

Correspondence

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REINCARNATION

Sir,

IF the belief in Reincarnation is the belief that individual essences return to body after body seriatim, and it is further assumed that these essences are *distinct*, then such a belief is traditionally false, for the Lord is the only Essence and so "the Lord is the only Transmigrant."

This is, of course, at the level of the Absolute, or at least at that of Being. At the level of an incarnation, it is again obviously true that any two incarnate persons, born contemporaneously or consecutively (in whatever order), are different; so that any identification isolating one integral person in incarnate form could not, obviously, cover a second.

Is there any further sense we could make of the concept of Reincarnation? Obviously elements, both subtle and gross, from our present incarnation (or incarnations) will reappear, even, as Guénon points out, during our lifetime. Could any groupings of these be considered as entities transmigrated?

Within Buddhism, at least, it seems obvious that the Skandhas regroup to form the equivalent of a further life. It is not the *same* life, but then this itself is changing continually, so that the gap between one individual and another would seem no wider than that between an individual in one phase and the same individual in another, say in childhood and in manhood. A Buddhist certainly would object (as I do) to the canonising of one existence, an integral incarnation, as the "individuality"—in *contrast to* one grouping of Skandhas through several lives. To Guénon's "individuality" one would oppose "anatta"—and I thought we were not alone in doing that.

So that either there is no "individuality" (there is only the Real), or else there are identifiable lives and series of lives, characteristics and their reincarnations. And if this is not true, and someone must cleave to an "individuality" during life then relinquish it at death, I fail to see how there can be deliverance—for you must adhere to this "individuality" you have. To speak nothing of the return of a Bodhisattva to succour others.

In addition, Guénon rather peremptorily dismisses a very human argument for Reincarnation—on the grounds of justice—with fallacious rejoinders. First, he argues that there would be disadvantages simply as each individual is at a different stage in manifestation. It seems obvious to me that, just as the child is at no disadvantage when compared to the man, a person at an inferior stage would be at no disadvantage when compared to one at a superior stage. Guénon, as I understand him, bolsters his argument with the demand for an explanation of how differences, at all, began. Fairly obviously, *in time*. One does not need to explain *the commencement* of a person's evolution (or, better, revolution) by laws of karma.

He might, in this latter section, be asking how *any* differing accounts of the lives of men can be given by the proponents of Reincarnation, while still allowing for equality. In fact, he argues that "had the individuals been perfectly equal they would have been alike in all respects" under the pain of "contradiction." The "perfectly" gives the argument away. It is no contradiction to maintain that two things can be equal, even "perfectly" equal, yet not "alike in all respects": seven plus three plus two is "perfectly" equal to four plus eight, yet they are not alike in all respects. What *would* be a contradiction would be to maintain that two identical things were not alike in all respects, for two identical things are of course one. It seems fairly obvious that Guénon is confusing identity and equality.

This confusion is quite certainly engendered by what Guénon calls, following Leibnitz, the "principle of indiscernables," "by which he meant that there cannot exist anywhere two identical beings, that is to say, two beings alike in every respect" (*The Reign of Quantity* P64). A discussion of this "principle," *in brief*, would be wholly inappropriate, not to say presumptuous. But even if we allow that there is some sense in which it is true, is it relevant to Guénon's argument against opponents envisaging a cosmic justice? Their position does not require that individuals be alike in every respect but simply that they be equal in the amount of justice or the quality of justice allotted to them. We can, I think, fairly easily imagine cases in which two vastly different people receive equal justice. If we extend this to groupings of lives, it would seem easier still.

CLIVE FAUST
Japan, 18.2.66

(Original editorial inclusions that followed the essay:)

*There is no Natural Religion . . . As all men are alike (though infinitely various), so
all Religions, as all similars, have one source.*

William Blake.