



COMMENTARY

Response to Jim Tucker

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Let me begin by thanking Jim Tucker (Tucker, 2022) for offering his thoughts on my *JSE* paper on the James Leininger case (Sudduth 2021). I appreciate his clarifying his interpretation of several facts in the case, as well as his providing further context to some of them. I also appreciate his acknowledgement of Bruce Leininger’s authorship of the 2003 chronology which I uncovered in my investigation and made use of in my paper. That’s all helpful. For the rest, I wish I could say what St. Augustine said to Evodius when responding to the latter’s criticisms—“you have knocked vigorously.” Alas, I cannot say this about Tucker’s response.

My paper developed a number of different concerns about the evidential value of the James Leininger case (hereafter, JL case). The paper was lengthy and the scope of the material I presented was broad, often involving considerable detail regarding different aspects of the case. I realize this can make writing a concise and salient response a daunting task. To effectively navigate the landscape, therefore, it’s crucial to properly understand the structure and content of my *arguments*, as well as how I intend to leverage various facts in the service of specific lines of argument. One must not miss the forest (the argument) for the trees (particular facts).

Tucker’s response is largely focused on defensive posturing and cherry-picking claims I make in the course of arguments—some of the claims he attributes to me I actually *don’t* make—and trying to show that my depiction of the James Leininger case involves various “distortions, mischaracterizations, and outright misinformation” (p. 84). This could be instructive and effective as a critique, but only if Tucker showed how his purported corrections and narrative amendments were consequential to the cogency of my *arguments*. He’s not done that. He doesn’t say much, if anything, about my arguments—for example, what specific conclusion I draw from the facts I present, and how that conclusion feeds into a wider argument. On occasion, he tries to address what he thinks I’m arguing, but his objections betray various confusions about the content and structure of my argument—for example, not understanding how cumulative case arguments work or how to distinguish claims essential to an argument from those that are of minor significance or tangential. Tucker’s response may be a passionate exercise in apologetics, but it does little to address the cogency of my arguments.

Most importantly, though, Tucker’s entire critique depends on a variety of unstated assumptions about how we should understand *evidence*. When is one statement evidence for another statement? When would it be good evidence? Ultimately, my paper was designed to drive the reincarnation train into a collision course with these crucial questions in epistemology. Tucker failed to see this, or he chose to ignore it. Either way, he has squandered a valuable opportunity to address the kind of questions that underlie his favorable assessment of the JL case and his unfavorable assessment of my paper.

In what follows, I’ll address the above shortcomings of Tucker’s response.



Preliminaries

I should begin with two closely related preliminaries.

First, Tucker begins his paper with a straw man fallacy. He claims that my alleged errors “contribute to an inaccurate picture that denigrates the credibility of James’s parents as informants and my competence as a researcher” (p. 84).

While I don’t think the Leiningers are sufficiently credible as informants, I didn’t claim nor imply that we should question Tucker’s *competence as a researcher*. Tucker portrays my criticisms in this way, but he never shows that I say this, nor does he show how it follows from anything I actually said. I point out problems, errors, and flaws in his investigation and analysis in the JL case. As far as I can see, these are consistent with being a competent researcher. Competence doesn’t require infallibility or anything close to it. A competent baseball player sometimes strikes out. What’s true in baseball is true in research: Competence tolerates error.

The straw man fallacy is unfortunate in another respect. It’s a deflection from the central issues and problems that Tucker’s investigation and analysis raise for the kind of research he and others have been doing since the days of Ian Stevenson. This is not ultimately about Tucker, but about the challenges and problems that characterize the investigation and analysis of cases of the reincarnation type.

Since Tucker obfuscates the main threads of my paper, let me briefly restate them.

I argued that:

- (I) The Leiningers are not reliable as informants.
- (II) James was exposed to specific ordinary sources of information that (a) raise the probability of non-reincarnation explanations of the presumed facts in the case and which, therefore, (b) lower the probability of the reincarnation hypothesis relative to those same facts.
- (III) Tucker’s investigation was blind to several important ordinary sources of information to which James was exposed proximate in time to important claims and behaviors his parents attributed to him.
- (IV) (I), (II), and (III) jointly and severally severely undercut Tucker’s favorable evaluation of the case as evidence for reincarnation.

As I’ll show below, nothing Tucker says by way of his alleged corrections and amendments to the JL chronology in his response effectively challenges the arguments I present for these main claims. This is because Tucker doesn’t address the arguments I offered for these claims, or he only addresses some aspect of the argument, often in a way that is question begging and ignores the bigger pic-

ture. Tucker’s strategy isn’t adequately calibrated to track the essential features of my arguments. It’s more akin to shooting at duck targets at a carnival—*how many of these little guys can I shoot down in the time allotted?* That’s how you win big stuffed animals, but it’s not how you achieve the ends to which dialogue and argument are directed.

Tucker’s Verdict on My Paper

In his conclusion to his paper, Tucker makes the following claims:

Much of Sudduth’s paper is ultimately beside the point. . . . The case remains unscathed . . . Sudduth has demonstrated that the case is so strong that a determined critic can devote endless time and energy trying to debunk it and still not make a dent in it. His accomplishment is marred only by his inability to see what he has done. (p. 89)

I’ll set aside Tucker’s rhetorical mischaracterization of my critical approach to this case. What’s more interesting is his dismissive verdict. Although cloaked in imprecise language, it seems he thinks that nothing I’ve presented (significantly?) lowers the plausibility of the JL case as (good?) evidence for reincarnation. That’s an easy thing to say, of course. It’s more difficult to show. And I don’t see that Tucker has shown it. He presents no clear argument for his net assessment. He’s merely appended this verdict to a selection of *alleged* corrections to a small subset of claims I *allegedly* made in the course of my arguments. Since he has not engaged my arguments—he doesn’t even state them—he predictably fails to show how any of his counterpoints and gripes are consequential to the cogency of my arguments.

Tucker’s verdict is as understandable as it was predictable. It’s symptomatic of the very problem my paper was designed to ferret out—the lack of clarity in much reincarnation research concerning criteria that would sufficiently underwrite the kinds of evidential claims that reincarnation researchers would like to make. There’s an elephant in the conversation room here: *what makes any fact evidence for the truth of a claim?* If we’re not clear about the answer to this question, we can’t be clear about why the presumed facts of the JL case—for example, what Tucker presents in his tables—are evidence for reincarnation, much less why they would be good evidence. And if we’re not clear about this, we’re not going to be clear about why anything I’ve said undercuts the JL case as evidence for reincarnation.

If Tucker wishes to provide a serious engagement with the kinds of criticisms I have offered, he needs to do a number of things.

□ He needs to state more precisely the evidential claim he's willing to make about the JL case. Does he think the facts in the JL case are *mere* evidence for reincarnation? Or are they *good* evidence? And if the latter, approximately how good?

□ He needs to explain his understanding of evidential strength. After all, Tucker appears to think the presumed facts of the JL case provide strong evidence for reincarnation, or at least strong enough to deflect anything I've said. Does he think the presumed facts merely *raise* the probability of the reincarnation hypothesis? Does he think the facts make the reincarnation hypothesis more probable than not? Highly probable? What exactly? Opacity here is a recipe for dodging criticisms not answering them.

□ Tucker needs to present an *argument* that backs up his evidential claim(s). And to do this he must explain what logical principles justify his evidential claims. For example, does he wish to endorse a Likelihoodist approach to evidence? Perhaps a Bayesian view? Or maybe some other approach? If he wishes to appeal to reincarnation as the best explanation of the facts in this case, he needs to explain his explanatory criteria and elaborate how such criteria convert to evidential cash value. I frankly don't care which approach to evidence he takes. I'm just requesting clarity on a fundamental issue. What rules does he think sanction his purported inferences?

The JL case, like all other CORTs, has no established evidential relevance until we are clear about at least provisional answers to fairly remedial epistemological questions. Tucker has not made that clear. And if he hasn't done that, he can't effectively argue that the JL case has any evidential merit. And if he can't do that, his criticisms of my JSE paper are premature and ultimately beg the question. Worse, his criticisms mask a fundamental problem that vitiates much of survival research (see Sudduth, 2016, pp. 10–17).

I'll refer back to the core evidential issue in what follows to show how it hampers Tucker's ability to offer a salient response to my paper.

Tucker's Table Talk

In connection with my exposition of his analysis of the case, Tucker accuses me of using the "wrong table" for the purposes of analyzing the alleged early-bird claims of the case.

First of all, he [Sudduth] uses the wrong table. He focuses on one from my paper about the case (Tucker, 2016), rather than the one from the longer report I published in one of my books (Tucker, 2013). The

table in the paper was not a complete list of the B items. Instead, it was a list of items that were part of a 2002 ABC News feature that included an interview with the Leiningers conducted before Huston was identified. The items there do count as B items (with one exception to be discussed later), but they are not the complete list. Sudduth chooses to focus on it, however, and then adds items of his own for which there is *not* documentation made before Huston was identified. Predictably, he finds them wanting. (p. 84)

In section 1 of my JSE paper (Sudduth, 2021, 939–941) I explain that Tucker provides *two* sets of early-bird claims. He has one in his 2016 paper based on material presented in the 2002 ABC program, and he presents an expanded list in his 2013 *Return to Life* which he justifies on the grounds of a broader range of documentation. So, I make the very point Tucker makes above about the content and rationale for each of his tables. Yes, I have considerable discussion of the items in Tucker's 2016 table. But Tucker's gripe here is a red herring. First, the tables overlap, so much of what I say about items in Tucker's 2016 table applies to what he says in his 2013 table. Second, I devote an entire section of my JSE paper—section 7 (pp. 1002–1009)—to discussing the items that only appear in Tucker's 2013 table, and I provide further discussion of one of those items—the *Natoma* attribution—in section 6 (pp. 990–992).

Tucker's complaint is especially bizarre given that he makes terse references to a small fraction of what I say about those other items. So, he is aware that I address those items. If they are so important, he should have spent more time addressing *why* I find *all* the items he lists wanting, rather than incorrectly suggesting that I've rigged the discussion in some way by ignoring a more complete list of items. Tucker may be disappointed that I didn't include the extra items in my table analysis. I'm disappointed that Tucker failed to see how my criticisms of those extra items bear on my analysis of Tucker's 2013 table, especially since I explained it. More disappointing still is that he chose not to engage the full set of considerations I adduced to doubt the evidential force of those extra items he regards as so impressive.

Finally, in the above quote, Tucker makes reference to my alternative table (p. 1001). To clarify, I had previously shown (pp. 998–1000) how the material from earlier sections of my paper bears on the kind of analysis Tucker engages in in his 2016 table. I argued two things. First, the appearance of a genuine match with Huston in Tucker's 2016 table depends on logically dubious maneuvers (p. 999), and a non-reincarnation explanation of the facts Tucker cites would sufficiently account for what James got right

and what he got wrong. (I later make the same point after considering the extra items in Tucker's table in 2013.) My alternative table (p. 1001) was a supplemental way of explicating why Tucker's 2016 table was problematic, and I argued that we either have overriding reasons to prefer my table to Tucker's or we have no overriding reason to prefer either table. Tucker does not comment on my argument.

Tucker criticizes my alternative table because it includes claims for which there is no early-bird documentation, but this betrays Tucker's misunderstanding of the function of my alternative table. As noted above, it was another way of highlighting the problems in Tucker's uncritical and dubious dependence on the case's alleged early-bird items. The documentation and related background assumptions that Tucker uses as the scaffolding for much of the case suffers from a variety of unacknowledged liabilities which I explained in detail in sections 6 and 7 of my essay. How serious these liabilities are will in part depend on what kinds of (evidential) claims we wish to make on behalf of the early-bird items, but these issues need to be addressed head-on. In the JL case, some of the early-bird claims involve ambiguity, others are false or disconfirmed, and others are not clearly confirmed. There is the additional problem of selection bias, analogous to the file-drawer problem. And that's particularly acute in the JL case. If the Leiningers are reliable informants, then the early-bird items Tucker lists in his 2013 and 2016 tables are not the only claims we're justified in attributing to James before the previous personality was identified. What's relevant is not whether these other claims have early-bird status, but whether they are part of the Leiningers' narrative and how they bear on the evidential status of the case. Tucker is opaque at this juncture.

Ultimately, though, Tucker's table talk is little more than a distraction from more substantive issues. Regardless of what gets included in the tables, Tucker must state why the content of such tables is evidence for the claim that James Leininger is the reincarnation of James Huston. And he must explain his respective weighting of early-bird claims and claims not in this classification. What degree of evidential support do early-bird items confer on the reincarnation hypothesis compared to the degree of evidential support non early-bird items confer? We have a bunch of claims scattered through a chronology. Tucker needs to explain how he's allocating evidential support.

Tucker repeatedly brandishes the notion of "matches," but this begs the evidential question. Even if Tucker could clearly distinguish between a genuine and merely apparent match—and he hasn't—why should any number/kind of matches be regarded as evidence, much less good evidence, for reincarnation? And what number/kind of mismatches would count as evidence *against* the reincarnation

hypothesis? Until this is done, appeals to matches between the claims of James Leininger and the life of Huston beg the evidential question. Tucker's reasoning about this, lacking any normative evidential criteria, remains merely impressionistic.

Documentation and B Cases

In connection with Tucker's table complaint, he distinguishes between claims that are documented *before* the previous personality has been identified (B cases) and claims that are documented *after* the previous personality has been identified (A cases). The JL case, as Tucker notes, is a B type case since some of the claims attributed to James were documented before the Leiningers had decided on Huston as the previous personality.

All good and fine, except that Tucker's distinction between A and B cases overlooks a *third* classification of cases which Stevenson wrote about and which I briefly discussed in note 4 of my *JSE* essay (pp. 1011–1012): documentation made before *anyone* has even *attempted to verify* the claims of the subject (Stevenson, 1974, pp. 4, 71, 270–271). Identifying a previous personality is subsequent to and based on a (possibly lengthy) process of attempting to verify a subject's claims. There are many ways the process of attempting to verify a subject's claims can contaminate the facts, especially when the inquiry is conducted by someone close to the subject. If attempts at verification provide information about a previous personality, we have not adequately insulated the "facts" from contamination.

The concern about contamination is especially acute when information acquired during the verification process includes (i) information acquired specifically about the person later designated as the previous personality, (ii) information later used to identify a particular person as the previous personality, (iii) the subject has access to the information in (i) and (ii)—for example, by overhearing chatter about it or reading documents, and (iv) the process of verification is protracted, extending over years, and is proximate to the genesis of the story and its early evolution.

In the JL case, some of James's claims were documented *before* the previous personality was identified—that is, *selected or decided on* by the Leiningers as the result of an inference they drew. But these claims were documented *after* Bruce Leininger had been attempting to verify the claims. The Leiningers were the first ones to "identify" James Huston, Jr., as the previous personality, apparently after they ruled out Jack Larsen. They did so sometime between fall 2002 and December 2002. But according to the Leiningers' official chronology, they were attempting to verify James's claims as early as August 27, 2000. At that

time, Bruce allegedly had detailed information about the *Natoma Bay*. Among other things, he knew the carrier supported US operations at Iwo Jima from February to early March 1945. In December 2000, *Natoma Bay* veteran Leo Pyatt told Bruce that Jack Larsen was a crew member on the *Natoma Bay* around the time the carrier was supporting operations at Iwo Jima. In January 2001, Bruce acquired a list of *Natoma Bay* crew killed in action. The list included the name of James Huston, