

Sir George Trevelyan: thoughts and writings

Thoughts on Childbirth

In the light of the holistic world-picture



This essay is written for a lass who has a baby on the way and who is troubled by the doubt as to whether it was justifiable to bring a child into so awful a world as surrounds us now. Let us look at this in the light of the 'holistic' world picture. It is always good and valid to lift our viewpoint and look at every problem from this greater light. Be it repeated that none of this is dogma to be *believed*. If you respond to these ideas, learn to live with them as thoughts, learn to act *as if you believed them*, and yet reserve judgment. You are not asked to believe but to think. Watch life in the light of them. This is a way of exploring into further reaches of imponderable truths. They will, if true to you, draw an inner certainty to themselves as the weeks go by. Something in us quickens in response to an idea. We are experiencing the opening of buds of perception, of new vision.

So, think that all life is One. All is Consciousness, a divine field of creative thought interpenetrating everything everywhere. We are each a point of self-consciousness in this sea of consciousness. Thus there can be no problem it does not touch. All aspects of our lives can be illuminated.

So to our question of child-birth.

The soul is immortal and imperishable. It always was and always will be, for it is a droplet of the Divine Source. For it there can be no death, though the body sheath can age, break down and be destroyed. The conception of a child is thus the initiating of a process whereby a free ranging spiritual being begins the long process of anchoring itself into the material world and descending into the field of gravity.

Since the true spiritual 'I' of man is eternal, it follows axiomatically that it was there before it was born, as an already developed entity. Hold to this tremendous thought. The child quickening within you is not a soul starting 'from scratch' at conception. It is already matured by experience through long ages. This point is best illustrated from a verse by our metaphysical poet Thomas Traherne (d.1650) who possessed the faculty of remembering back into the womb – and beyond. All his poems and writings try to convey this experience to us. It is significant that his works were lost until discovered in an attic about 1900 for they could not have

been understood earlier. Now they speak to us a profound and vital truth. Listen to them. He is palpably describing the embryo.

*Before I skill'd to prize
Those living Stars, mine Eyes;
Before I knew these Hands were mine
Or that my sinews did my Members join.
I was within
A house I knew not, newly cloath'd with skin.
Then was my Soul my only All to me,
A living endless Eye
Scarce bounded with the Sky
Whose Power and Act and Essence was to see;
I was an inward sphere of Light
Or an interminable
Orb of Sight
Exceeding that which makes the days,
A vital Sun, that shed abroad its rays,
All Life, all Sense,
A naked, simple, pure intelligence.*

The same intuition is developed by Wordsworth in his great 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in early childhood'.

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar:
Nor in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home
Heaven lies about us in our infancy
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy.
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.*

We now, in the quickening of spiritual knowledge, are indeed recovering that 'vision splendid'. It is not dead. Only the organs of inner perception have gone dormant as we grow to self-consciousness and they call to be re-awakened.

What a thought this is (for parents, doctors or teachers). When we see a wee pulling infant let us not say 'Look at this tiny little soul' - the soul is ageless. You may be watching the beginning of a lengthy process of incarnation of a mature and highly developed soul, limiting itself into the drastic restriction of embodiment. The body is the wonderful tool for action and creation in the heavy density of the material plane, but the entry into a body is nevertheless, for a free-ranging spirit, something like an imprisonment. It is a sort of tomb. Gravity is the grave, birth is in this sense a kind of death, death truly a birth. It is perhaps a blessed provision that we wholly forget the world of light we came from.

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This coming child of yours - where, then, did it gather its experience? We see that in addition to the physical evolution of the body we must come to terms with the idea of a spiritual evolution of the 'I', that spark separated from the Divine Fire. Can we take it that entry into the field of gravity and form, obviously involving the experience of separation from the spiritual source, could be a kind of training, a method of getting experience? The whole drive of evolution is towards what Teilhard de Chardin calls the process of 'complexifying', the coming together of cells into ever greater complexity, each stage involving a heightening of consciousness. Indeed he comes to the conclusion that there is an inbuilt drive within the cell to complexify, and he concludes that, if this be so, it reveals higher purpose in all evolution. As Pope put it:

*Mere atoms casually together hurled
Could ne'er produce so beautiful a world.*

(Live with that wonderful idea. Don't believe it, but live as if you believed it. Don't let critical mind say "Yes, but...")

So it looks as if our beautiful earth is the great training-ground for souls. Here within the limitation of body and senses we learn self-consciousness and responsibility. Keats called Earth a 'Vale of Soul-making'. From the concept of pre-existence we arrive at the likelihood of many visits to earth - re-birth or re-incarnation. Again this is no doctrine to be believed, but enormous strength comes from living as if you believed it. For it implies that we choose our environment for soul training. Spiritual research bears this out, and the seers from Plato onward have known it. It appears that no soul incarnates until it agrees to do so and that then it is shown its destiny and given a preview of its coming life experience.

This concept is presented by Robert Frost in a remarkable poem called 'Trial by Existence'. The scene is laid in Heaven and he describes:

*...the gathering of the souls for birth,
The trial by existence named,
The obscuration upon earth,
And none are taken but who will,
Having first heard the life read out
That opens earthward, good or ill
Beyond the shadow of a doubt.
But always God speaks at the end.
One thought in agony of strife
The bravest will have by for friend
The memory that he chose the life:
But the pure fate to which you go
Admits no memory of choice
Or the woe were not earthly woe
To which you give assenting voice...*

How infinitely strengthening it would be if we could act as if we believed this. Modern psychology has implied that our personalities are made from heredity and environment. This justifies us in transferring blame for our shortcomings on to someone else or something outside ourselves. The noble picture of rebirth puts the responsibility squarely on our own shoulders. Seen on a higher level we chose our environment and are therefore in a real sense total cause of our circumstances, and our difficulties and limitations. We gain a great deal and lose nothing whatever by this way of thinking and we still remain free from any dogmatic belief in a difficult field.

Now that child is on the way – the implication is that it actually chose its parents in order to get a suitable body for its round of earth experience. Be flattered! You have a great task. You didn't make that child – you are giving it a body.

One of the most important aspects of the concept of reincarnation is that we return in groups of kindred souls. Grasp the idea of the Group Soul, formed out of the coming together of many souls held by affinity and the attractive force of love. When you descend to earth you do not go down with your whole being. What might be called your 'permanent soul' puts out a sort of feeler into the gravity plane to act as a feedback for earth experience into the Group Soul. Your present personality is no more than the limited self-consciousness built up during this sojourn on earth. Your immortal eternal 'I' is something beyond personality and we shall learn to see that the purpose of earth life is to achieve this transpersonal consciousness. This is no less than achieving the Life Eternal not after death but now, while we are in the body. When we have done that we are sure to go forward after death into the Eternal realms of Light and not be stuck in the gloomy Borderland.

We incarnate in kindred groups. Therefore the friend or colleague you find in middle life was probably a relative last time, and perhaps will be a brother, sister, mother, son next time. Again there's no need to *believe* this. But how enriching a possibility. Surely this adds a profound respect for both our relatives and our friends or colleagues and helps us to face up to personality difficulties. It is wonderful to think what experiences we must have had together. It seems that after the release of so called death we are allowed to look back down the corridors of time and see what our real soul's history has been. For you and I truly are history. But alas we may too likely find that we have by no means fulfilled the task we undertook when we chose to descend.

Now to consider that grave question - am I justified for my pleasure in bringing another child into our over-crowded and in many ways awful world?

Firstly, it is not only the concern of you and your husband. That being has chosen you and with its eyes open saw the world it was entering. Born in 1979 it will come of age in the year 2000. The turn of the century is likely to be a time of tremendous spiritual transformation of man. In all the turmoil of our present time we are perhaps experiencing the prelude to the greatest events in human history. Apocalyptic change is upon us, to be followed after the time of tribulation such as never was by the 'coming of the Son of Man with power and great glory'. This is perhaps the most exciting and important generation in human history and you young people are involved and on your shoulders will be the great responsibility. Is it not likely that many souls are crowding into incarnation to share the experience of earth change and the Second Coming? So far from doing something wrong by having a child, you are giving a soul the opportunity of sharing this great experience. You are being joined by one of the group, maybe an advanced soul who can really help to lift mankind through the coming changes.

You see the sort of scale of thinking that must come if we brood upon the holistic world picture. How great a responsibility and joy to give the chance of a new birth. Look into the eyes of the young child and know that in that smile a great arid exalted soul may be looking out at you.

