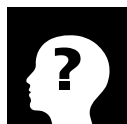


# THE SKEPTICAL INTELLIGENCER

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ASSOCIATION for SKEPTICAL ENQUIRY



Edited by Michael Heap

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The *Skeptical Intelligencer* welcomes formal and informal contributions on any subject within the ambit of the Association for Skeptical Enquiry (ASKE).

Formal articles should be aimed at the intelligent layperson, and authors should take particular care to define or explain unusual terms or concepts. Equations, statistics or other numerical and symbolic tools may be employed whenever required. Articles should be as succinct as possible, but may be of any length.

Authors of contributions to the *Skeptical Intelligencer* should be take care to ensure that texts are temperate in tone and free of vituperation. They should also ensure that arguments are either supported by express evidence/arguments or identified as speculative. 'Do not pretend conclusions are certain that are not demonstrated or demonstrable.' (T.H. Huxley).

Before being accepted for publication, submitted texts will be reviewed by the Editor and any appropriate advisors. Where improvements or changes are desirable, the editorial team will work with authors and make constructive suggestions as to amendments.

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- List multiple references in date order: e.g. '...a number of studies have thrown doubt on this claim (Zack, 1986; Al-Issa, 1989; Erikson, 1997)...'
- In the case of electronic material, give the author and the date the material was accessed on line
- Place Internet addresses URLs in angle brackets: e.g. <http://www.nothing.org>

A complete list of references in alphabetical order of authors' surnames should be given at the end of the article. The list should be compiled using the following conventions:

- *Articles*: Smith, L.J. (1990) An examination of astrology. *Astrological Journal*, **13**, 132-196.
- *Books*: Naranjo, X. (1902) *The End of the Road*. London: University of London.
- *Chapters*: Griff, P. (1978) Creationism. In D. Greengage (ed.) *Pseudoscience*. Boston: Chapman Publishers.
- *Electronic material*: Driscoe, E. Another look at Uri Geller. <http://www.etc.org>. Accessed 21 April 1997.

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# EDITORIAL

**Michael Heap**

This issue of the *Skeptical Intelligencer* features a review of a book about past-life regression (*Many Lives, Many Masters* by Brian L. Weiss), the reviewer being award-winning medical journalist Jon Danzig.

Past-life regression, usually using hypnosis, is an example of what James Randi calls 'an unsinkable rubber duck': each time it puts in an appearance it is effectively discredited, only to re-emerge at a later time, often with much ballyhoo on the part of the media.

The earliest example of this use of hypnosis of which sceptics may be aware is the case of 'Bridey Murphy' in the 1950s in Colorado (The Search for Bridey Murphy by Morey Bernstein, 1956). Housewife Virginia Tighe was hypnotically regressed to before her birth and gave a vivid account of life as a 19th century Irishwoman born 'Bridey Murphy' who, at the age of 17, married a barrister called Sean Brian McCarthy and moved from Cork to Belfast. No evidence was found that this woman actually existed but Ms Tighe herself had Irish roots and an Irish immigrant named Bridie Murphy Corkell had lived across the street from her in her childhood. The most likely conclusion is that the 'past life' was a fantasy constructed by Ms Tighe, which incorporated material known to her in her existing life.

My earliest memory of encountering the subject of past-life regression is my reading about it in one of the Sunday newspapers (I think it was the *People*), around my early teens in the 1960s. The only thing I remember is that it was claimed that a woman was hypnotically regressed to a previous incarnation and started speaking perfect French, despite having never spoken the language in her existing life. This stuck in my mind (for many years I was inclined to believe everything I read in the papers) until my next encounter with the phenomenon, which was an account of 'the Bloxham tapes' in the 1970s. Hypnotherapist Arnall Bloxham, who practised in Wales, made over 400 recordings of past-life hypnotic regressions. The *Sunday Times* did a series about this and a programme appeared on BBC television produced by Jeffrey Iverson, who also wrote a best-selling paperback called *More Lives than One? The Evidence of the Remarkable Bloxham Tapes* (1976). I recall watching the BBC programme and reading

both the *Sunday Times* articles and Iverson's book with great interest. And it is indeed an interesting phenomenon, one certainly worthy of research, if only because of the profound experiences that some subjects do have. However, by that stage, while still wanting to believe in the authenticity of past-life regression, I was becoming more wary of paranormal explanations, and more interested in accounts grounded in mainstream cognitive and social psychology. One consideration whose significance I did not fully grasp at the time was the fact that Mr Iverson reported on only a handful of cases from over 400 of Mr Bloxham's subjects whose regressions he recorded. These regressions were vivid, detailed and full of historical information. In contrast, in the book Mr Iverson mentions that the lives described by many of the remaining subjects were mundane and unremarkable. If we merely assume some random distribution amongst the attributes that contribute to 'a convincing case', then chance alone may play a significant role in the remarkableness of the small fraction of cases deliberately selected for having those attributes.

The late Nicholas Spanos, Professor of Psychology at Carlton University in Ottawa, reported that around 40% of hypnotically suggestible subjects could be induced to experience a 'previous life' (see *Multiple Identities & False Memories: A Sociocognitive Perspective*, Washington: American Psychological Association, 1996). Though often very vivid and elaborate, they are best described as constructed fantasies generated by the person's expectations and beliefs and those conveyed by the experimenter. It is likely, in my opinion, that extra credence is given to the authenticity of these fantasies by the commonly-held belief that past-lives arise because the person has been 'put into a trance state' that has some very unusual properties. It is in fact unnecessary to posit this special state of mind to explain or even elicit these supposed 'past lives'. Equipped with the requisite imaginative skills, beliefs and expectations, and with sufficient preparation to feel committed to the task in hand and become absorbed in their inner world, a person is likely to have the experience of 'reliving a past life' without any of the trappings usually accompanying hypnosis.

# ARTICLES

## CONSPIRACY THEORIES

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### Dene Bebbington

*Dene Bebbington is an IT professional and a writer in his spare time. He's been interested in scepticism for many years, and has had several articles published in The Skeptic (UK) magazine.*

Why do some people believe that NASA astronauts didn't set foot on the moon, that Anne Frank didn't write a diary about her time hiding from the Nazis, or that terrorists weren't responsible for the London 7/7 bombings?

Conspiracy theorists believe that these, and countless other historical events didn't happen according to the conventional account. Instead, they are claimed to be hoaxes, frauds or the result of secret government plots. At the extreme they're part of a larger Paranoid Conspiracy Theory in which a group called the Illuminati are said to control world affairs. David Icke has taken this further by claiming that shape-shifting reptilian humanoids are involved!

What sets a Conspiracy Theory (henceforth CT) apart from a genuine conspiracy is its approach to evidence. In law, evidence must be given to prove that the accused conspired to commit a criminal act. In contrast, a CT relies on coincidences and supposed anomalies to support an alternative account, typically that agents of the government were responsible.

The *modus operandi* of conspiracy theorists is to presume motives and dismiss evidence in the context of presumed, yet rarely named individual perpetrators. In this worldview NASA faked the moon landings, either British or Israeli intelligence agencies carried out the London 7/7 bombings and framed innocent Muslims, and American or Israeli intelligence agencies did the same with 9/11, to name only a few of the many CTs.

### Birth of a Conspiracy Theory

CTs are born when someone spots what they believe are unlikely coincidences and anomalies in an event. These are then used as negative evidence on which to base a claim that the official account is a sham. Usually the claim is that a government, or a part of government such as the intelligence services, carried out the acts and fabricated an alternative truth for a political end. Occasionally an individual is blamed and named, as with Otto Frank and the Anne Frank diary. Dozens of historical events in recent decades have CTs associated with them (RationalWiki, n.d.), the seminal one being the assassination of John F. Kennedy. You can be sure that many future events will also be subject to CTs.

It appears that mistrust in, and prejudice against

governments leads to this skewed and simplistic way of understanding events in a complicated and unpredictable world. A genuine historical account is not given. Instead, conspiracy theorists confidently present a hotchpotch of suppositions and spurious assertions about aspects of the official account, and motives of the 'real' perpetrators.

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***Like a work of fiction, evidence, motives and abilities of the real conspirators are easily manipulated to lead to a preferred conclusion.***

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A CT is alluring for some people. Like a work of fiction, evidence, motives and abilities of the real conspirators are easily manipulated to lead to a preferred conclusion. Here's an example: on the side of the bombed London bus a poster advertised a film with a review comment "OUTRIGHT TERROR... BOLD AND BRILLIANT". Coincidence? Not according to those who say it was a sick joke by the real bombers (Quinn, 2009).

False expertise is another aspect of CTs. People with no expertise in document or photographic evidence, for example, are not reticent in making or repeating claims of forged documents, or faked photographs or video.

A still image from CCTV footage of the London 7/7 terrorists (Metropolitan Police, n.d.) is often cited as a flaw in the official account. One can see a railing apparently in front of a terrorist when it should appear behind him. This could be due to the way his arm is positioned or an artifact of video, but there's no shortage of people who jump to the conclusion that it's a faked image. A similar effect can sometimes be seen on television; one example was where a man was stood in front of a windowed door and part of the wood framing the glass appeared to be in front of him.

In a debate one might point out that no one has ever admitted to involvement in any of the enormous number of purported conspiracies. Conspiracy theorists hand-wave this away by claiming that potential whistle-blowers fear they'll be intimidated or killed (Quinn, J., n.d.).

On an Internet forum a conspiracy theorist even asserted that another poster was somehow involved in the 7/7 bombings conspiracy simply because he defended the

CCTV evidence! That kind of reaction makes a CT impervious to falsification, and is remarkably similar to the way people suffering from paranoid delusions rationalise any counter argument.

An approach taken by Holocaust revisionist Robert Faurisson is to employ arguments from incredulity when examining the Anne Frank diary, which he claims is a literary fraud carried out by her father, Otto Frank (Faurisson, n.d.). He quotes passages from the diary and concludes that because he thinks it's absurd it therefore couldn't have happened as written.

### **Burden of proof**

If a CT is to be taken seriously it must provide positive evidence that agents of the government, or whoever it is, were responsible. However, individuals are rarely named, except in cases like the Anne Frank diary. Conspiracy theorists do not accept the normal burden of proof; they turn it into a game whereby any evidence presented to them is explained away or endlessly debated.

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***‘People are also more likely to believe in conspiracy theories if they feel powerless in the face of large social authorities or institutions, and not part of the mainstream of society’.***

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According to the moon landing CT, stars should be visible in pictures taken by astronauts on the moon. Since it was pointed out that the camera exposure wouldn't have been long enough to show stars, someone then finds another photograph apparently showing objects in the sky (Cosnette, n.d.).

A curious aspect of CTs is the view of the world in which coincidences don't happen, and any such coincidences are really part of the conspiracy. When police were hunting failed terrorist bombers in 2005 they had a block of flats under surveillance. According to the official report, when the ill-fated Jean Charles de Menezes emerged from the flats the soldier on surveillance duty was relieving himself, and so wasn't able to take a photograph for identification. One conspiracy theorist thinks this is highly unlikely, giving exact odds of 300 to 1 against (Anonymous, n.d.).

Confirmation bias (favouring evidence that fits with one's beliefs) plays a significant part. The poster on the London bus exemplifies this: the lazy, armchair critic nature of many CTs. It wouldn't have taken much investigation to discover that the film poster was on many London buses as part of an advertising campaign. By citing it as a sick joke the conspiracy theorists are exposing their preconceptions of the 'real' bombers whose motives and mind-set they've cut from whole cloth.

### **Why Believe?**

Psychologist Patrick Leman's research (Leman, 2007) suggests that 'people think that a major or significant event must have been caused by something similarly major, significant or powerful'. And that 'People are also more likely to believe in conspiracy theories if they feel powerless in the face of large social authorities or institutions, and not part of the mainstream of society'. The latter may be a reason why the CT about the London bombings finds an accepting audience in some Muslim communities (Quinn, 2009).

Leman and fellow psychologist Christopher French have done research that suggests people who have low levels of trust, who feel alienated from society, and who are prone to making assumptions from limited evidence are more likely to believe in CTs (Weson, 2007). One of their experiments showed that people fitting this profile were accepting, rather than sceptical, of an invented conspiracy.

Speculating, two other factors influence belief in particular CTs. The first is that prejudice and political beliefs drive a determination not to accept conventional historical accounts. Holocaust denial, for example, is often inextricably linked with anti-Semitic and extreme right wing ideology.

A reasonable hypothesis is that Holocaust denial is, at least in part, an attempt to portray Nazism as less wicked and dangerous than history tells us. If the Nazis didn't kill millions of Jews and the Holocaust is a hoax perpetrated by Jews and the wartime Allied powers, then the Nazis can be seen as victims. Nazism is then absolved of its darkest side.

The second factor is that CTs give some people a sense of belonging to a select group who feel superior in thinking they know the real truth, whereas the majority of people have been duped. They don't need to have any expertise in historical methodology, explosives and demolition, analysis of photographs, CCTV footage or documentation, etc.; it's enough only for them to find something that on first inspection seems wrong.

It would be a mistake, though, to write off Conspiracy Theories as merely harmless nonsense perpetuated by fringe groups and individuals. By accusing governments of faking events and murdering its citizens to further political aims, the conspiracy theorists further erode trust in the democratic system. In cases like the London 7/7 bombings it may well exacerbate alienation, societal tensions and extremism.

*The Conspiracy Files* TV programme showed that some Muslims believe a 'documentary' called *The Ripple Effect* which blames the 7/7 bombings on MI5 and/or Mossad. It claims the actual bombers are not only innocent, they're patsies (Muad'Dib, n.d.). Proponents of *The Ripple Effect* are willing to spread this message further across Muslim communities.

This article shouldn't be taken to imply that there are never any government conspiracies. However, the type of Conspiracy Theory discussed here are not explanations of events adhering to normal standards of evidence and reasoning. They are Potemkin constructs, devoid of explanatory power, shaped to fit preconceived beliefs that governments are puppeteers faking history whenever it suits them.

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### *Call for Contributions*

If you have attended a conference or presentation, watched a programme, or read an article or book that would be of interest to readers, why not write a review of this, however brief, for the *Skeptical Adversaria* or the *Skeptical Intelligencer*?

## HOT AIR ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING

**Dene Bebbington**

*Dene Bebbington is an IT professional and a writer in his spare time. He's been interested in scepticism for many years, and has had several articles published in The Skeptic (UK) magazine.*

Global warming: it's a scientific claim that continues to cause heated public controversy with vehement responses from those sceptical of the science. Ostensibly the science is being fought over – the reality is otherwise.

The media and the public don't get exercised about String theory in Physics. There aren't bad-tempered debates online and in print accusing String theorists of scamming or swindling. Theories with social, political, or religious implications are ones that attract this level of discourse – at stake is a worldview, not a scientific truth. Attempts to discredit the science are a way to protect a cherished worldview.

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***Attempts to discredit the science are a way to protect a cherished worldview.***

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Evolution is controversial because it conflicts with certain religious beliefs; genetic modification of food raises fears, and conflicts with some views on capitalism; and global warming feeds a furore because of political decisions on taxes and asking people to change their behaviour.

Climate scientists, like some evolutionary biologists, have suffered verbal attacks going well beyond the science to impugn their integrity. The Express newspaper is especially vocal on the issue of Anthropogenic Global Warming (henceforth AGW), setting forth its position thus: 'The Daily Express has led the way in exposing flaws in the arguments supporting global warming' (Price, 2010). Ironically, and not surprisingly, it's the Express which is guilty of flawed arguments. On many subjects the media skew understanding of an issue rather than help it. This is particularly true of newspapers which can entwine opinion in pieces designed to appear informative, but have mainly rhetorical value.

In December 2009 the Express ran a piece headlined '100 REASONS WHY GLOBAL WARMING IS NATURAL' (Brown, 2009) which reported a dossier of 100 *so-called* reasons why global warming is natural. The writer of that piece describes the originator of the dossier – the European Foundation – as 'respected'. This is a rhetorical trick. We should ask who the Foundation is respected by and for what reason? Its name doesn't seem

like that of a scientific body, and it isn't. The European Foundation is a political think-tank concerned with the European Union. Indeed, the author of the dossier, as the Express states, is a political analyst.

The use of loaded terms is another subtle technique of persuasion deployed by the Express. Those issuing the dossier are called campaigners, but those who support the claim of AGW are often referred to as a lobby or alarmists. By using a different word for the two sides, a connotation that campaigner is good, but lobby or alarmist is bad has been inserted.

An examination of the 100 reasons (as the Express presents them) is instructive. The Express's title is 'CLIMATE CHANGE IS NATURAL: 100 REASONS WHY' (Anonymous, 2009). However, many items on the list are not reasons why global warming is natural. Here are just a few examples:

**Red herrings:** Item 4 in the list states there was cooling for four decades after 1940. This is true, there was cooling between 1940 and 1970; sulphate aerosols emitted by industrial activity and volcanoes are considered to be the cause.

**Begging the question:** Item 9 claims that as global warming is natural there's little we can do about it, and item 28 claims that rising CO<sub>2</sub> is our best hope for raising crop yields. These points beg the question of whether the warming is natural.

**Irrelevance:** Item 13 reports an MP who stated that many people in Britain don't believe in the importance of global warming. Public opinion has no bearing on the cause of global warming.

**Ad hominem:** Item 55 likens those who think global warming is man-made to flat-Earthers.

**Omitting key facts:** Item 66 refers to the 'climategate' emails where a trick was used to hide a decline in temperatures. The decline was in inferred temperatures from tree rings, which since 1960 have diverged from measured temperatures.

**Semantics:** Item 89 claims that CO<sub>2</sub> isn't a pollutant because nitrogen forms 80% of the atmosphere and humans couldn't live in 100% nitrogen, therefore CO<sub>2</sub> is no more a pollutant than nitrogen. If a gas reached harmful levels it could be described as a pollutant.

**Contradictions:** Item 42 reports the Met Office claiming we're in the hottest decade since records began, and this is expected if climate is cyclical. However, item 92 reports little or no global warming since 1979. If there was no warming since 1979 then this wouldn't be the hottest decade since records began.

Far from being a list of reasons why global warming is natural, the list is a case study in fallacies and techniques of persuasion.

Curiously, about three weeks later the Express writer who penned an article referring to the 100 reasons then wrote a piece headlined 'SNOW CHAOS: AND THEY STILL CLAIM IT'S GLOBAL WARMING' (Brown, 2010). The headline and opening paragraph are a form of the *Poisoning the Well* fallacy. Even though the piece goes on to quote both sides of the debate, it first implants a negative opinion about AGW.

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***A warming trend doesn't mean that every year has to be hotter than the last, or that every season within a year is hotter than in the previous year.***

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Global warming is shorthand for a rise in average global temperatures. It's possible for one year to be hotter than the last even if some parts of the world suffered a colder than average winter. Also, a warming trend doesn't mean that every year has to be hotter than the last, or that every season within a year is hotter than in the previous year – there can be plateaus and dips on an upward trend curve. Highlighting a cold winter in Britain, and other parts of the world, did fool some people, judging by certain comments attached to the snow chaos article. It makes no more sense than arguing that turning off a radiator in one room of a house means the house isn't warmer if one room is colder than normal.

It should go without saying that Britain isn't the world. To put it in perspective, Britain's area is approximately 245,000 square km, whereas the Pacific Ocean (which is about a third of the world's surface) is approximately 166 million square km. Even though parts of the northern hemisphere were experiencing a colder than normal winter, 2010 was the hottest year on record. The northern hemisphere isn't the world, and winter isn't the year. Linking Britain's cold winter to doubts about global warming is either disingenuous or reflects a lack of understanding of mathematics and climate science.

