

ABORIGINAL BELIEFS AND REINCARNATION

Marjorie Crawley

Although reincarnation has been believed over thousands of years among a variety of widely dispersed cultures, apart from the Celtic heritage of many Europeans it is not a concept that is part of our European Australian understanding of the nature of man and his relationship to the world. In recent years, however, with the intrusion of Eastern religions, we have been given more opportunity to attempt to understand, if not accept, categories of thought foreign to our own, yet difficulties in understanding the concept of reincarnation persist. For it has been expressed in doctrines that have changed according to the understanding of wisdom, and the needs of the people during the passing ages, even within the same religious tradition. There is also doubt as to whether it was correct to attribute reincarnation beliefs to some cultures, pointing to an indescision as to what counts as evidence and how to interpret it.¹ It is not surprising therefore, to find conflict of opinion as to whether the Aranda believe in reincarnation. Early this century, Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen were cited for the affirmative, and Carl Strehlow for the negative.² More recently, T.G.H. Strehlow supported the view,

The father of the young initiate then takes the hand of his son, leads him to the cluster, and places the smooth round stone into his hands. Having obtained permission of the other old men present, he tells his son:

'This is your own body from which you have been reborn. It is the true body of the great Tjenterama, the chief of the Ibalintja storehouse . . . You are the great Tjenterama himself . . . You are the true chief reincarnate . . . Keep alive the traditions of our forefathers until another chief be born.'³

whereas Olive Pink did not.

I found no evidence to show that the aborigines believed in reincarnation except in so far as the spirits of babies and very young children who die are concerned. These are said to be born again through the same mothers. But my informants, both sophisticated and unsophisticated, alone or in groups, emphatically denied it.⁴

In a prior article, Pink had acknowledged her guide Akorar as the reincarnation of the bandicoot ancestor.⁵ I am not presenting her latter statement as necessarily her final one, but only to show that it has been an area of conflict. For reasons which I shall gradually unfold, I think that there is an Aranda concept of reincarnation, but that confusion arose for two reasons. Firstly, there is a lack of definition of the concept concomittant with a lack of awareness of its multivarious forms, and secondly, it is most difficult to ascertain what Aboriginal beliefs actually are. I shall outline these difficulties, (some of which are peculiar to the Aborigines, others to the researchers of whom I will show T.G.H. Strehlow⁶ to be best qualified to overcome the difficulties) then after

defining reincarnation in its most elementary form, briefly discuss some difficulties associated with the Aranda concept as it is recorded by him.

Difficulties encountered in ascertaining Aboriginal beliefs

It is common to our human condition that there are times when we tell others what they want to hear regardless of what is truth. The Aborigines are no exceptions.

Among missionized natives it is extremely difficult to find out what the *original* beliefs really were, or even what their own *really* are now. The beliefs they recount are sometimes only such as they think the missionary would approve if he should hear them.⁷

Consequently it is highly unlikely that Pastor Carl Strehlow would have heard of the Aranda belief in reincarnation from a people who loved and revered him as the 'ajua' old man of importance, and 'ingkata' ceremonial chief.⁸ However, Strehlow states that his father was not wilfully misled, but given information as to all adult totemites.⁹

Not all that is said or sung is necessarily understood by the Aborigines themselves. It is not unknown for portions of any ancient religious literature to be cryptic to the point of obscurity, for words were often a mnemonic, the understanding of wisdom being dependent on the immediate interaction of the seekers with their master. However, for the Aranda youth, no questions may be asked while meagre scraps of information are reaching them from the lips of their teachers. Many details of the myths remain doubtful to them. The explanation of chant-verses, which they have learned with whole-hearted zeal, is often quite inadequate, and fails to give an intelligible literal rendering of the traditional lines into more modern language.¹⁰ In the religious sphere, words themselves can be regarded as powerful if exactly reiterated, so meaning can be lost without undue concern, such as when words are deleted through the death of an individual, or foreign words are imported after an inter-tribal gathering.¹¹

There are many levels of knowledge about the same belief, from camp-fire stories known by women and children through to the ultimate secrets known only to the elders. Sometimes portions of the story are related to the young men inaccurately. They are apt to be supplied with an officially falsified account. These false versions are traditional; only the actual owner of the myth, even though he be a young man, must not be deceived by the aged guardians of the clan tjuruna.¹² In one of his lectures this year, Mr. Noel Wallace told how he and his wife spent considerable time unlearning supposed truths that the Pitjantjatjara had given them before they had been accepted as genuine seekers. Tribal youths are denied knowledge if judged unworthy.

The secrets die with the old men, and though they die in sorrow, knowing that the old rites and myths will pass into oblivion and that the tribe is doomed to extinction, yet they die triumphantly, having been loyal to their trust.¹³

The Central Australian tribes are essentially disunited, no common systems of religion being embraced by them as a whole. Neither is there linguistic unity among the Aranda, dialectical differences being targets of abuse and biting ridicule, so both words and concepts differ within the tribe. It is noted that in West Aranda territory, a man is less frequently looked upon as a direct reincarnation of a particular ancestor than in the Northern area,¹⁴ and beliefs about the destiny of the soul vary among all the sub-groups. Thomas attributes this local variation of belief as the most probable reason for differences of opinion between Carl Strehlow and the English authors.¹⁵ Pink's researches were confined almost entirely to the Northern and North-western divisions of the Aranda, so I shall keep my discussion mainly limited to those groups.

For the researchers, the difficulties include their knowledge of the language, their understanding of Aboriginal concepts, and an awareness of their own bias.

It has been argued that it is in theory only that anything short of a complete mastery of the language leads to unsatisfactory results, for in practice, a field worker's rapport can sometimes compensate for the lack of knowing the language.¹⁶ Whist this can be true for basic empirical data, I think that an intimate knowledge of the language would be necessary for exploring the concept of reincarnation, and would also enrich those relationships achieved by rapport. For language is 'a pathway to the people's soul, its universe of discourse, its customary ways of thinking, its outlook on life, and its manner of social intercourse.'¹⁷ Unfortunately, early European contact with Aborigines was often made by those whose vocabulary was very poor, and the ruinous effect of Pidgin is aptly shown by Strehlow's caricatured tale of Macbeth.¹⁸ His *Songs of Central Australia*, and his translations of myths in *Aranda Traditions* bring a sense of wonder and excitement expected of the lasting literature of ancient traditions, proving the contrary to past reports, even from scientists who described the language as devoid of all ornament and graces. Spencer and Gillen had to work in Pidgin¹⁹ and Pink wrote, 'I could not speak Aranda in the sense of using sentences.'²⁰ Carl Strehlow is described as both 'well acquainted with the language'²¹ and as his knowledge of Aranda being 'not adequate to the task'.²² Strehlow, on the other hand, because of his birth and upbringing, describes himself as not only speaking Aranda, but thinking in Aranda as well.²³ Because language is inextricably interwoven with concept formation, he therefore seems most qualified to faithfully present Aranda concepts, yet to think in Aranda need not necessarily mean that in all matters he thinks as do the Aranda.

The absence of words does not necessitate the absence of a concept. Mystical literature over the ages expresses this,

The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named

Is not the constant name.²⁴

Pink found that difficulties arose even at an empirical level. Two headmen spent some hours trying to think of a word to describe very poor country that had no permanent water, for her. She thought they had forgotten her question. 'Both men were quite evidently thinking out a word *for me*. Among them it needed no such definition.'²⁵ The existence and efficacy of anything does not depend on someone's formal affirmation of them in words. Yet neither do we want to extrapolate from Aboriginal statements, hints and silences, concepts which are not there.²⁶ I am, nevertheless in favour of speculative constructions as long as they are presented as such, and not as necessary truths. Just as behind some of our actions as individuals there are motives of which we are currently ignorant, so there may be universal principles explaining our common human experiences such as love and anger variably expressed according to the culture we live in.