We recognise that a result of the rationalist reductionist thinking has resulted in the development of a medical science which treats the body essentially as a machine, even now to the supply of spare parts to keep it going efficiently. From this thinking it has seemed valid, for hospital efficiency's sake, to separate the new born babe immediately from the mother, hold it upside down and slap its bottom to make it take its first breath and cry its first cry, wash it and label it - all very clinical. Now from the lead of Dr. Leboyer and others concerned with 'natural childbirth' it is realised that the infant may be left quietly with the parents of which, soul and body it is truly part, that the first breath will be taken naturally at the right moment, that what is all-important is the unbroken flow of love and life from the mother to the new born child. This may be seen just as a wise improvement in ante-natal technique allowing for the tenderness which we know

to be so vital a psychological factor. But' if we try to relate this to the holistic world-picture, we shall see that this change of method, now rapidly spreading to the joy and delight of so many mothers, may be a real sign of the inflooding of the energies of synthesis, harmony, wholeness and love. These powers of the spirit, it is contended, are now being released into human consciousness to bring about the 'metanoia', or change in thinking which will bring mankind into an era of greater harmony, based on a knowledge of the Oneness of life. This must inevitably reveal itself at the key point in the life process, when the spiritual entity first passes from the Timeless realms through the narrow gate of birth into the world of form. Just conceive in this light the terrible shock of bewilderment when this being of its own free choice begins its adventure of plunging down into the fascinating and dangerous adventure of earth life to be received with a callous indifference of being taken from the mother, slapped and washed and catalogued. Thus the movement for natural childbirth may be truly seen as a step towards a holistic medicine which will, come to recognise man as being of spirit, soul and body, and birth as a wonderful step into incarnation.

In light of this knowledge, the study of embryology is quite fascinating. Here is found one of the greatest sources of spiritual research into the history of the evolution of the planet earth. As Steiner and his fellow researchers have shown, the embryo recapitulates in miniature not only the story of bodily evolution but of the various incarnations of the planet. These are described in Steiner's great volume *Occult Science*.

The young child naturally holds a dim recollection of the land of light from which as a spiritual being it has descended. This we have found so well expressed in Traherne's poems. Thus so often it will ask the puzzled question "Mummy where did I come from?" Too often the modern mother, assuming tacitly that life begins at conception, will reply by telling the child prematurely about the so-called 'facts of life'. But it is not desire for instruction about sex that lies behind the question, for the child, as Wordsworth knew, still "beholds the light and whence it flows". There are indeed "intimations of immortality in early childhood". With Taliessin he can rightly say: "I come from the region of the summer stars".

It is so easy for the rationalist-minded mother to assume that the tiny child has only very limited consciousness and awareness, Yet consider the implications of a single authentic case. A woman was put into a hypnotic state to help her to be freed from some traumatic mental blockage. She was carried right back to the moment of birth, when she suddenly said in a loud Yorkshire accent "Eh, but the master will be mad when he sees this 'un!". These were the words of the midwife immediately after the birth and the subconscious of the child heard and understood it and knew she was an unwanted child – and never forgot it!

Traherne has another extraordinary poem called 'Dumbness' in which he describes how, before he had learned to talk, all natural objects spoke to him and told him of their Divinity, but, when he began to speak they relapsed into

silence. *We* may try, with wonder, to conceive what is really going on in the inner world of the child.

One of the most wonderful moments with the tiny child is when first it really smiles – as distinct from the grimace associated with wind. If we know that we are watching the majestic process of incarnation of an already mature soul, then with deeper vision we can look through that smile into the light-filled beauty of the descending spirit. In Traherne's words again:

*How like an angel I came down
How bright are all things here.*

A friend of mine heard a small boy of four declare to his mother – "These people are all giants. But they don't know it because they can only see the part that's down here". He was delighted and amused at his discovery. That child had clairvoyant vision of the oversoul. So it is with many children, who are able to 'see' into the supersensible, elemental world, the realm of 'faery'. They know the truth, but how shattering it can be for this sensitivity when a prosaic parent declares that the child must stop imagining things and be sensible. So let us close with Wordsworth, again from the great 'Ode'.

*Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity:
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind -
Mighty prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the day...
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height .
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight
And custom lie upon thee with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.*