Inconsistency between those two pieces in the Express (is global warming natural or isn't it

happening?!) by the same author suggest that the aim was to rubbish claims of AGW rather than provide coherent scepticism about the science. It's reasonable to conclude that the Express has led the way in using flawed arguments against AGW. Besides, is it appropriate for newspapers to take an advocacy role on a matter of scientific truth?

A few minutes spent searching newspaper websites shows that the Express isn't the only one to engage in reporting that's more likely to misinform than educate readers. Newspapers enjoy power without responsibility, even considering limits on their behaviour thanks to privacy and libel laws. When a paper takes a contrarian stance on a scientific issue, skewed reporting and rhetorical tricks will probably follow. The public would be better off going to the source documents and reliable outlets that focus on the science. Newspapers and other media rely on the fact that most people won't.

When science has implications for everyone, it's important not to be swayed by those using a privileged position in the media to further one viewpoint. They do more harm than good to public understanding of science and of the implications for public policy. At worst, if Anthropogenic Global Warming is true they have irresponsibly obstructed rational debate on its truth, its consequences, and how to tackle it.

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## REFORMING ENGLISH SPELLING

Including a review of NAVLIPI: A New, Universal, Script (“Alphabet”) Accommodating The Phonemic Idiosyncrasies of all the World’s Languages (Volume 1), Prasanna Chandrasekhar, Branden Books, Boston, 2012, pp xli + 576

### Mark Newbrook

*Mark Newbrook is currently a research associate affiliated with Sheffield University. His main areas of research interest are dialectology, controversies in historical linguistics and skeptical linguistics generally.*

A while ago, in *Skeptical Adversaria*, I commented briefly on reforms of English spelling (orthography) proposed by non-linguists. There have been many schemes aimed at the rationalising of the spelled forms of words in English and in other languages which use the Roman Alphabet.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, interest in these matters is widespread, extending well beyond groups of reform advocates. But the issues are rather more technical than many realise, and expertise in linguistics is often crucial here. Various professional linguists (not necessarily identifying as skeptics) have in fact critiqued spelling reform proposals; one such is Geoffrey Sampson. And any skeptic with an interest in language and communication might also be drawn to the consideration of such proposals.

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***It has been suggested that the shallow Italian orthography allows Italian dyslexics to conceal and/or cope with their problems with reading relatively readily, whereas this option is not open to English-speaking children.***

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Some schemes, such as Isaac Pitman’s Shorthand and Reginald Dutton’s Speedwords, have been developed mainly for the use of secretaries taking dictation, students making lecture-notes, etc. But most proposals in this area involve the actual **reform** of spelling for everyday use – mostly with respect to English with its complex spelling-pronunciation relationships, which are perceived by many as disastrously unsystematic (“irregular”) and as harmful to the acquisition of literacy. A few such proposals have actually been made by linguists, notably Valerie Yule; but, in contrast, most of the authors in question here know too little linguistics to deal adequately with the task which they set themselves.

Would-be reformers also vary in respect of their own background accents and even, for those who are non-native speakers, their basic knowledge of English pronunciation.

One Chinese writer even argues that the contrast between the letters L and R should be abolished – because he himself cannot hear the difference between the sounds in question owing to the influence of his first language, and believes that this difference is in fact spurious. (Tests in which native speakers are asked to identify words such as *red* and *led* heard in isolation naturally show that this author is mistaken!) Furthermore, would-be reformers work with various different specific principles for ‘good’ spelling – although, as will be seen, very many of them advocate ‘phonemic spelling’ (see below).

Some spelling reform enthusiasts focus upon information regarding dyslexia which appears to support their cases. The best-known but by no means the only manifestation of this condition (if so it be) is difficulty in learning the ordering of letters in words. Dyslexia is the subject of much intense debate among psychologists and linguists. Many reform advocates accept the theory that spelling problems such as dyslexia are generated or at least worsened by the current English spelling system, citing evidence suggesting that there are higher rates of dyslexia in English-speaking countries than elsewhere, for example in Italy or France. Italian spelling is almost phonemic (a ‘shallow’ orthography) and is readily mastered by Italian children (once they are familiar with Standard Italian). (See below on the more complex case of French.) In contrast – as I noted a while ago in *Skeptical Adversaria* – English spelling is ‘deeper’: it often reflects ‘abstract’ relationships between words and/or now-superseded and unpredictable pronunciations, and it has multiple sources (see below on these points). With its many ‘irregularities’, it is arguably unsurprising that many children (and foreign learners) struggle with it.

It does appear to be true that dyslexia is less in evidence in countries such as Italy. One group of researchers struggled to identify Italian-speaking dyslexics; they eventually did so only by selecting subjects with evident memory problems and slow reading speeds. It has been suggested that the shallow Italian orthography allows

Italian dyslexics to conceal and/or cope with their problems with reading relatively readily, whereas this option is not open to English-speaking children.

However, not all spelling problems experienced by children (or indeed by adults) involve anything as ‘alarming’ as dyslexia. And in any case there is other evidence suggesting that the development of dyslexia relates not (or not only) to the spelling systems of given languages but rather to delayed acquisition of the phonology and phonetics of a child’s first language. If this latter is indeed the dominant factor in dyslexia, the relatively complex phonology of English might be, at least in large part, to blame for high levels of dyslexia in the English-speaking world. (English has almost twice as many distinct phonemes as, for instance, Italian; and in addition it contains far more possible syllables, because English phonology permits far more varied consonant clusters, including lengthier ones such as /mpst/ in *glimpsed*, in more positions in a syllable. English-speaking children thus have to learn how to spell a much greater number of sounds and sequences.) In this event, attacks on English **orthography** would seem misdirected. However, as I have noted more recently in *Skeptical Adversaria*, it is more or less impossible to alter the phonology used by ordinary native speakers of a language. Even ‘elocution’ classes (which are usually aimed only at **details** of the phonology) generally have little effect on speech outside the classroom. The best approach would seem, then, to involve remedial work with the specific students in question. Not surprisingly, spelling-reform advocates generally ignore findings such as these.

Even if dyslexia *per se* is not closely associated with ‘difficult’ spelling systems such as that used for English, it is still conceivable that spelling reform might help with the acquisition of literacy in such languages. For example, English spelling features letters which represent no phoneme at all, and virtually all proposals for reform involve removing these; for instance, *debt* becomes *det*. Such changes would appear uncontroversial in themselves – but there might be difficulties even here. For example, some letters as used in English which now correspond directly with no phoneme at all, such as ‘silent’ or ‘mute’ *e* in words such as *spine*, identify **other** phonemes in a word; thus the *-e* in *spine* shows with a high degree of reliability that the vowel in this word spelled with *-i-* is the long vowel which is usually spelled with *-i-* rather than the short vowel usually spelled with *-i-* (as in *spin*). At least some of these letters must obviously be retained, unless (continuing this example) the long and short vowels are themselves to be distinguished by means of novel spellings.

In addition to the elimination of redundant letters, most (though by no means all) proposals for spelling reform are essentially phonemic in nature; that is, they involve the ‘phonemic principle’ of correspondence (syntagmatic and paradigmatic) between letters and phonemes<sup>2</sup>. Reformers tend to believe (usually without taking into consideration

all the issues) that phonemic spelling is obviously easier to learn and use, and thus should clearly be preferred.

Many reformers, knowing little linguistics, are more aware of letters than of phonemes, and indeed are unfamiliar with the language-neutral International Phonetic Association Alphabet (henceforth IPAA) as employed (a) by linguists in transcription for their own technical purposes and (b) in foreign-language-teaching. However, the resources of the Roman Alphabet (26 letters as normally used to write English) are clearly inadequate to represent on a 1:1 basis the 40-45 phonemes of the various accents of English. Thinkers who are contemplating spelling reform cannot but become aware of this fact (even if the details are confused in their minds). There is thus a tendency for familiar digraphs such as *-oo-* or *-ch-* (or even polygraphs with three or more letters in sequence) to be retained, with each digraph now consistently representing its most usual pronunciation. Thus, the word *chew* (two phonemes) might now be spelled *choo*. A spelling system relying entirely on a traditional alphabet with too few letters, and thus having to incorporate such digraphs, can still be essentially phonemic in character.

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***Many reformers, knowing little linguistics, are more aware of letters than of phonemes, and indeed are unfamiliar with the language-neutral International Phonetic Association Alphabet.***

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In contrast, the current English spelling system – along with a few other European alphabetic writing systems, notably those used to write French and Modern Greek – diverges substantially from phoneme-level systematicity, chiefly because it often represents (systematically or otherwise): (i) structural entities more abstract than phonemes; (ii) older, now superseded pronunciations, phonemic contrasts and other phonological structures (it is ‘conservative’); (iii) the foreign spellings of loan-words from other languages; etc. For example, English spells the roots *photo* and *graph* identically in the words *photograph*, *photographer* and *photographic*, thus reflecting the more abstract, word-level identities of the forms rather than the differences between their vowel phonemes; this is an instance of (i) above. And, by way of an example of (ii) above, the vowel phonemes (or sequences of phonemes) in the words *go*, *hoe*, *sew*, *though* etc. were at one time distinct, as the spellings suggest; but all these words now have the same vowel phoneme. In a phonemic spelling system, these words would all (nowadays) display the same spelling for this vowel.

While it generally (not quite always) permits only one possible pronunciation for a given written word, the contemporary French spelling system is again highly conservative and thus not especially transparent with

respect to current pronunciations; there are many cases in which different spellings are used for the same phoneme or phoneme-sequence in different words (for instance, *au*, ‘to the’, *eau*, ‘water’, and many other words are all pronounced /o/); and the system also features many ‘silent’ letters and sequences which no longer correspond with any phoneme (for example, the word *portent*, ‘[they] carry’, is now pronounced /port/, homophonous with *porte* ‘[he/she/it] carries’; the entire second syllable of *portent* has been lost in the modern pronunciation). Modern Greek spelling is very conservative indeed, because of the status of Classical and New Testament Greek and associated sociolinguistic issues, and again fails to reflect massive homophony arising from the loss of earlier contrasts (while again generally permitting only one possible pronunciation for a given written word).