This uneasy liaison between knowledge and language makes the following statement a moot point. 'There were no Aboriginal philosophers and one can speak of 'philosophy' only metaphorically.'²⁷ Certainly there are no metaphysical and theological arguments on record supporting the Aranda concept of reincarnation by any of its own people, but the total identification of the individual with the ancestor, which includes physical likeness, is an empirical argument, given the premise that genetic endowment comes from the ancestor. The difficult task is to capture in our language, the philosophies, (which I think Stanner prefers to call axioms),²⁸ implicit in the Aboriginal knowledge that is lived, enacted, painted, danced and sung for reincarnation is closely tied with the *present* life for the individual, 'myths present the axioms in an intuitive-contemplative aspect, and rites present them in a passioist-activist aspect'.²⁹ It is a quest for discovering the non-appearing that lies behind the appearance of our daily living.

However, to say that there were no Aboriginal philosophers does not mean that the Aborigines do not have the capacity for philosophical thought at all i.e. the ability to think logically, and systematically and in general and abstract terms. That Aboriginal thinking is pre-logical as argued by Levy-Bruhl has been countered by the recognition that whilst European philosophical thought disagrees with certain premisses such as the pre-existence of spirits, (apart from Platonism) the inferences made from such are logical. General terms for creatures and objects were recorded as early as 1901 and 1903,³⁰ and although the Aborigines to our mind use abstract words only sparingly, the Aranda nevertheless have the linguistic mechanisms for making them. Abstract concepts can also be conveyed by the use of symbols which are selected according to the degree of numbers, diffusion, ecological importance and the impressive behaviour of the species. For example, in Aboriginal thought, 'kangaroo' and 'goanna' have reached the full stage of 'abstraction' of all warm-respectively-cold-blooded beings or phenomena. For

Aboriginal logic demands that in a universe filled by animation, liveliness must be preserved in any abstraction from its phenomena.³¹ The earthiness of their thought patterns is reflected in their concept of reincarnation which is closely tied with *tjuruna* ownership in the present world, and not with an eschatological theory of perfection or release. This is not surprising, considering that their access to the sky was severed in the Dreaming, symbolized in the myths by withdrawn spears and felled casuarinas.

In our desire for systematized knowledge, we are always in danger of introducing more order and clarity than was in the original material. For example, has Maddock discovered, or merely imposed a cohesive structure where there is none, when piecing together the information he gathered concerning *bolung* to form a theory about reincarnation in Arnhem Land?³² On the other hand, whilst there seems to be no cohesion of disparate thoughts in Stanner's enigmatic conversation with the Murinbata concerning the *mir* concept, were the Aborigines merely resisting the persistent enquiries of a European? Intelligent and helpful Murinbata pointed out that they had never thought of questions such as he asked: the unclarity and conflicts within their tradition were of little interest to them.³³ Speaking of his own sketch of the three precincts of the primordial world as believed by some Aranda, (a sketch which I will later use, the original material being Strehlow's),³⁴ Stanner acknowledges that he contracts, paraphrases, and arranges for study, material that in the original is more complex and diffuse. How aware can researchers be of obscure inclinations and assumptions which have a distorting effect? For the path of interference is a path of risk and often of loss.

In the past, information that was gathered was often very uneven and much of it was under the influence of ideas that now seem mistaken. Carl Strehlow saw the Aranda through the eyes of a Christian missionary, Spencer as a matter-of-fact and often unimaginative scientist, whose greatest discovery, it has been said, was Gillen, the post-master of Alice Springs gifted with the ability of making accurate observations. The point of my criticism is to show the ease of recognizing past prejudices, the difficulty of knowing present ones. In a short article³⁵ Pink acknowledges five times her inadequacy as a researcher through failing to ask appropriate questions, and through lack of observation or interest. Strehlow admitted that he was not entirely clear in his own mind about certain aspects of conception beliefs, which are closely linked with reincarnation beliefs, when he wrote *Aranda Traditions*.³⁶ And how confident can we be that his understanding of Aranda beliefs are not biased through an unconscious reaction to his father's beliefs?

To ascertain, and faithfully represent the concept of reincarnation among the Aranda, it seems to me that an intimate knowledge of the language is necessary, as well as an ability to 'think black'³⁷ as do the Aranda, with an awareness of personal bias. On balance, I think that

T.G.H. Strehlow best meets these demands.

Definition

Although Strehlow wrote extensively on the concept, he does not specifically define reincarnation, but says that according to the belief, some part of the 'life' the totemic ancestors and ancestresses left behind them in their trails throughout the landscape, could enter into the body of a human mother who crossed these trails, and could then take on a fresh existence as her human infant.³⁸ The concept implies the total identification of a living individual with an original totemic ancestor.³⁹

He justified his use of the term on two accounts: it enabled the reader to arrive much more quickly at an understanding of native beliefs than if the Aranda equivalent had been used (reincarnation being a dominant idea of the Far Eastern religions): and because it is a term familiar to an educated reader from a study of other religions, thus emphasizing the fact that there is a striking resemblance between religious observances and ideas in many widely scattered parts of the world, in spite of the thousands of years of separation between the individual races of the human family.⁴⁰ Reincarnation beliefs have been attributed to Africans, Brazilians, Buddhists, Celts, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Indians, Jews and Teutons with multivarious beliefs as to the nature of the body, what constitutes the transmigrant and its relationship with death, whether there is a series of lives, attendant doctrines such as karma, and supportive evidence in the form of metaphysical, theological and empirical arguments.⁴¹ These present striking differences as well as resemblances, and the Aranda concept is not without its problems.

This is Pink's description of reincarnation:

I then explained what was *supposed* to be their belief, namely continuous reincarnation; they retorted 'that white fellow talk – not blackfellow.' When I persisted, as I did, going back and back to the same subject on many occasions to see when they would contradict what they had said either knowingly or by implication, they said that the baby-spirit which a woman 'found' at the time of quickening was a new one, not that of some, previously deceased, adult blackfellow.⁴²

She refers to reincarnation as being 'continuous', which combined with the native response, infers the Eastern concept of an immortal soul transmigrating through a succession of lives. This is also a point of contention for Thomas, 'According to Spencer and Gillen, the tribes of Central Australia believe that children are reincarnations of their ancestors (totem) and are *continually* reborn, but the testimony of (Carl) Strehlow directly contradicts this.'⁴³

What then, is reincarnation, and what is the significance of it being described as continuous? In its simplest but most comprehensive form, reincarnation requires that a transmigrant leaves one body to become, through birth, embodied in another.⁴⁴ In incarnation, the entity is

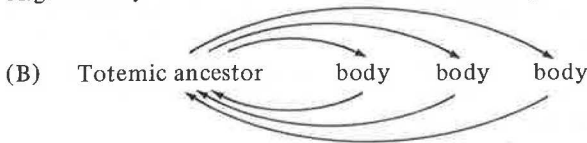
embodied only once, or for the first time, further embodiments constituting reincarnation. I make this distinction because Thomas prefers 'incarnation' for the Aranda: though Spencer and Gillen

speak of reincarnation of ancestors, they really mean an incarnation of spirit-children left behind by the totem ancestors.⁴⁵

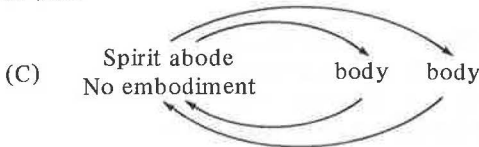
If the ancestor spirits were always embodied, then any rebirth into other bodies constitutes reincarnation. Continued reincarnation seems to imply sequent births, the recurrence of a transmigrating element successively in a series of transient bodies, death releasing the transmigrant. Diagrammatically, it could be shown thus:

(A) totemic ancestor → body → body → body → body

Yet the term 'continuous' could be applied another way. The ancestor spirit is, or becomes, embodied as a supernatural being; its transmigrating entity later becomes embodied as a human being on whose death, it returns to its original supernatural body or abode. Later it becomes re-embodied as another human being, and on death again returns to its original body or abode. This would be shown diagrammatically thus:

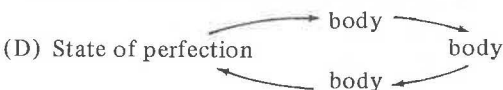


or thus



Spencer and Gillen described a Beginning in which a spirit impregnated an ancestress who gave birth to a son.⁴⁶ This differs from the myths I shall use in that a woman is necessary to give birth, and the spirit is originally disembodied. However, it becomes embodied in the supernatural beings before being reincarnated in ordinary mortals. Strehlow also speaks of the *first* emergence of the ancestor into a human being as 'incarnation'.⁴⁷

Both alternative (B) and (C) are 'continuous', but form a closed-loop of continuity rather than a seemingly linear succession of embodiments, (seemingly linear because the attainment of release often means the attainment of a lost original state), thus:



I think that the Aranda concept of reincarnation is most closely illustrated by diagram (B): that the ancestor is embodied always, and in a very real way, is believed to still be so.

It should be noted that the closed-loop of continuity can come to an end. In Southern Aranda, the famous initiation rites of the Njikantja brothers, (who, contrary to Aranda tradition, ascended into the sky by climbing up a tall spear when their days on earth were done), slowly but surely gave way to the intrusion of Northern ideas. They were staged for the last time when the two ancestors had taken form for the last time in two men, Koputanualka and Natnitjintika. When these old men died years ago, the old traditions passed into oblivion and the reincarnation of the Njikantja brothers ended.⁴⁸

A final word concerning definition. One of the main difficulties in the study of religions is the abandonment with which crucial terms such as 'soul' and 'spirit' are used without definition. The meaning of 'soul' can range from 'pure spirit' to 'personality' to 'life'. 'Spirit' can mean 'pure consciousness without attributes' to 'supernatural entities with personalities and attributes such as good or evil'. In the literature used for this essay, 'spirit', 'soul' and 'life' are often used interchangeably. Although the Aborigine does isolate the elements of body, spirit, ghost, shadow, name, spirit-site, and totem, his abstractions are not in a spirit of enquiry or dissent, for his over-ruling mood is one of belief in their oneness.⁴⁹ The intellectual struggle is 'thinking-white' of which I am a part, so I shall now struggle with the form of the ancestor, isolating the elements in pursuit of the transmigrating factor.

The Form of the Ancestor

In the primordial world, there were three distinct precincts each with its distinct inhabitants,⁵⁰ There were the sky-beings who had no interest in, nor power over the earth and its beings: there were immobile, helpless and immature earth-beings: and lastly, the subterrestrial-sleepers who were born out of their own eternity. It is the sleepers who interest us. Spontaneously they awoke, and of their own free will, broke through to the earth's surface. Although they were human, they were more than human, because animal, plant and other vital principles of differences were mysteriously intermixed with their humanity. Some took the form of animals but generally thought and acted like human beings: some appeared as human beings, but had an inner affinity with particular species of animals and could change at will into their affinities: some were human in form but had plant affinities, although they did not assume plant form and fed exclusively on their affine species: some were human in form, both male and female, but with neither plant nor animal affinities. They worked marvellous changes on the earth, freed the protean earth-beings, and everywhere these ancestors went, became impregnated forever with the particular powers they possessed or expressed. Their work done, they resumed their sleep in the ground, often in the shape of rocks, trees

and land formations. Some ascended into the sky.

It is apparent from the sketch that the ancestors were embodied. Aranda mythology is filled with their physical and mental activities e.g. 'The famous gurra (bandicoot) ancestor, Karora, lay asleep at the root of the great *matantja* where he had rested ever from the beginning. He was thinking, and wishes and desires flashed through his mind. Bandicoots began to come out of his navel and from his arm-pits. He arose, feeling hungry since magical powers had gone out from his body. He feels dazed.⁵¹ My favourite subterrestrial-sleeper is the witchetty-grub ancestor from Lukara the famous, whose sole conscious activity was an abortive attempt to recover stolen witchetty-grubs from a thieving stranger whom he ineffectually pursued with slow and tottering steps before he sank down to earth again. However, even in sleep, he had felt a sharp pain in his body, when the robber had snatched his sons' grubs away.⁵²

The bodies of the ancestors are capable of creativity,

One night as the old man slept, reclining on his right arm, something fell out from under his right arm-pit, something shaped like a witchetty-grub. It fell to the ground and took on human shape and grew apace; and when morning broke, the old man opened his eyes and gazed with astonishment upon his first-born son.⁵³

metamorphosis:

The sons sometimes felt the desire to become grubs again; then they would chant a spell, and so transform themselves into grubs, and re-enter the roots of witchetty bushes. Thence they would emerge again to the surface and assume human form one more.⁵⁴

and multiple manifestation:

The father sank down, his body turned into a living *tjurunga*, the sons all became *tjurunga*; and the bundles of stolen grubs also turned into *tjurunga* . . . they are all completely identified with each other by the native mind; they are all different forms of the intangible living something that is essentially the same in all cases.⁵⁵

However, thus far, the form of the ancestor and his activities present no problem for the concept of reincarnation. The difficulty is that the ancestor does not die.⁵⁶ Although the ancestor is said to grow old and die, or become mortally wounded, his body is immortal.

The bandicoot poises his spear for the throw;

he hurls it with deadly aim;

the spear sinks deep into the back of his father,

who falls forward, struggling wildly on the ground.

The spear point is standing out at his chest.

He gives a last flutter in his death spasm.

The bandicoot rushes upon the dead crow.

He mutilates him:

he cuts off the head, the legs, and the arms of his murdered father, and flings them away savagely.⁵⁷

It must be stressed . . . that the crow was not 'killed' in our sense of the word; his dismembered body and scattered limbs were, of course, immortal, and hence could still give rise to human beings in later days; such persons would then be considered as reincarnations of the original crow ancestor.⁵⁸ The ancestor never dies, but merely undergoes a transmutation into something that will weather the assaults of time, change and decay. 'The rocks and the stones . . . represent the undying bodies of the *gurra* brothers'⁵⁹ even today.

However, it is not simply a matter of a transformed body, (if such matters are simple — consider the theories concerning the resurrected body of Christ, or the *trikāya* of Buddha), because there are myths in which the original body of the ancestor never died, but merely resumed its eternal sleep.

Karora, the natives say, remained behind at his original home: he is lying in eternal sleep at the bottom of the Ibalintja soak; and men and women who approach the soak to quench their thirst may do so only if they bear in their hands bunches of green *tnuruna* boughs which they lay down on the edge of the soak. For then Karora is pleased with their coming and smiles in his sleep.⁶⁰

So the body of the ancestor either dies yet lives, or it never dies but sleeps. Does this preclude the possibility for reincarnation, for generally speaking, the death of the body is a necessary pre-requisite? There are exceptions. In Tahiti, the abdication of a king in favour of an infant son has been attributed to the belief that the child is, in special measure, an embodiment of the father.⁶¹

It is inappropriate in this essay to discuss interpretations of the eternal sleep-cum-death as the unconscious, or as altered states of consciousness in mystical experience typified in Visnu seshayi, but as the ancestor's death can only be accomplished by the use of a *magic* weapon such as a living spear the implication is that the death is symbolic. The ancestor is dead in the sense that his primordial wanderings and activities are finished, but alive in that his power is still available today, for mankind, and for the continuance of the seasons and all living species. Although there is no literal death, in a deeply symbolic religion, the impact of a symbolic death is sufficient means by which the difficulty of a persisting body is surmounted.

Apart from general mind properties (evident in the already mentioned mythology such as the ability to think, feel and desire), the Aranda ancestors were marked with distinctive personalities. Powerful and proud beings exalting in their mighty strength, they lived with apparent thoughtless gaiety in a carefree and non-moral existence. The land was green with pasture and abundant with food and honeysuckle water. However, in hard times, when food ran out, or strangers came, or family relationships were strained as youth desired more power, the treacherous, violent, lustful and cruel aspects of their personalities dominated.

Particularly in the Northern area, most of the ancestors are utterly

lacking in even the most elementary conception of morals, virtue and ideals, a characteristic of Classical, Germanic and Celtic mythology.⁶² In Northern Aranda myths, a deep hostility is revealed between the all-powerful father, who distrusts and sometimes hates his sons because he senses in them his own future rivals for the possession of power. The sons venerate but fear their father realising their impotence in the presence of his seemingly limitless strength. In almost all legends the ancestor preys on his sons, though mostly this form of cannibalism is thinly disguised by the use of animal symbolism.

In some legends, however, the earlier all-powerful son-devouring sire has remained in all his grimness . . . the *tnjimatja* ancestor of Mborinka on the Burt Plain regularly went out on raids to kill *tnjimatja* men who are definitely stated to have possessed human shape; and these he roasted and devoured with relish, delighting in their sweet flesh. In the end, however, their flesh turned into grubs in his bowels, and so he was devoured from within by his own slaughtered sons.⁶³

The Northern ancestors, who are usually imagined as elderly men with strong limbs and flowing white beards, usually suffer from some serious physical disability, mostly lameness or blindness for which there is no explanation. There is however, a long detailed account of a seemingly irrelevant hunt in which the sons give chase to a large male animal of their own totem which they either kill or disable in the end. However, there are a few extant myths in which it is definitely stated that the primal sire has been mutilated or disabled by his own sons.⁶⁴

The cruelty and treachery of the Aranda ancestors extends even to helpless strangers, for these unrestrained all-powerful beings had no laws save those of expediency and selfishness to govern their conduct.⁶⁵

The ancestor is, of course, spirit as well as body and mind. Though it changes form and name, the spirit is everlasting. On the ancestor's death, his spirit returned to the storehouse where the *Churinga* was deposited. It then split into two: one half persisted as a new spirit (*kuruna*) that would undergo reincarnation, the other gave rise to the everlasting *Arumburinga*, or double of the *kuruna*. The splitting of the spirit is supposed to have taken place once only in the old Alcheringa times, and the *Arumburinga* thus formed persists forever.⁶⁶

The activities of the *arumburinga* are many,⁶⁷ including watching over the pregnant woman into whom the *kuruna* has entered. After birth, the *arumburinga* continues to watch over his human representative, but in a general way only, such as saving him from being bitten by a snake although its friendliness is not guaranteed. On the person's death, the *kuruna* immediately leaves the body and returns to the storehouse to join the *arumburinga* which hastens to the grave to protect the body. It is now called the *alknuriniata*. After the girdle made from the dead man's hair is woven, it returns to the storehouse and the *kuruna* returns to the grave in the form of an *ulthana* until the final mourning ceremony has been held,

after which it returns to the storehouse joining the *arumburinga* and other spirit beings. It now assumes once more the form of a *kuruna* that can enter a woman and be reborn.⁶⁸

I would like to have heard the original conversation describing this spiritual relay-race: there is always the possibility that the orderliness demanded by a scientific mind produced a schema that unfortunately appears childish, given the profundity of the concept of simultaneous presence of the ancestor at all places that once witnessed the fullness of his power.⁶⁹ In practice, the presence of the ancestor is not always limited to just those scenes of former glory. Ekuntjarinja, the leader of the Krantji clan, suddenly took ill a few days after allowing the rites of the kangaroo ancestor to be witnessed at Alice Springs by those who should have been excluded. The illness was thought to be supernatural retribution on the part of the ancestor who actually had not ventured more than a few miles from his soak which was over eighty miles away from the scene of misconduct.⁷⁰ The ancestor is not held to be omniscient though: the *ramaia* ancestor had to listen to camp-talk to discover which women were of the correct class through whom he could become reincarnated.⁷¹

The spirit is also believed to have the power of becoming visible on certain occasions, both to spectators with whom it was not linked physically,⁷² and to its representatives who now live a long distance from the sacred sites. Because of the beliefs in simultaneous presence, and the ability to travel long distances, it would be reasonable to infer that the transmigrating element is the spirit. 'When the spirit part has gone into a woman and a child has, as a result, been born, then that living child is the reincarnation of that particular spirit individual.'⁷³ It is not so simple: for the remarkable aspect of the Aranda concept of reincarnation is that the ancestor as a totality transmigrates – body, mind and spirit.

The foetus that had resulted from the physical union of two parents was believed not only to receive its second soul from a supernatural being, but also to acquire the physical characteristics and the whole personality of the latter. In that sense, all Aranda men, women, and children were believed to have been completely *recreated* in the images of those totemic ancestors who had become reincarnated in them.⁷⁴

The transmigrant as spirit

That the spirit of the ancestor enters the body of the pregnant woman, giving the foetus its immortal soul, is not a point of dispute. It is the fate of the spirit, (commonly called 'soul' and sometimes 'life'), that has been the area of conflict. According to Thomas, Carl Strehlow maintains that the native belief is that the soul of every man goes at death to the Isle of the Dead, there to be annihilated by a flash of lightning; in certain cases it is believed that a totemic ancestor himself is reborn but after his reincarnation he does not return.⁷⁵ An enigmatic passage in *Aranda Traditions* appears to confirm this.

Speaking of the ancestors, Strehlow says that they are reincarnated into this world, but only for a brief space . . .

Their lives are now oppressed by want and hardships and grief and sickness; and after a few troubled years death comes, and with it the final dissolution.

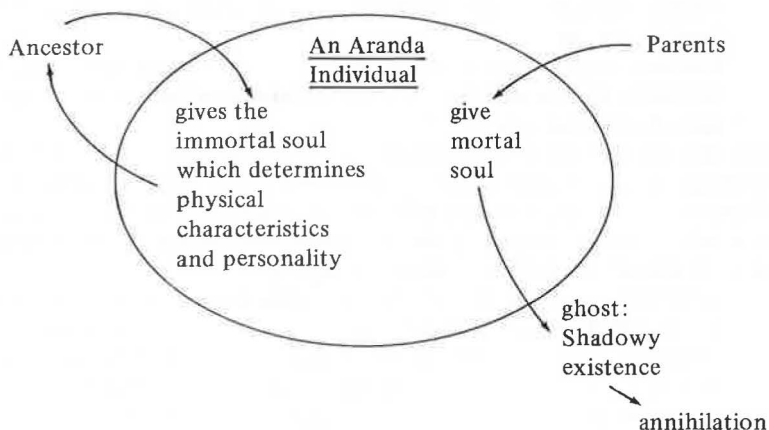
Whatever may happen to the totemic ancestor in that dark hour, the Northern Aranda man has no illusion about death as far as the human individual is concerned. . .⁷⁶

The use of the word 'dissolution' is ambiguous here, for apart from meaning death, it also means a separation into parts or constituent elements. So it could simply refer to the separation of the mortal and immortal souls as occurs in the two-souls concept which he explicates in a subsequent work, *Central Australian Religion*:

Intercourse between a man and a woman results in a foetus which has a mortal human 'life' (or 'soul') of its own; in other words, man comes into being initially like the animals, whose existence also results from mating between male and female parents. But man differs from the animals in acquiring an all-important second 'life' (or 'soul') which is immortal. This second soul is part of the 'life' of one of the immortal supernatural ancestors.⁷⁷

The second (and immortal) soul returned, on death, to the conception site whence it had first emerged in order to be incarnated in a human being: this immortal spark became reabsorbed into the 'life' of the totemic ancestors, and was hence taken up once more by the eternal landscape.⁷⁸ This supports Spencer and Gillen's description of the *kuruna*, which having been reincarnated, then performed its various activities after the death of the body, assumes once more the form that can enter a woman and be reborn.⁷⁹

The mortal soul however, turned into a departed spirit (or ghost, *Itana*), which balefully hovered around the place where the body had died. After some months of shadowy existence, it either ceased to exist, or, particularly in the beliefs of the Western Aranda, was destroyed by lightning.⁸⁰ It was this destruction of the mortal soul which earlier authors took to be the destruction of the ancestor's spirit, and consequently as his inability to be repeatedly reincarnated. It also brings understanding to Pink's conclusion that there is no continuous reincarnation because her research was mainly among the Northern and North Western Aranda who believe in the annihilation of man's mortal soul. Her informants had stressed that 'the baby-spirit which a woman found at the time of quickening was a new one, not that of some previously deceased blackfellow'. This is certainly the case, and may be illustrated thus:



This is why death is a great tragedy. It is the dissolution of a living man from eternity. For eternity, for the Northern Aranda man, is only experienced in daily living, in being the ancestor, by living the Dreaming. Death ends that union. The ancestor returns to his eternal sleep awaiting further reincarnation, but the Northern Aranda man dies and is annihilated. The belief is well documented in many myths such as the magpie and the curlew:

The doomed curlew man died, and the rest buried him . . . But the dead man hollowed out the soil from underneath. Then his forehead emerged through the crust; next his temples re-appeared; next his head became visible, up to his throat. His two shoulders, however, had become caught below . . . Then Urbura, the magpie, rushed up, filled with deadly anger . . . grasped a heavy mulga spear, thrust it deep into the neck of the dead man, stamped him back into the ground with his heel, trampling fiercely upon him: 'Remain rooted down firmly for all time; do not attempt to rise again; stay for ever in the grave! . . .'⁸¹

The evidence that Spencer and Gillen found, that the spirit of a man continues for ever is found among the Eastern Aranda, for which Strehlow found corroborating evidence.⁸² The easterners appear to have had no site in their own area to which a myth was attached explaining how Death had come into the world. Hence it was possible for these Eastern groups to believe that the *arambarana* (immortal spirit doubles of living persons or persons whose names were still remembered) and *erintarinja* (the *arambarana* or spirit-doubles of long dead persons whose names had been forgotten) still roamed about in the homeland, immortal and eternal.⁸³

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For the Aranda, the body of man is merely the temporary body of the ancestor, the *tjurunga* is the permanent body:

Young man. See this object. This is your own body. This is the *tjilpa* ancestor who you were when you used to wander about in your previous existence. . . This is you own *tjurunga*. Keep close watch over it.⁸⁴

However, even though the loss of a *tjurunga* is not the loss of possessions as we would regard it, but a loss of self, it is not a concept similar to Indian thought that men can be reborn as animals, plants, spirits or gods. For it is not the man who transmutes into, or transmigrates from the object, but the ancestor. For the *Northern* Aranda man there is no exhortation,

As a man casts off his worn out clothes and takes on other new ones, so does the embodied self cast off its worn out bodies and enters other new ones.⁸⁵

For him, death is not the final initiation, but is the end of his glorious unity with eternity, with the Dreaming. His annihilation. It would be interesting to make a comparative study with the yin yang concept, for concomittant with the extinction of a person's individuality is the cyclic transformation of male and female principles,

The great mystery revealed to the human totemites in the final acts of their ceremonial cycles was the eternal union, in an unbreakable embrace, of the separate male and female 'principles' which had always coexisted at each sacred site. Whereas human unions were only of a brief and transient nature, the supernatural union . . . was eternal and immutable.⁸⁶

The human union with immortality was all too brief.

The transmigrant as mind and personality

If reincarnation is the total identification with the ancestor, the spirit determining the whole personality, an obvious problem arises. Are the Aranda of today endowed with the same treachery, violence, lust and cruelty of their ancestors? Do they indulge in cannibalism and patricide? Obviously not. Most natives show disgust at the excesses described in the mythology, benevolently excusing the behaviour by the addition that grim necessity and ignorance were the cause. However,

Discourtesy and cruelty towards helpless strangers are by no means unknown among Central Australian natives themselves. The habit of deceiving strangers, or even fellow-tribesmen, in order to gain some selfish end, is so universal that untruthfulness and treachery have come to be regarded almost as basic elements in human nature. Little trust or loyalty is to be found amongst the uncivilized savages outside the inner circle of their best friends and nearest relatives . . . the primitive trait of deceitfulness must not be under-estimated. After all, even civilized races are by no means free from this vice in their dealings with one another . . .

On the other hand, he has risen many steps above the level on which his legendary ancestors are standing. Moral and ethical concepts have begun to influence his life . . .

It is, of course, a well-known fact that natives, if their full trust and confidence has been gained, will be found to be the truest and most sociable companions that even a white-man could desire.⁸⁷

Central Australian religion . . . has made them more kindly, tolerant, and helpful towards their human fellows everywhere than they would have been otherwise.⁸⁸

The Aranda certainly have no monopoly on immorality, but the pertinent question is, how can moral standards change from the constancy of the Dreaming precedent, and total identification with the ancestors be claimed? One solution is that whilst 'the whole personality is acquired from a supernatural being' as stated, it is also the case that 'every human being has two souls and therefore a twin personality'.⁸⁹

Moreover, mortal human beings had also a human soul, a human mind, and human passions. They could commit errors unwittingly; they could deliberately break the social laws necessary for the smooth running of the human community of which they were individual members . . .⁹⁰

Did the ancestors have this choice of action as well? Was it a series of choices that formed their grim dominant characteristics? If so, it would appear that the concept of free-will, and not the established mode of conduct of the ancestors, is the constant element of the Dreaming.

Although the European theological concept of 'free will' formed no part of the overtly Central Australian religious beliefs, nevertheless it was freely admitted that human beings could act contrary to the 'divine' element in their twin personality.⁹¹

But what is the *divine* element for the Aranda? Presumably not the violent, treacherous, lusty and cruel aspects of the ancestors. Yet how are we to judge these superhuman beings living in a world where the human notions of good and evil had but a shadowy meaning? But neither can the divine element be that mortal personality which perishes utterly. While the ancestors were not accountable for their actions to any superior power,

this must not be taken to mean that the world of the totemic ancestors was completely beyond the reach of all moral laws . . . the annihilation of the bloodthirsty and cannibalistic Bat Men of Imanda by a single honest champion who lived at Atota . . . showed that even in a world where every totemic ancestor and ancestress could do what was right in his or her own eyes . . . there still existed some undefinable, nameless Force which was capable of bringing about the final downfall of even the most powerful supernatural beings that had believed themselves superior in strength to all possible opponents.⁹²

Perhaps it is in this sense that Elkin justifies his statement that Aboriginal

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philosophy includes to a limited degree, the concept of *karma*: that we reap what we have sown, but have the free will to choose what we shall reap in the future.

The Dreaming also implies a unitary principle with an aspect of determinism. We may compare *ṛta* which in Indian scriptures is the unitary principle and 'the life force', not so much of particular phenomena, as of things in general. Moreover it compels every creature and everything 'to follow the law of its own existence'. Thus the doctrine of *karma* arises. This aspect of determinism is accepted by the Aborigines . . . This is the road the individual must follow from birth to death. From it there is no escape.⁹³

The possible solution lies, I think, in that the ancestors lived in an era which gradually moved towards the establishment of an ethical code. (I suggest this because of the different presentations of the myths, the times cannibalism is undisguised being earlier, the adoption of new moralities necessitating the use of animal symbolism and benevolent excuses. On the other hand, the gradual movement towards the establishment of an ethical code occurred completely after the ancestors had returned to their eternal sleep, in which case the different presentation of the myths is a reflection on the changing morality of mankind only.) Meanwhile, the ancestors' choices in solving the challenges and crises of living in the desert, were brutal ones of survival. This determined their merciless personalities, but the divine spark, ever present, awaited the time of its more adequate expression. Known by many names in many cultures, yet nameless,

The name that can be named
Is not the constant name⁹⁴

it is the constant of the Dreaming, and of today, and is not dependent on the expression of the mortal soul or personality. That the Aranda of today are 'more kindly, tolerant and helpful' is due to the fuller expression of the divine spark that continues throughout the reincarnated lives of the ancestors. This implies an evolutionary philosophy of gradual enlightenment towards perfection within the closed-loop of reincarnation: that cosmic *ṛta* and *karma* are principles within the Dreaming and that the closed-loop of reincarnation brings those principles into the life of the individual where they can be given vital expression according to the free will of that individual.

Whilst this is speculative, there is nevertheless, a real sense in which the concept of *karma* is applicable for the individual Aranda man. For him, life is determined according to the activities and choices he exercised in his previous existence as the ancestor, but considerable freedom of choice towards the future as to whether he comes into full possession of his personal *tjuruna*.⁹⁵

If the ancestor is reincarnated into the correct sex, clan and class of the tribe, there are no legal difficulties for his possessing his conception *tjuruna*, for they owned by his own local totemic clan. His father

safeguards his interests from childhood to the final initiation stage, and takes special pains afterwards to ensure that he receives all the ceremonies and chant-verses which are his rightful heritage. However, a male ancestor born female is thought to have acted capriciously, temporary trustees having to preside over his *tjuruna*. A male reincarnation of an ancestress is accepted as her living representative. But to be born into the wrong class brings a retribution involving legal difficulties. Such a reincarnated ancestor is regarded as being untrue to his own country and is not always a welcome guest when he returns in the guise of a young and strange initiate to his old home. And his own totemic clan does not like to see him change his native habitation for that of strangers. If both clan and class were changed, there is a strong distrust of the heir's identity, even though there is a Dreaming precedent.⁹⁶

Not to come into full possession of one's personal *tjuruna* is a cause of great shame and regret, so the choice of the ancestor brings either retribution or reward in daily living. But within that daily living, the deliberate choice of life-style affects the outcome of *tjuruna* ownership. For the old men assess the initiate's obedience, aptitude, ability to keep silent in secret matters, fidelity in marriage and to the tribe (especially in his contact with white-men), generosity, of gifts to his father and the elders, and of sacramental blood during the ceremonies. Strehlow's friend, Gurra, was the reincarnation of the ancestral bandicoot chief himself, Tjenterama. However,

Should Gurra during his probation period on the *inkura* ground have proved himself unworthy . . . it is by no means certain that the elders of the group would have admitted him as the reincarnated Tjenterama . . . he might have been treated as the descendent of one of the nameless bandicoot brothers.⁹⁷

In bygone years, part of the assessment was the man's ability to endure his thumb nails being ripped off on the day that the elders had determined to make him the owner of his personal *tjuruna*.

Thus the relevance of *karma* to the concept of reincarnation among the Aranda needs careful consideration, although it has nothing in common with the idea that life is a mere whirling existence. It rather brings to fruition the 'dim splendour underlying the *Jataka* scheme – the promise and hope of life seen as a whole'.⁹⁸ It would also help to explain why the ancestors 'desire' and 'crave'⁹⁹ reincarnation, unless Strehlow has unconsciously used Eastern religious terminology. However, if they are Aranda concepts, what is the state of the ancestor that he should so desire and crave rebirth?

It is readily acknowledged that life today is vastly inferior to the Dreaming: now life is oppressed with want, grief, hardships and sickness. But the ancestors, wearied from their long journeys, finally sank back to earth. 'Motionless and silent, they continue to lead a shadowy existence through the passing ages until an opportunity presents itself for entering into the body of a passing woman!¹⁰⁰ Yet they are conscious. The

Ibalintja ancestor smiles in his sleep, welcoming thirsty mortals to his soak, as we have seen.

The totemic ancestors who slumbered under the soil continued to watch over all property rights, both for themselves and for their reincarnations.¹⁰¹

The totemic ancestors, though resting in perpetual slumber, were not unmindful of what went on around them, nor had they lost their original powers of creation, of preservation, and of destruction.¹⁰²

This implies that the eternal sleep is not a shadowy existence from which to escape, but more akin to the vital unconscious, or the lively awareness of mystical states, or in modern terms, of altered states of consciousness. The time during pregnancy, when the ancestor is a foetus, is his only time of forgetting.¹⁰³ At birth, he has no recollection of his former glorious existence, and if born a boy, the old men will later initiate him and re-introduce him into the ancient ceremonies which he himself had introduced. By ascending through the age-grading ceremonies, and acquiring knowledge as he is judged worthy, through a life-time of toil and obedience, he receives a gradual unfolding of his identity. Through this path of enlightenment, especially as he enacts the ritual, chanting the songs with the body painted and sung, on the sacred soil patterned with sacramental blood and white down, and shaped with symbols of eternity, he once more is the ancestor in all his glorious virility. No longer a memory in motionless silence, but danced in joyful reality. For this the ancestor craves.

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It is commonly accepted in other reincarnation traditions, that the spirit or psyche (or personality) transmigrate, but can the body transmigrate?

The transmigrant as body

The ancestor represents the sum total of the living essence of the witchetty grubs – both animal and human – regarded as a whole. Every cell, if we may be allowed to phrase it thus, in the body of the original ancestor is a living animal or a living human being: if the ancestor is a 'witchetty grub man', then every cell in his body is potentially either a separate living witchetty-grub or a separate living man of the witchetty grub totem.¹⁰⁴

The question is, *is* Strehlow allowed to 'phrase it thus'? How accurate is his interpretation of the living essence or power of the ancestor as cellular? For Spencer and Gillen, *nanja* is

the term applied to some natural object, such as a tree or stone which rose to mark the spot where an ancestor of the mythical past went into the ground, leaving behind his spirit part associated with his *Churinga*. The tree or stone is the *nanja* of that spirit and also of the

human being in the form of whom it undergoes reincarnation. The *Churinga* is the *Churinga nanja* of the human being.¹⁰⁵ whereas for Strehlow, *nanja* is 'life-cells'.¹⁰⁶

I think that Strehlow's translation is apt, for three reasons. Firstly, the body of the ancestor still lives; secondly, the living-essence is not a general life-force but is creative of specific species only; lastly, because of the importance of the ancestor's role in conception beliefs. Whilst some still hold to the opinion that was once widely supported – that the traditional Aborigine is ignorant of physiological paternity,¹⁰⁷ it is mostly recognized that sexual intercourse is relegated to secondary importance in religious beliefs. It is an opening or a preparation for the ancestor who always enters a pregnant woman at the place where she suffered either her first attack of morning sickness (through eating food that was impregnated with the life of the ancestor), or felt the first movements of quickening, or the first pains of pregnancy (caused by a life-bearing bull-roarer hurled at her hips by the ancestor), or experienced a day-dream vision of the baby (produced by the ancestor).

There is an emphasis on these encounters of the woman with the ancestor as a physical or sensual union, the woman experiencing pain, sickness or a vision, the ancestor assuming the form of food, vision, bull-roarer and the landmarks that bear his life-giving essence which she has crossed. As a result of this physical union or sensual encounter, the foetus is believed to be endowed with the physical characteristics of the ancestor to the extent that even abnormalities were advanced as proofs of reincarnation from specified supernatural personages.

A Hale River man called Kolbarinja, used to display proudly the unusually large metatarsophalangeal joints on both of his feet as a proof of his being the reincarnation of the grim native cat Sire of Kolba who had developed swollen 'bunions' when he had angrily thrust his feet into the camp fires of the sons who had left him.

An Unmatjera man called Topintira displayed an irregularly shaped and light-brown patch of skin on his back as a proof that he belonged to the possum totem of Erultja: for the male possums often have some coppery-coloured fur on their bodies.¹⁰⁸

Genetic endowment from the ancestor presents no difficulty in a society where relationships are determined socially rather than biologically. For the father of the child is always the mother's husband. There is therefore no stigma of illegitimacy, especially when it was believed that anyone looking at a child, man or woman could see before him the original totemic ancestor or ancestress. There were, nevertheless, strong physical links with the father, for the child's class was always determined by the class of its human father, not by the class of the totemic ancestor whose reincarnation it was regarded.

The reality of siring children as an ancestor is seen most poignantly through the belief of a fine old man from the Hale River district. To his

own great grief, he had no children, but he proudly told Strehlow how at the beginning of time, when he was the *tjilpa* (native cat) ancestor of Kolba, he had peopled the whole district with his sons and daughters. Many of these had become reincarnated through the ages in the form of human beings, and he had thus been responsible for giving life to scores of sons and daughters in the past; in the same way he would, of course, have future 'descendants' long after he himself had ceased to be.¹⁰⁹

Although the concept of life-giving matter as a continuum between the ancestor as a supernatural being and a mortal human being is foreign to European thought, it is less dissimilar to Eastern thought such as Samkhya in which the psyche is regarded as matter. And in a religion where the earth is seen as both father and mother, (the sky having no relevance as the male principle), it is a logical extension for the ancestor's life to continue physically as well as spritually and mentally, shown most vividly in the conception beliefs, the attribution of physical characteristics to the ancestor, and the ability for men to sire children through their activities in the Dreaming.

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Because of the format of this essay, I run the grave risk of being judged as a 'thoroughly and incurably European mentality'.¹¹⁰ But the dissection and analytic approach to study does not preclude necessarily an emotional or psychological rapport within certain attitudes found within Aboriginal religion, one of these being the sense of unity or oneness between all things. In attempting to separate some aspects of the ancestor, I am continually aware of the emphasis placed on their unity in the context of Aboriginal belief: that the second soul determined the physical characteristics and the whole personality.

It must be added at once that the second soul possessed by each human being was only a *part* of the 'life' of the totemic ancestor from whom it had come: even a totemic ancestor who had become reincarnated in a human being still continued to slumber at the sacred site where he had finally ceased from his labours.¹¹¹

'Since no human being could contain more than a small part of the infinite life of a totemic ancestor, no difficulty was experienced when more than one child had to be regarded as having been reincarnated from a single totemic ancestor!¹¹² However, this is a contradiction to a prior statement that the Western Aranda men were disinclined to allow two or three living representatives simultaneously of the same original ancestor. Had they understood the concept of the part of the ancestor being identical to the whole, and that only a part was reincarnated, their explanation of attributing their conception to the lost *tjurunga* of the ancestor would not have been necessary. And when there is complete identification of the ancestor with his transmuted bodies and tracks, it seems redundant to establish the difference between being reincarnated from the ancestor

himself, and from his *tjurunga*. However, an obvious practical advantage in such a distinction is the claim to status: to be reincarnated from the original ancestor brings more knowledge and consequently more power and authority, than being reincarnated from one of the *tjurunga* he lost along the way.

Conclusion

I think that Strehlow is the most qualified in matters of knowing the language, understanding Aboriginal concepts and being aware of some of his own limitations. He thereby is most likely to bring a faithful rendering of Aranda beliefs. I have therefore used his works as my main authority.

I think that the concept of reincarnation is evident in Aranda beliefs, although it has striking dissimilarities as well as resemblances to other reincarnation traditions. I think that the ancestor is embodied always, and becomes re-embodied in a continuous, but closed-cycle of rebirth. The cycle can come to an end.

The transmigrant is a part of the whole ancestor — body, mind and spirit — and while such distinctions are not unknown in Aboriginal thought, the mood is one of overwhelming belief in their unity. Whether it is understood or not, the implication is that the part is identical to the whole.

Aranda reincarnation beliefs are more earth-centred than other traditions, seen in the importance of the ancestor's role in conception, *tjuruna* ownership, the assent to life as the union of man with eternity, and the despair over death as the dissolution of that union.

Speculations such as the possibility of *karma* as an attendant belief must be well scrutinized lest they be mere intrusions of foreign thought, as was the search for montheistic beliefs in the past. 'However, from the aboriginal viewpoint, the most important effects of the Aranda conception and reincarnation beliefs were the totemic relationships that they established and the links which they forged between mortal man, the helpless creature of Time, and the changeless forces of Eternity.'¹³

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NOTES

1. 'In Egyptian beliefs, there are three different ideas which refer to changes of personality: the union with a god, the voluntary metamorphosis of a person temporarily into another form for his own benefit, and the transmigration of the soul into an animal for a life-time . . . The question of transmigration has been disputed. The Greek authors refer to it as an undoubted belief; but there seems to be no Egyptian text which refers to the idea.' W.M. Flinders Petrie, 'Transmigration (Egyptian)', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, (ed.), James Hastings, p. 431.
2. N.W. Thomas, 'Transmigration (Introductory and Primitive)', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, (ed.), James Hastings, pp. 428-9
3. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, pp. 116-7.
4. Olive Pink, 'The Landowners in the Northern Division of the Aranda Tribe, Central Australia', in *Oceania*, Vol. VI, pp. 288-9.
5. Olive Pink, 'Spirit Ancestors in a Northern Aranda Horde Country', in *Oceania*, Vol. IV, p. 186.
6. Future references to T.G.H. Strehlow will be Strehlow.
7. Olive Pink, 'The Landowners in the Northern Division of the Aranda Tribe, Central Australia', in *Oceania*, Vol. VI, p. 230.
8. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, p. 4.
9. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion* pp. 60-1 footnote 16, p, 58 footnote 1.
10. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 146 .
11. However, the essentials of the songs are held to remain the same for they are representative of the constant authority of the Dreaming precedent which gave the people their identity and their justification for being where they are. In 1930, the anthropologist Norman Tindale made cylinder recording of Pintubi songs: forty five years later, Dr. Richard Moyle recorded the same songs word for word.
12. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 146.
13. A.P. Elkin, 'The Secret Life of the Australian Aborigines', in *Oceania*, Vol. III, No. 2, December 1932, p. 120, and specifically for the Aranda, T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 172.
14. In the Northern area the ancestors usually lived in large hordes, and accordingly a theory of direct reincarnation was commonly assumed for living individuals. The Western ancestors frequently lived at their homes in pairs or small families, and the old men were disinclined to allow an ancestor to have two or three living representatives in the same group simultaneously. Instead, persons were thought to be reincarnated from the ancestor's *tjuruna*. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p.118.
15. N.W. Thomas, op.cit., p. 429.
16. A. Capell, 'From Men to Gods and Back Again', in *Oceania*, Vol. L, No. 2, December 1979, p. 143.

17. A.P. Elkin, 'The Secret Life of the Australian Aborigines', op.cit., p. 119.
18. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. xix.
19. A. Capell, op.cit., p. 143.
20. Olive Pink, 'The Landowners in the Northern Division of the Aranda Tribe', op.cit., p. 227.
21. N.W. Thomas, op.cit., p. 428.
22. A. Capell, op.cit., p. 143 citing the view of Richard Merz in *Die Numinose Mischgestalt*. T.G.H. Strehlow payed tribute to his father, 'C. Strehlow's work was the first which gave translations of the myths associated with the ritual, and quoted the sacred songs sung on all ceremonial occasions. Moreover, he succeeded in translating the difficult archaic language found in these songs – a feat never before achieved in Australia. Only a linguist can appreciate the full magnitude of this accomplishment.' in *Central Australian Religion*, p. 8.
23. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. xviii.
24. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 1:1.
25. Olive Pink, 'The Landowners in the Northern Aranda' op.cit., p. 284.
26. Both Stanner and Strehlow list a number of remarkable constructions (such as Freud's Oedipal fantasy of primordial lust, murder, guilt, and fear of castration, and the vast cloacal theorem of the unconscious, which Roheim used to explain the Aranda) in 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism' in *White Man Got No Dreaming*, p. 136 and *Central Australian Religion*, pp. 8-10, resectively.
27. W.E.H. Stanner, op.cit., p. 122.
28. Ibid. .
29. Ibid. .
30. A.P. Elkin, 'Elements of Australian Aboriginal Philosophy', in *Oceania*, Vol. XL, No. 2, December 1969, pp. 86-7, citing the works of W.E. Roth and N. Hey. In the first few weeks of his field work in the Kimberleys, Elkin himself recorded such general terms and, he wrote, 'none of my probings shook my informants.'
31. C.G. von Brandenstein, 'Identical Principles Behind Australian Totemism and Empedoclean 'Philosophy' ', in *Australian Aboriginal Concepts*, (ed.), L.R. Hiatt, pp. 135-6
32. Kenneth Maddock, 'Metaphysics in a Mythical View of the World', in *The Rainbow Serpent*, (eds.), Ira Buchler, Kenneth Maddock.
33. W.E.H. Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, pp. 158-9.
34. W.E.H. Stanner, *Approaches to the Study of Aboriginal Religious Life-I*, p. 4 and Strehlow, *Central Australian Religions*, Part A.
35. Olive Pink, 'Spirit Ancestors in a Northern Aranda Horde Country' op.cit., pp. 179, 181, 183.
36. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 21.
37. W.E.H. Stanner, 'The Dreaming', in *White Man Got No Dreaming*,

- p. 24.
38. T.G.H. Strehlow, op.cit., p. 20.
 39. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. xiv.
 40. Ibid. .
 41. 'Transmigration', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, (ed.) James Hastings, pp. 425-440, and 'Reincarnation', in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (ed.), Paul Edwards, pp. 122-124.
 42. Olive Pink, 'The Landowners in the Northern Aranda', op.cit., p. 289.
 43. N.W. Thomas, op.cit., p. 429 My underlining.
 44. I am not content with this definition, for neither 'birth' nor 'embodied' are appropriate when the course for the transmigrating element in Hindu belief includes spirits and gods.
 45. N.W. Thomas, op.cit., p. 429.
 46. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Arunta*, pp. 422-3.
 47. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 35.
 48. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 80.
 49. W.E.H. Stanner, 'The Dreaming', op.cit., p. 25.
 50. W.E.H. Stanner, *Approaches to the Study of Aboriginal Religious Life - I*, pp. 1-4 from T.G.H. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion Part A*, pp. 11-19.

Having already referred to the problems in condensing the original material, I have condensed it further! Its omissions are obvious. What of the *Tnatantja* of great importance to the Northern Aranda? Now a symbol of male fertility, the *tnatantja* had risen from the totemic ground ever from the beginning. Plant-like, it was a living creature capable of independent action, and from its life-holding down, men were to arise at a later date. It is still standing at Rantjatanana in the form of a bloodwood tree. Occasionally, a mountain or water-hole sprang into existence of its own volition, and became the parent source from which the totemic ancestors and human beings derived their being. *Aranda Traditions*, pp. 23-5. Whatever the omissions of the sketch, it represents faithfully the bare outline of Aranda mythology as portrayed by Strehlow.

51. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, pp. 7-8.
52. Ibid., pp. 15-6.
53. Ibid., pp. 15-6.
54. Ibid., pp. 15-6.
55. Ibid., pp. 16-7.
56. For Spencer and Gillen, this problem does not arise, for they believe in the death of the ancestors body. "His body died, but some natural feature, such as a rock or tree, arose to mark the spot, while his spirit part remained in the Churinga", *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* p. 123.
57. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, pp. 20-1.
58. Ibid., p. 21.

59. Ibid., pp. 9-10.
60. Ibid., p. 10.
61. N.W. Thomas, 'Transmigration', op.cit., p. 425.
62. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, 'Primitive Mode of Conduct', pp. 38-42. His reference for the comparison of ethical values is N.K. and H.M. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*.
63. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 12.
64. Ibid., p. 13.
65. Ibid., pp. 41-2.
66. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Arunta*, Vol II, pp. 421-2.
67. Spencer and Gillen, op.cit., p. 422.
68. Ibid., p. 423
69. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 29, According to Strehlow, 'Spirit Beliefs' (chapter XVI) of *the Arunta* contains much confusing and inaccurate matter. His footnote 18 on pp. 61-3 in *Central Australian Religion* is most helpful.
70. Ibid., p. 30.
71. Ibid., p. 88.
72. While I am not suggesting that this is totally explained by the shimmer of the desert, it is interesting to read of the distorting effects or visions that a geologist and his wife experienced when working on Lake Eyre. Roma Dulhunty, *The Spell of Lake Eyre*, 'Mirages', pp. 9-15.
73. Spencer and Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, p. 138.
74. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 22
75. N.W. Thomas, op.cit., p. 429.
76. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, pp. 42-3.
77. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 21.
78. Ibid., p. 35.
79. Spencer and Gillen, *The Arunta*, p. 423.
80. Strehlow, op.cit., p. 35, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 43.
81. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 44.
82. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 43, *Central Australian Religion*, footnote 18, pp. 61-3.
83. Ibid. .
84. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 119.
85. The Bhagavad-Gita, 2:22.
86. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 33.
87. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 41.
88. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 47.
89. Ibid., p. 23.
90. Ibid., p. 36.
91. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 63, footnote 20.
92. Ibid., p. 18.
93. Elkin, 'Elements of Australian Aboriginal Philosophy', op.cit., p. 89.

94. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 1:1.
95. I have adopted Strehlow's spelling for differentiating *tjurunga*: sacred stone or wooden objects only, from *tjununa* which includes at least 11 different specialized terms such as ceremonies, objects, paintings, sacred chants, *Aranda Traditions* pp. 85-6.
96. In the Dreaming, some wandering ancestors travelled underground to avoid trespassing on ancient soil belonging to men of a strange class, but others changed their class. The ancestors who introduced circumcision, who flew in the guise of hawks, changed their class in order to alight on the initiation grounds belonging to men of another class. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, pp. 143-4.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 122-3.
98. Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Indian Religion and Survival*, p. 43-4.
99. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 87 and p. 17 respectively.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 42 Is there a belief similar to the Shades of the Aeneid? for even if it is not applicable to the ancestors, some Aranda sub-groups believe in a temporary shadowy existence for the mortal soul. A.P., Elkin, 'Religion and Philosophy of the Australian Aborigine in *Essays in Honour of G.W. Thatcher*, (ed.), E.C.B. Maclaurin, p. 28.
101. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 44.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
103. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 93.
104. Strehow, *Aranda Traditions*, p. 17.
105. Spencer and Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, p. 652.
106. Strehlow, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
107. Ashley-Montague, *Coming into Being among the Australian Aborigines*. Robert Tonkinson, 'Semen versus Spirit-child in a Western Desert Culture', in *Australian Aboriginal Concepts*, (ed.) L.R. Hiatt.
108. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 23.
109. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, footnote pp. 10-11.
110. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 31 speaking of Winthuis.
111. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 22.
112. *Ibid.* .
113. Strehlow, *Central Australian Religion*, p. 24.

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