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***English has diversified so much around the world that even major educated urban accents differ too greatly to share a phonemic spelling system.***

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In English, however, the case is still ‘worse’, as there are also instances of multiple pronunciations sharing the same spelling. One example involves the notorious case of *-ough-*. As a result of various phonological and orthographical changes, this sequence now represents several different phonemes and sequences of phonemes: compare *though*, *through*, *bough*, *thought*, *thorough*, *cough*, *tough*, etc. In a phonemic spelling system, these words would be re-spelled with letters representing the actual phoneme or phoneme sequence present in each.

It may be held that these considerations imply that spelling reform is desirable for English; but it is far from clear that a **phonemic** system, specifically, is to be preferred. In fact a phonemic spelling system for a language as varied as English (even if it related only to standard varieties of English) would be very problematic. English has diversified so much around the world that even major educated urban accents differ too greatly to **share** a phonemic spelling system. A spelling system of this kind which is accurate for an educated Southern English accent is inaccurate in various places from the point of view of educated Northern English and Australian speech and wildly inaccurate for all American and Scottish accents (and *vice versa*). For example, words such as *grass*, if spelled phonemically, would have to display the ‘long A’ phoneme (however represented) for Londoners but the ‘short A’ phoneme for most people from the North of England; and words such as *park* would be spelled with R = /r/ for Scotland and most of the USA but without R for most of England (where there is a ‘long A’ corresponding with the Scottish and American sequence /ar/).

If such differentiation were deemed unacceptable, the spelling would have to be uniform across all accents; but then it would therefore systematically favour some accents over others at each point where differences exist. This would be a highly political issue as well as an educational issue, even if consideration was confined to a few major accents. Most Australians, for instance, would resent being instructed to spell everyday words in unnatural, supposedly helpful ways because ‘this is how most Americans pronounce them’. The existing spelling is at least accent-neutral, overall; insofar as it favours **any** current accents, it favours **different** accents in different respects, and most users – while possibly noting and maybe even resenting points where it reflects their own accent especially ‘badly’ – do not think of it as positively representing any one other accent. Many (not all) of the most important inter-accent differences – including those discussed above – are phonemic rather than merely phonetic and thus would inevitably affect the spelling in a phonemic system, either creating vast diversity or enforcing a choice.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, many reform enthusiasts do not even (consciously) understand the phonetic-phonemic distinction; it is a point with which beginners in linguistics notoriously struggle, and some enthusiasts know too little linguistics in any case. For instance, Tom Zurinkas, the inventor of Truespel, announces that his system spells words ‘exactly as pronounced’, as if this idea were unambiguous – even though he uses terms such as *phoneme*. In addition to this, some reformers totally ignore matters of accent difference, often proceeding as if their own accent or the locally relevant standard accent were the only one of importance.

Another major problem with phonemic spelling for English involves the existence of widespread **homophony**, as in *roe* (‘fish eggs’), *row* (‘propel boat with oars’), *row* (‘line of items’). The issue of widespread homophony is resolved in part in languages such as English through the continued use of spellings which do **not** correspond with the modern phonology in a particularly systematic way; note that *roe* is spelled differently from *row/row* despite being homophonous with these other words (of course, *row* and *row* are still spelled in the same way; the use of non-phonemic spelling thus resolves this problem only in part). Phonemic spelling would make it **impossible** to spell homophones differently. All homophones would also have to be homographs (and hence homonyms).<sup>4,5</sup>

The inability to distinguish between homophones would particularly affect **readers**; the level of ambiguity would increase. Of course, grammatical and semantic/pragmatic context often disambiguate effectively in written text, as they do in speech. (In speech, meaning is also clarified by intonation, stress and other ‘non-segmental’ features of language, and by gesture and other aspects of ‘body language’.) However, there would still be **somewhat** greater levels of ambiguity, and this would

especially affect inexperienced readers such as children and foreign learners.

Phonemic spelling would have yet further awkward consequences for the recognisability of words. This would affect cases such as that of *photograph*, *photographer* and *photographic*, mentioned above. In a phonemic spelling system, such roots could not be spelled in the same way throughout. Again, this would render more difficult the task of readers, especially inexperienced readers.

In addition, foreign borrowings and classical roots (for instance in scientific terminology) would generally no longer resemble their source forms as closely in a phonemic spelling system. For instance, words derived from Classical Greek and currently spelled with *-ph-*, such as *philosophy*, would all have to be respelled with *-f-*, since the same phoneme is involved as in words such as *fish*.<sup>6</sup>

In sum, phonemic spelling would reduce the recognisability of English words and roots, especially hampering inexperienced readers.

Some linguists, including Noam Chomsky, argue that phonemic spelling is actually psycholinguistically **unnatural**, for languages with ‘irregular’ spelling such as English and indeed more generally. Chomskyans hold that the current, typically more abstract English spellings often import more valid/useful analyses, and their own versions of phoneme theory yield representations of words which are closer to traditional spellings than to phonemic representations of the usual type as described in this article. However, it is far from clear that Chomskyan representations **are** psychologically accurate; for instance, Sampson reports a case in which the etymological/abstract link between the words *sign* and *signature* (not reflected in the phonemics of these current forms as usually understood, where the words have only the initial /s/ and the /n/ in common) was not at all apparent to the young subjects under study. The Chomskyan theory would suggest that this link **would** be apparent to untutored native speakers who were in the process of becoming literate. This debate continues.

Opposition to phonemic spelling or to any other specific proposal (or observing that many reform advocates do not know enough linguistics) does not constitute dismissal or rejection of the entire notion of spelling reform. In cases where all accents agree against redundant or misleading traditional spellings - and where there are no major etymological or structural counter-arguments - many linguists would happily accept reform. But all reform advocates should obviously familiarise themselves with (a) IPAA, (b) basic phoneme theory and (c) the phonology and phonetics of at least the leading accents of English (or of whatever language is in question). After suitable study, reformers may not necessarily agree with linguists (or with each other) on what is desirable; but they will be much better informed on the structural principles and the facts.

A crucial point which emerges from my own personal communications with some of the more thoughtful

reformers (notably Doug Everingham) is that for many linguists, especially sociolinguists and dialectologists, accent-bias is a feature to be avoided at all costs in a spelling system, and this **excludes** any strictly phonemic system for English; whereas for many reform advocates such systems appear so advantageous in other respects that they are willing to bear the cost of accent-bias (and of the other disadvantages outlined above). Unless either side can advance novel evidence or argumentation, or decisive refutations of the other’s objections, it may be that there is a near-permanent impasse at this point.

I turn here to a brief examination of various specific proposals for spelling reform in English, including some which are essentially phonemic and some which are not. There are very many such proposals; here I can do no more than exemplify with some of the more interesting cases.

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Sayspel (formerly Saispel), proposed by Roy Blain, involves a mixture of ‘Cut Spelling’ (see below), ‘phonetic spelling’ (by which Blain essentially means ‘phonemic spelling’, though his criteria are not wholly clear), and an attempt at accent-neutral spelling. The latter two principles obviously conflict at times: if Sayspel consistently uses one symbol per phoneme (in a paradigmatic sense; see Note 1) it **cannot** be accent-neutral, unless it permits ranges of variant spellings in the many cases where different accents have different phonemes (for example in *grass*). This complex approach, combined with a tendency to follow traditional spelling at times at the expense of representing the phonology (for instance by including X = x or ex as in *taxi*, *extra*; non-initial -x- actually represents the phoneme sequences /ks/ or /gz/) gives the scheme a rather peculiar appearance in places. There are also various errors and oddities involving other points of detail. On the other hand, Blain is more interested than are some reformers in directly comparing his own and other proposals.

Joe Thornton, who had struggled for many years to become literate, produced a dictionary of the standard spellings of common English words, listed alphabetically under spellings which he believed would be those which would most naturally occur to others with similar problems. Thornton’s scheme is essentially phonemic but is inconsistent: the same phoneme is spelled in different ways in different words, and sometimes alternatives are given. This may reflect the results of a survey conducted (in Australia) by Thornton; but with professional help generalisation would have been possible and helpful. In addition, an accent of a South-East England/Australasian

type is clearly assumed. A person from Northern England with spelling problems would not readily think of looking for *grasp* under *grahsp*.

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**Thomas Zurinkas' phonemic system,  
Truespel, works quite well for his own variety  
of American English, and includes some  
interesting and helpful features.**

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Thomas Zurinkas' phonemic system, Truespel, works quite well for his own variety of American English, and includes some interesting and helpful features such as doubled consonants before non-initial stressed syllables (as in *biggin* for *begin*). Notable infelicities include (a) Zurinkas' avoidance of a symbol for / / (the phoneme which linguists call *schwa*, as in *the* or the first syllable of *about*; he is suspicious of the concept of this phoneme) and (b) matters of 'phoneme incidence' which do not affect the overall system, such as his use of *-ee-* in the specific suffix form *-ing* as in *going*, *during* etc. (which he mishears) in place of the phonetically accurate *-i-* (IPAA [i]). (In discussing this and similar incidence matters, he also confuses the issue of how the IPA determines the symbols representing sounds with that of whether or not these IPAA symbols are then accurately selected by linguists to represent the sounds of particular words.) In addition, although Truespel also works tolerably well (with modifications) for some other accents of English, Zurinkas' reluctance to accept that some accents differ from his in some specific ways handicaps him in this respect; for instance, he apparently believes, quite wrongly, that all native speakers have the same vowel in *Mary* and *merry* – as he himself does, along with many Americans. And his claim that Truespel is preferable to the established IPAA-based system for romanising Japanese is grotesquely overstated. As noted earlier, Zurinkas is also unaware of the phonetic/phonemic distinction, a serious handicap in context.

'Cut Spelling' is offered by Christopher Upward; obviously, this proposal focuses heavily upon the cutting of superfluous letters, as a means of reducing the level of redundancy. One issue with this particular proposal involves the fact that Upward rejects the idea, otherwise very generally accepted, that the notion of 'redundancy' is defined in this context in phonological terms; redundancy involves the existence of letters which do not express any phoneme present (and do not assist in distinguishing contrasting phonemes; see above). However, he is apparently unable to explain how he **does** define the notion. This issue does not seem to have serious upshots for the outcome (the actual spellings adopted), but it remains perplexing.

A very few reform proposals have achieved partial acceptance, including at official level; the best example is

the adoption by Gough Whitlam's government in Australia (1972-75) of the first of the series of essentially phonemic spelling rules advocated by Whitlam's health minister Doug Everingham and intended to be introduced progressively, phoneme by phoneme, so as to minimise disorientation. This first rule was 'Spelling Rule 1': *e = /e/* (see the examples in Note 1 involving *bet*, *said*, *bread*). For example, under Whitlam, Everingham's ministry was officially referred to as the *Ministry of Helth*. The change was abandoned by Malcolm Fraser's new government after 1975. The set of spelling rules was devised by an associate of Everingham, Harry Lindgren, who had (in 1969) produced a proposal combining phonemic and more abstract ('morphophonemic') elements, and also taking detailed phonetic facts into consideration; his approach was pragmatic rather than dogmatic. In 1971 Lindgren founded the Spelling Action Society (now the English Spelling Society) to promote his reforms.

Some linguists were involved in the i.t.a (Initial Teaching Alphabet) experiment in the UK in the early 1960s, which was aimed at children only; the idea was that young readers would gain confidence by starting with a near-phonemic system. The system was developed by James Pitman; it included some morphophonemic elements, for instance the inclusion of *-r* in words such as *car* and the use of a reversed Z symbol to ensure that children would equate plural *-s = /z/* in *dogs* etc. with its variant */s/* in *cats* etc. (while still indicating that the actual phoneme present is */z/*). Children who began with i.t.a. later progressed to adult spelling. I.t.a. made use of some novel symbols (mostly drawn from IPAA). Inevitably, it imported a degree of accent bias, favouring Southern English accents in some respects, for instance in representing *one* as rhyming with *gun* rather than with *gone* as is usual in North-West England (and confusing some children in the latter area). There was later a modification of the character-set to accommodate other accents. The consensus was that the experiment had succeeded but to a lesser degree than had been hoped, and the project was not pursued further after the 1960s.

There have also been proposals for more radical reform of English, extending beyond the spelling into matters of vocabulary and even grammar; I may discuss these in the future.

Some other languages – used in fewer countries than English, with less internal accent variation, and with higher levels of pre-existing systematicity in their spelling systems – have actually undergone spelling reform at the hands of governments (with advice from linguists).

**NAVLIPi: A New, Universal, Script ("Alphabet")  
Accommodating The Phonemic Idiosyncrasies of all  
the World's Languages (Volume 1) by Prasanna  
Chandrasekhar**

I turn now to a recent, particularly sophisticated proposal for reform in this area. This proposal ('Navlipi') emanates

from Prasanna Chandrasekhar.<sup>7</sup> The Sanskrit word adopted as the short title of this book means ‘new script’; and, as the entire title suggests, it presents a proposal for a new cross-linguistic alphabetic writing system. This system is intended, in principle, to replace **both** (a) IPAA as a whole as employed by linguists for the transcription and teaching of all languages (not merely some aspects of the IPA’s analysis of English, as in Zurinkas’ Truespel) **and** (b) existing language-specific scripts as used for everyday purposes, including the current spelling of English and other languages; it is thus of especial interest.

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**Chandrasekhar’s ideas are suspect in some important ways which will probably not be apparent to readers who are not themselves linguists.**

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Chandrasekhar clearly takes the ‘common-sense’ view – not accepted by all psycholinguists – that alphabetic writing is in general to be preferred to non-alphabetic systems (such as the Chinese logography), and – agreeing here with the IPA – he accepts that for obvious pragmatic reasons any such system intended for widespread use must be based on the Roman Alphabet. More specifically, his system does **not** seek to reflect (i) etymologies or other aspects of linguistic history (‘diachronic’) or (ii) more abstract relationships between the forms of words and word-parts (as in *photograph*, *photographer* and *photographic*); it is strictly ‘synchronic’, and it is grounded in the phonetics of words and in ‘shallow’/‘surface’ aspects of the phonology (as reflected in the usual phonemic representations). Again, some linguists, such as Chomsky (see above), would not agree with Chandrasekhar in respect of point (ii). Chandrasekhar does not (here) engage in discussion of these background issues.

The core of the Navlipi system involves the 26 letters of the most familiar version of the Roman Alphabet (that used for English) together with five novel symbols. These 31 characters are subject to various modifications of form which systematically correspond with phonetic variations of the phone-types in question (as with J.R.R. Tolkien’s ‘tengwar’) so as to represent the very many specific phones (sounds) found across the languages of the world. Chandrasekhar also includes further devices for showing phonemic tone – needed for transcribing ‘tonal’ languages such as Chinese – and other such ‘supra-segmental’ features.

The presentation of the material, while somewhat ‘distinctive’ in style, is adequately scholarly; notably, there are extensive references to sources (albeit rather idiosyncratically organised) and an index. There are also two broadly supportive forewords contributed by linguists. However, these themselves include surprising oddities, such as the claim made in the second foreword that IPAA

fails to reduce all languages to writing ‘in a uniform way’. This latter claim must be deemed false or at least overstated, even if Navlipi is considered superior to IPAA in this respect.

Chandrasekhar’s title itself appears bombastic and indeed overstated (he cannot have examined **all** of the world’s 6,000+ languages, even through the work of others), and he is not himself a linguist (he is a chemist); but he has studied many languages and aspects of linguistics, and his actual discussion emerges as much more sophisticated about linguistic matters than that of most non-linguists who have proposed reforms. He is well-informed, his scope (while understandably displaying a particular focus upon India) is wide, and many of his individual points (general and specific) are themselves correct (if often uncontroversial). Indeed, the book deals interestingly with methodological issues involving phonetics and script-design, notably on pp. 291-350. Overall, it has to be taken seriously.

Nevertheless, Chandrasekhar’s ideas are suspect in some important ways which will probably not be apparent to readers who are not themselves linguists.

Chandrasekhar announces at the outset that his goal has been to develop a cross-linguistic and indeed a universal alphabetic writing system. He is especially concerned to address what he sees as an ‘urgent issue’: the phenomenon which he (oddly) describes as the **phonemic idiosyncrasies** of different languages (not the only case where his terminology is unfamiliar and arguably contrived). This involves the fact that, even where some specific phones are shared between languages, said languages often group them differently into phonemes. Thus the two ‘L’ sounds referred to in Note 2 are allophones of the same phoneme in English but are separate phonemes (and are written differently) in Polish.

Chandrasekhar states (p. xxxi, xxxiii, xxxiv, 278, etc.) that his work is the first to address this ‘problem’ ‘thoroughly’ or effectively. But, unless the word *thoroughly* is being used in a strange (and partisan) way, this is quite wrong, and surprisingly so given his apparent familiarity with the literature. Chandrasekhar may not **agree** with all the specific analyses of such cases which have been offered by mainstream linguists, or with their transcription systems, and in some cases he may be right and they wrong; but nevertheless there is a vast and varied technical linguistic literature and a set of practices in which this issue is central.

Chandrasekhar also suggests (pp. xxxii, 171-173) that some thinkers have proposed or might propose that there is in fact no such thing as ‘phonemic idiosyncrasy’ but that in **all** of the very many relevant cases the point is really that some languages lack some of the phones in question altogether. He goes on to deny that this latter situation ever occurs (providing a summary argument which is overstated and unclear). However, no mainstream linguist would hold the view which he describes here. Linguists certainly have

held (a) that in **many** such cases a given language (or accent) has phones which are not found at all in another language (or accent); but they grant fully (b) that in **other** such cases what Chandrasekhar calls ‘phonemic idiosyncrasy’ **does** obtain. And in addition mainstream linguists are clearly **correct** in holding that situations of both types are common. If situations of type (a) did not occur, **all** of the enormous range of phones found in the entire set of 6,000+ human languages would appear (if often misperceived) in **all** of these languages. But this is very clearly false. And Chandrasekhar implies as much by including in his system means of representing many phones which, as he appears to acknowledge, occur only in a few languages. For instance, he notes (p. 321) that in teaching Navlipi the symbols for rarer phones might be omitted where not needed for specific languages. If Chandrasekhar’s views on this issue are in fact coherent, he has expressed himself poorly and confusingly in the relevant sections of his text.

Indeed, the most important general problem with Chandrasekhar’s work involves the distinction between, on the one hand, (a) phonetic transcription systems such as IPAA (normally language-neutral and intended for technical linguistic work or the teaching of foreign-language phonetics), and, on the other, (b) language-specific phonemic transcription systems (such as those based on IPAA) intended both for technical work and (by spelling-reformers and by linguists inventing new scripts; see below) for actual everyday use.

Chandrasekhar appears to be attempting to cover **both** of these sets of requirements at once, with no reasonable grounds for expecting success proportional to the efforts involved. Systems which are suitable in one of these contexts may not be at all suitable in the other. In particular, a system used for the everyday writing of a given language crucially involves that language’s own phoneme system (and thus also awareness of the allophonics on the part of the designer, even though allophones will not normally be distinguished; see Note 3); but the positions of the various allophones (single or multiple) of these phonemes within the entire range of phones found across all languages are simply irrelevant to the vast majority of people, and written forms which incorporate such information are likely to distract non-specialist learners and users. The brilliantly-devised Hangul writing system used for Korean, described and praised by Chandrasekhar on pp. 198-201, **is** systematic in this way – but with reference **only** to **Korean** phonology. In contrast, Navlipi symbols appear likely to confuse non-linguist users by incorporating detail which is irrelevant in context because it relates to cross-linguistic patterning.

Indeed, some of the features saliently displayed in Navlipi, such as the systematically-marked third ‘lip-position’ variant, are so seldom required that it is not clear that their inclusion confers any advantage at all – as Chandrasekhar’s own tables confirm. Furthermore, some

features, such as the one just cited, may not even be sufficiently determinate in phonetic terms to be reified in this way; and on p. 299 Chandrasekhar himself admits that this very case really involves a phonetic continuum with no genuinely discrete divisions.

Other points involving usability include the fact that the core Navlipi symbols are all drawn from just 31 basic types, with many of the variants on each type looking rather similar (necessarily so if their type-membership is to be apparent); and given the issues already raised it is not clear that the acknowledged systematicity of Navlipi in this respect would assist non-linguist users in everyday use – or even that linguists would find the Navlipi system easier to use for their own purposes than the diacritics (written accents) which are systematically used in IPAA. Some of the Navlipi variants also give texts in familiar languages an even more unfamiliar look than do the equivalent IPAA-derived symbols.

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***It does have to be granted that Navlipi has important strengths. For instance, it is indeed more systematic than IPAA.***

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It does have to be granted that Navlipi has important strengths. For instance, it is indeed more systematic than IPAA. Of course, this might be expected from a system devised all at once by one author; in contrast, despite repeated semi-systematic reform, some features of IPAA inevitably betray the fact that it has ‘evolved’ over many decades in the hands of many linguists with diverse views and knowledge (indeed, it still offers alternatives in places). But some of Chandrasekhar’s other criticisms of IPAA (pp. 270-278) appear mistaken or at least overstated. In some of these cases, his own interpretation of the phonetics appears doubtful. In addition, Chandrasekhar (like the author of his first foreword) ignores the existence of the many very familiar language-specific phonemic transcription systems derived from IPAA, and thus wrongly suggests that IPAA-derived systems cannot handle cases where dissimilar phones are allophones of the same phoneme, or indeed (as per his earlier comments) ‘phonemic idiosyncrasies’ generally. (On p. 276 he appears to be about to adopt a more accurate view of this issue; but he quickly reverts to his more usual stance.) And, while IPAA and IPAA-based phonemic transcription systems are not necessarily ‘non-linguist friendly’, they were never intended to be; and they **are** readily adapted into scripts for everyday use (as is repeatedly demonstrated by linguists inventing scripts for hitherto unwritten languages).

Other problems with Navlipi include the treatment of differences between consonants in respect of ‘voice’, ‘manner’ and airstream-mechanism (which in fact cross-classify) by means of a single set of 35 possible values (see pp. 12-13); IPAA is clearly superior in this respect. In

addition, by partly confounding the different roles of phonetic and phonemic transcription (see above) Navlipi, as used to write any given language, renders itself potentially liable (a) to repeated change as phonetic details change and (b) to massive variation reflecting accent differences (which could easily become even more extensive than that which potentially arises for a strictly phonemic system). As is implied by my comment in Note 3 below, openly language-specific and phonemic systems, even if strictly systematic at the **phonemic** level and thus unable to express more abstract relationships between word-forms, are affected by these two issues only to more modest degrees – simply because, by design, they do not display phonetic detail either. (See again Chandrasekhar's inchoate comment on p. 276.)

Nevertheless, as noted, this book is very much worthy of attention by all with a serious interest in writing systems – and, as I hope is clear, there are quite a few such people.

## Notes

1. An alphabet is technically defined as a writing system in which, in principle, one symbol corresponds with one speech-sound or 'phoneme' (see Note 2) rather than with a syllable or an entire word. Alphabetic spelling is most consistent ('systematic') when the spelling is **strictly** phonemic, such that there is 1:1 correspondence between the phonemes making up the phoneme system or 'paradigm' and the letters. Thus, for English, the phoneme /e/ as in *bet*, *said*, *bread* would **always** be represented by the letter *-e-* (*bet*, *sed*, *bred*), and the letter *-e-* would be used **only** to represent this phoneme; words such as *be* would have to be re-spelled (this is called **paradigmatic phonemicity**). In addition, in strictly phonemic systems, each single phoneme in any sequence or 'syntagm' (such as a word) is always represented by a single letter, and each letter in a sequence always represents one and only one phoneme; thus, the two-letter sequence *-ea-* in *bread* could not be used, as it is in current spelling, to represent the single phoneme /e/, and the word would have to be respelled, probably as *bred*; words spelled with non-initial *-x-* would have to be re-spelled with *-ks-* or *-gz-*; etc. (this is called **syntagmatic phonemicity**). Such complete systematicity represents an 'ideal'; most actual alphabetic systems incorporate various infringements of these principles, for a variety of reasons (current English spelling is indeed among the least systematic in Europe), and indeed it is not even universally agreed that perfect **phoneme-level** systematicity, specifically, is really the best option (see later).

2. I need to explain here what is meant by 'phonetics' and 'phonemics'/'phonology'. A 'phone' is a speech-sound considered 'phonetically', that is, as a physical entity, in terms of its articulation with the speech organs, the associated acoustic effects in the air and the auditory reception of the sound in the ear and brain of a listener. In any given language (or accent), the phones used are

grouped into 'phonemes'. The phones which are members of a given phoneme in a given language (its 'allophones') are related to each other in various important structural and distributional ways; and they are perceived by linguistically untutored native speakers of that language (though not by native speakers of other languages with different systems) as the same sound, even if they are seriously different in phonetic terms.

For example, the two 'L' sounds in English *lull* are allophones of the same English phoneme (/l/). The second allophone is found only at the ends of syllables or before consonants, the first elsewhere (this is their distributional relationship). But they are phonetically very different (and native speakers of other languages hear them as very different).

The phonemes themselves are involved in the 'phonemic'/'phonological' structure of the language/accents: which phonemes and contrasts between phonemes exist, which sequences of phonemes are possible in a word, etc.

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***It must be acknowledged that the adoption of different spellings for homophones does not of itself resolve all readers' problems relating to ambiguity.***

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3. Alphabetic writing systems for everyday use (whether or not they are fully systematic; see Note 1) are in general phonemic rather than phonetic (although if they are highly systematic they are often inaccurately described as 'phonetic' by non-linguists); they do not distinguish between allophones of a phoneme, since linguistically untutored native speakers are unaware of allophonic differences and do not need such distinctions in spelling. (Scripts generally distinguish between allophones only if they have been borrowed from languages with different phonologies.) Invented, more thoroughly systematic phonemic systems will not display allophonic differences either; nor could they display accent differences which are purely phonetic, even if this were considered desirable. (Those salient inter-accent differences, such as the precise **quality** of the 'long A' vowel in words such as *father*, which **are** in fact purely phonetic, are thus unlikely to be reflected in proposed spelling differences of this kind, unless their salience in an accent-contact situation is allowed to override their non-phonemic status.) But these systems obviously **will** display **phonemic** differences between accents: indeed, if they are consistently phonemic and true to the speech patterns which they represent, they **must** do so.

4. It must be acknowledged that the adoption of different spellings for homophones does not of itself resolve **all** readers' problems relating to ambiguity. It may not be at all obvious – except to the tiny minority who are



knowledgeable etymologists – **which** spelled form represents each of a set of homophonous words. The fact that *roe* is the spelling of the word which means ‘fish eggs’ and *row* that of the word meaning ‘line of items’ is in no way obvious from the meanings of the words or from any other information available to the general reader. The pairings of spellings and meanings are effectively arbitrary and simply have to be **learned** – which may be more or less difficult for differently-skilled readers – although, **once** learned, the different spellings **are** of course of use. Writers too may struggle to determine which spelling is appropriate where homophones are in question. For example, inexperienced writers often experience great difficulty in choosing between *there*, *their* and *they’re*, all three of which are homophonous in many accents.

5. If phonemic spelling were allowed to vary according to accent (see above), the words *roe*, *row* and *row* would have to be spelled identically in most but not quite all of the English-speaking world; and the words *paw*, *pore* and *pour* would have to be spelled identically for much but by no

means all of England. If phonemic spelling were uniform across all communities, regardless of accent, pairs and sets of words such as *paw*, *pore* and *pour* would either have to be spelled identically everywhere – conforming with those accents in which they **are** homophonous – or else spelled differently from each other everywhere, if they happened to be non-homophonous in whatever accent was selected to be followed.

6. This strategy is not **necessarily** disastrous; it has already been adopted in part by some other languages with existing spelling systems closer to the phonemics, notably Spanish (where all the equivalent Greek-derived words are now spelled with *-f*). Nevertheless, those English-speakers who later learned the foreign languages in question (Classical Greek, etc.) would find less initial common ground than they now do.

7. This author’s surname will be familiar to astrophysicists, and both of his names will be familiar to older cricket-lovers!

## BOOK REVIEW

*Many Lives, Many Masters: The True Story of a Prominent Psychiatrist, his Young Patient, and the Past-Life Therapy that Changed both their Lives* by Brian L. Weiss M.D, 1988. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., ISBN 0-671-65786-0.

Jon Danzig (© Jon Danzig 2012)

Editor’s note: The first part of this review is itself part of a longer review which appeared in the December 2012 issue of the *Hypnotherapist Journal* of the Hypnotherapy Association. The full version is at:

<http://www.jondanzig.com/HypnoticRegressionbyJonDanzig.pdf> (short URL: [goo.gl/RU539](http://goo.gl/RU539)).

**Dr Brian Weiss is a psychiatrist and self-proclaimed ‘scientist’ who, in his best-selling book, *Many Lives, Many Masters*, claims to have ‘scientifically proved’ reincarnation by hypnotising one of his patients to past lives. His book has sold over 1.5 million copies with rave reviewers mostly giving ratings of 4 or 5 stars out of 5.**

I give the book zero stars. I believe it’s a sham, pretending to be a work of scientific discovery when it’s nothing of the sort. The book gives hypnotherapy, doctors and science a bad name. The fact that so many readers, and even some hypnotherapists, believe that this book provides ‘evidence’ for reincarnation shows that our education system has in many ways failed to explain the principles and discipline of science.

In his book, Dr Weiss related the stories under hypnosis of one of his patients, ‘Catherine’, as she apparently described her different lives from past times.

My criticism of the book is that it purports to be a work of scientific discovery, when clearly it is not. As a work of fiction, it’s quite entertaining; but it is disingenuous to describe the book as ‘scientific’, and Dr Weiss was censured by the medical profession when his book was first published.

Nevertheless, Dr Weiss wrote, ‘I felt the need to apply the scientific method, which I had rigorously used over the past fifteen years in my research, to evaluate this most unusual material emerging from Catherine’s lips.’ And yet, despite Dr Weiss’s eminent training as a ‘scientist’, nowhere in the book did he apply any scientific methods or protocols to evaluate his claims properly. I’ve now prepared a 3,000 word forensic review of ‘Many Lives, Many Masters’.

Editor’s note: the following part of this review can also be found at:

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/418986461> (short URL: [goo.gl/TswvI](http://goo.gl/TswvI)).

**This is one of the worst books I've ever read - parading as a scientific analysis when it is nothing of the sort.**

Dr Weiss has conducted his research without scientific protocols or peer review, yet as a 'scientist', Dr Weiss should have the skills and resources necessary to have conducted his 'investigation' properly and scientifically. The fact that he chose not to do so, I believe, discredited his book as a work of fairy tale-like fiction.

Rather than a conventional review, I will go through some of the claims made in the book, page by page, and show how it's full of nonsense.

**Page 27-28** – In regressing under hypnosis an anonymous patient called Catherine to a 'past life', Dr Weiss claims that Catherine can 'vividly' see that, 'The year is 1863 BC'. Yet this date could not have existed at that time, so how could Catherine possibly have seen it? In later hypnosis sessions, Catherine was only able to reveal the date of her past life if she could 'see or hear' it: so it makes a complete nonsense of history to be able to 'see' a date that didn't exist contemporaneously.

**Page 28** – In another hypnosis session, Catherine claimed that her daughter from 1863 BC, called Cleastra, was her niece in the present time called Rachel. Why didn't Dr Weiss question Catherine more closely about this astonishing claim? It could simply have been the result of Catherine's vivid imagination. How precisely did she know? No details, scientific basis or substance are provided; it was just presented by Dr Weiss as a fact.

**Page 29** – Catherine states now that she is in the year AD 1756 and her name is Louisa. Why no surname mentioned? With a surname in more modern time such as the 18th Century, the existence of such a person could be verified. Throughout the book, Catherine never states and is never asked for a surname. Neither is any specific address given or asked, which could be factually verified.

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***For a doctor who claims to have written many scientific journals, this is one book written in a most unscientific way.***

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**Page 30** – Dr Weiss asks Catherine if he appeared in her past life. Yes, she replies, Dr Weiss was her teacher in the year 1568 BC. Again, no questioning on how Catherine could presume that. It is accepted and presented as fact by Dr Weiss, without challenge. Again, a contemporaneously non-existent date is presented, when dates of more modern times could not be revealed as Catherine claimed she could not 'see' them.

**Page 36** – Dr Weiss claims that reincarnation was mentioned in the Bible, but it had been deleted early on. Where is the source? For a doctor who claims to have written many scientific journals, this is one book written

in a most unscientific way. Dr Weiss does not provide a list of sources or references to support any of the claims he makes in this book.

**Page 42** – Now Catherine claims that the man who killed her in 1473 was her current boyfriend, called Stuart. Again, no questioning by Dr Weiss on exactly how she came to this conclusion. Also, Dr Weiss did not give Catherine's verbatim account, even though Dr Weiss claimed to have written down or recorded her words. This was a critical commentary by Catherine, and Dr Weiss should have quoted her directly.

**Page 43** – Catherine claims that her mother in a previous, undated life is the same mother she has now. Again, no precise details are provided. No mention of when or where this happened. It's all skipped over. No clear description of the mother then and her mother now. It's all accepted without question. This amazing revelation is all over in one paragraph and not mentioned again. Where is the close questioning by the scientist that Dr Weiss is supposed to be?

**Page 43** – Dr Weiss states, 'According to most writers, groups of souls tend to reincarnate again and again...' Most writers? Maybe Dr Weiss could claim that most writers who write about reincarnation, but surely not most writers generally? It's this type of imprecise writing that makes Dr Weiss's book not one of scientific scrutiny and discovery, but a book of imprecise narration. Again, no source to back up his claim about 'most writers...'

**Page 43** - Dr Weiss states, 'I felt the need to apply the scientific method, which I had rigorously used over the past fifteen years in my research, to evaluate this most unusual material emerging from Catherine's lips.' Good idea. Yet, nowhere in the book does Dr Weiss apply any scientific methods to evaluate the claims made by his patient, Catherine. He only ever makes lip service to scientific methods.

**Page 44** – Dr Weiss wrote that, following the hypnosis sessions, Catherine gained 'psychic powers'. However, Catherine's father (in her present life!) expressed doubt about Catherine's new powers. Dr Weiss wrote, 'To prove to him that it was true, she took him to the race track. There, before his eyes, she proceeded to pick the winner of every race....she took all the money that she had won and gave it to the first poor street person she met on the way out of the track.' Where is the source and independent verification for this story? If true, it should have been easy to check and prove the truthfulness of this account. By not doing so, by not even explaining why he could not do so, Dr Weiss has demeaned the intelligence of every one of his readers.

**Page 44** – Dr Weiss states, 'This was tangible proof.... I could not deny her psychic abilities.' Dr Weiss calls this one, unverified account of winning at the races as 'tangible proof' of psychic abilities. Whatever

happened to Dr Weiss's scientific training? This was not proof at all.

**Page 46** – Under hypnosis, Catherine is 'regressed' to an unknown date in history to a town she thinks is called 'Brennington'. Dr Weiss states, 'Here she (Catherine) said some words I could not identify. Whether they were Gaelic or not, I have no idea.' Dr Weiss had no idea? He had recorded the sessions. Surely it would have been easy for him to identify whether the words spoken by Catherine were Gaelic or not, and if he could not, to explain precisely why. The lack of precision, detail, or questioning in Dr Weiss's writings undermines his title of Doctor.

**Page 47** – Dr Weiss wrote of Catherine, 'She had never heard of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Yet she was relating similar experiences to those described in these writings. This was a proof of sorts.' A proof of sorts? This was not proof of anything. How could Dr Weiss ascertain that Catherine had never heard of the Tibetan Book of the Dead? His scientific training should have taught him that it is impossible to prove a negative. To put forward this as proof, again makes a mockery of true scientific discovery.

**Page 54** – Dr Weiss states that, under hypnosis, Catherine tells him things about his own father and his son that could not possibly have been known by Catherine. This might be impressive if it was independently verified.

There is no way of telling whether the entire book is a complete work of fiction, and if it is, then of course it would be easy for Dr Weiss to make up anything to try and impress the gullible reader. After all, the existence of Catherine is not proven. She could be a person made up. We don't know her full name. Why has she not come forward to confirm what Dr Weiss has written about her? This book has made a lot of money. Who knows what was the true motive of Dr Weiss to write it?

**Page 57** – Dr Weiss refers to 'thousands of cases recorded in the scientific literature' of children miraculously being able to speak foreign languages 'to which they had never been exposed.' Again, no source for Dr Weiss's claims. Not even one book is sourced to show that there has been any scientific study, let alone thousands, about children who speak languages that they have not been taught. I challenge Dr Weiss to provide the so-called scientific studies to which he so casually refers.

**Page 66** – another hypnosis session in which Catherine is regressed to a town in Wales called something like 'Hamstead' when Catherine was a man called 'Christian' – again, no surname ever stated. Dr Weiss says, 'She could not see a year.' How was it that she could not see a year? It seems that Catherine was only able to tell the year if she could see it written down, but that was impossible for the times she could date from BC. This seems so nonsensical. Then Dr Weiss quotes

Catherine as saying, 'It's a port, a seaport in Wales. They're talking British.' British? There was, and is, no such language as British. Perhaps the people around her were talking Welsh or English, but not British. Why didn't Dr Weiss question this?

**Page 82** – Under hypnosis Catherine described a wedding in a past life. Dr Weiss asks her if there was anything in the newspaper about the wedding, because if there was, he could have looked up the date. 'No,' replies Catherine, 'I don't believe they have newspapers there.' Dr Weiss writes, 'Documentation was proving difficult to come by in this lifetime'.

This was a nonsensical statement for Dr Weiss to write, as if giving credence to the idea that there was documentary evidence to support any of the other past lives described by Catherine. In fact, Dr Weiss did not provide any documentary evidence at all in his book to support any of the past lives described by Catherine.

**Page 88** – Dr Weiss writes that he was 'driven to pursue the experience with Catherine in a careful, scientific manner' and to look at the information 'objectively'. In the book, Dr Weiss makes several references for the need to explore everything in a scientific manner and with objectivity, but nowhere did he do this. This is an old trick. By mentioning the need for scientific scrutiny and repeating often that he is a scientist, to the vulnerable reader, this could seem the same as conducting peer reviewed, empirical, repeatable scientific experiments. But Dr Weiss did no such thing, he just wrote about its importance, without doing it. Dr Weiss did not follow any scientific principles in his study of Catherine.

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***Dr Weiss simply states that he knows Catherine's information to be true 'intuitively' and 'my bones also knew'. This is the best he has to offer.***

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**Page 106** – Dr Weiss simply states that he knows Catherine's information to be true 'intuitively' and 'my bones also knew'. This is the best he has to offer. It's not the same as scientific evidence.

**Page 116-117** – Under hypnosis, Catherine describes herself as a 35-year-old German pilot in the Second World War shot down in France. Again, no specific detail is garnered by the questioning of Dr Weiss that could have proved beyond doubt whether such a pilot actually existed; such as what was the pilot's full name and rank and squadron? This hardly seems the work of a true scientist.

**Page 117-118** – Dr Weiss writes, 'During this entire process with Catherine, I had been reluctant to discuss her revelations with other professionals. .. I had not

shared this remarkable information with others at all.' A true scientist would insist on sharing his data with other professionals to discuss and verify. By not allowing the data to be independently scrutinised, we only have Dr Weiss's word for what happened between him and 'Catherine' and we only have his interpretations of the results. This is simply not good enough. No drug testing, no murder trial, not even a newspaper story, should ever rely upon one unverified source as evidence.

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***Dr Weiss lists a number of people who had 'psychic experiences' without naming them or providing any verification or proof.***

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**Page 129** – Dr Weiss lists a number of people who had 'psychic experiences' without naming them or providing any verification or proof. A chairman of a hospital department whose dead father protects him; a professor whose dreams provide the answers to his research experiments; a 'well-known doctor' who knows who is phoning him before he picks up the phone (yeah, isn't that 'Caller Display'?!), a woman who'd never been to Rome before but, when she visited, knew every street as if she had previously lived there. This is all gossip; the fact that Dr Weiss is prepared to quote such examples without providing any substance means that he does not adhere to scientific principles at all. This is the case throughout the book; only lip service is made to science, as if that is good enough to make the book scientific, which of course it is not.

**Page 159** – during the hypnosis sessions, Dr Weiss states that Catherine speaks the voice of 'masters', sort of gods who control the spirit world and are the well of all wisdom. Of course, Dr Weiss accepts this without question. One master, named by Dr Weiss as the 'poet Master', provided a summary of all wisdom as follows: 'Everything must be balanced. Nature is balanced. The beasts live in harmony. Humans have not learned to do that. They continue to destroy themselves. There is no harmony, no plan to what they do. It's so different in nature. Nature is balanced. Nature is energy and life and restoration. And humans just destroy. They destroy nature. They destroy other humans. They will eventually destroy themselves.'

This is all just reactionary, doom laden nonsense aimed to appeal to the least sophisticated of human thinking. 'The beasts live in harmony'? The animal world is vicious, involving wanton and brutal killing for food, sex, territory and power; animals destroy each other and can often be very damaging to the rest of nature. Look at the damage caused by locusts, for example, or ants, or foxes. Humans are animals too, so we cannot be expected to be any different or, actually,

any better. Yet how many animals have invented courts and parliaments to resolve differences, create laws and govern ourselves in a civilised manner? How many animals stop at traffic lights?

What animals make plans for industry, transport, schools, hospitals and libraries? The standard of living of the average ant hasn't ever improved, yet humans have made huge strides to improve their way of life. If describing humans as being worse than animals is wisdom that Dr Weiss believes truly comes from 'masters' of the universe, then it doesn't seem so wise or enlightened to me.

**Page 199** – Dr Weiss describes how Catherine had gone to see a psychic astrologer called Iris Saltzman. According to Dr Weiss, Saltzman confirmed all of what Catherine had revealed under hypnosis. This is hardly scientific validation. How does Weiss know what really happened at that session with Saltzman? How does he even know it even happened at all?

**Page 203** – Dr Weiss describes how progress is going to be made in proving past-life memories. He writes, 'The important strides that are going to be made in this field will be made using scientific methodology. In science, a hypothesis, which is a preliminary assumption made about a series of observations, is initially created to explain a phenomenon. From there, the hypothesis must be tested under controlled conditions. The results of these tests must be proved and replicated before a theory can be formed. Once the scientists have what they think is a sound theory, it must be tested again and again by other researchers, and the results should be the same.' I say, hear hear! But throughout his book, Dr Weiss has not used any of the scientific methods he claims to subscribe to.

In fact, his methods were so unscientific, that the so called 'evidence' he has presented to the world would have to be excluded from any scientific report, as being a complete sham and the opposite to true scientific discovery.

**Page 203** – Dr Weiss quoted several scientists who had published 'detailed, scientifically acceptable studies' to support reincarnation. For example, the work of Dr Joseph Banks Rhine, a pioneer of parapsychology. Yet, despite the requirement agreed by Dr Weiss for experiments to be 'repeatable', Dr Rhine's results could never be duplicated and several of his assistants were accused of fraud. Dr Weiss named Dr Ian Stevenson as another scientist who had proved reincarnation. Yet Dr Stevenson was on record as recognising a 'glaring flaw' in his researches: 'the absence of any evidence of a physical process by which a personality could survive death and travel to another body'.

**Page 217-218** - Dr Weiss explains that after Catherine he has regressed under hypnosis 12 other patients. He recounts a Jewish housewife who ran a 19th

Century brothel in New Orleans (surely verifiable, but no substance provided) and who has 'even more of a facility for accurately predicting future events'. Dr Weiss claims, 'I am still the scientist. All of her material must be scrutinized, evaluated and validated'. Yet, so far, Dr Weiss has failed to do that with any of the material he has presented. At least at the beginning of his book, on page 10, Dr Weiss admits, 'I do not have a scientific explanation for what happened.'

**In reading 'Many Lives, Many Masters', I had an open mind and was prepared to consider any evidence provided. I am disappointed that a doctor should write an account in such an unscientific manner and without any evidence to offer, when much could have been offered to either validate or disprove what happened.**

*For example, why not release the recordings of the sessions with the patient? Or at least, prove that the patient really existed? How are we to know that this wasn't simply a work of fiction? It's impossible to tell from what has been written. It could have all been made up, only first names have been used. Dr Weiss made no attempts to verify the astounding claims made by his patient, Catherine.*

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***It is disingenuous of Dr Weiss to compare his discoveries with that of Galileo or to claim that there is 'considerable evidence' to prove life after death.***

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Dr Weiss, on page 11, argues that, 'throughout history, humankind has been resistant to change and to the acceptance of new ideas. Historical lore is replete with examples. When Galileo discovered the moons of Jupiter, the astronomers of that time refused to accept or even look at the satellites...So it is now with psychiatrists and other therapists, who refuse to examine and evaluate the considerable evidence being gathered about survival after bodily death and about past-life memories. Their eyes stay tightly shut.'

It is disingenuous of Dr Weiss to compare his discoveries with that of Galileo or to claim that there is 'considerable evidence' to prove life after death. Galileo's discoveries were proved by real evidence. So far, there is no similar scientifically validated or accepted evidence to prove life after death or past-life memories. To try to suggest that such 'evidence' equates with the discoveries of Galileo is simply quasi-science aimed to hoodwink unquestioning and unscientific members of the public.

Just because 'Catherine' spoke her words under hypnosis, why should they be considered any more valid or believable than if she had simply told a story whilst wide awake? Her stories seemed imaginative fiction to me; I could not tell them apart from many other made-up stories I have read or heard, but it doesn't make them true. People have been telling stories ever since we could talk. There was nothing truly special in the stories of Catherine. All her historical references, which were quite vague anyway, could have been remembered from school lessons or documentaries or other books she had read, or simply from her imagination.

Dr Weiss only claimed to know Catherine in the privacy of his consulting room; he didn't really know her personally or in the 'outside' world. How could Dr Weiss know if she had hidden or even open talents as a story teller? Also, I've been hypnotised many times, there's nothing really that special about it, I knew exactly what I was saying during hypnosis and could remember it all afterwards.

**As I wrote at the beginning of my review: Dr Weiss has conducted his research without scientific protocols or peer review, yet as a 'scientist', Dr Weiss should have the skills and resources necessary to have conducted his 'investigation' properly and scientifically. The fact that he chose not to do so, I believe, discredited his book as a work of fairy tale-like fiction.**

#### Notes

1. Jon Danzig is an award-winning medical journalist and member of the UK's Medical Journalists Association. He was an investigative journalist and broadcaster on Roger Cook's consumer programme at the BBC. More about Jon Danzig at [www.JonDanzig.com](http://www.JonDanzig.com).

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I am very grateful to Mr Danzig for allowing us to publish his reviews here.

2. Jon Danzig provides another review of this book at <http://jondanzig.hubpages.com/hub/factorfictionpastlivesandhypnosis> (short URL: [goo.gl/aOz6m](http://goo.gl/aOz6m)).

3. *Many Lives, Many Masters* may be downloaded in pdf format at:

<http://ebookbrowse.com/many-lives-many-masters-pdf-d79666900> (short URL: [goo.gl/aO7ya](http://goo.gl/aO7ya); page numbers may be different to Jon Danzig's review copy).

## **THE ASSOCIATION FOR SKEPTICAL ENQUIRY (ASKE)**

Founded in 1997, ASKE is an association of people who support the following aims and principles:

- ASKE is committed to the application of rational, objective and scientific methods to the investigation and understanding of ideas, claims, and practices, especially those of an extraordinary and paranormal nature.
- ASKE is committed to challenging the uncritical promotion of beliefs and claims which are unsupported or contradicted by existing objective and scientific knowledge.
- ASKE opposes the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of science for purposes which deceive the public.
- ASKE supports the objective evaluation of all medical or psychological techniques offered to the public and opposes the uncritical promotion of techniques which are unsupported or contradicted by existing scientific knowledge.
- ASKE supports all efforts to promote the public awareness of the rational and scientific understanding of extraordinary and paranormal claims.
- ASKE is committed to a rational understanding of the reasons and motives which underlie the promotion and acceptance of irrational and paranormal claims and beliefs.
- ASKE accepts the rights of individuals to choose for themselves their beliefs about the world.

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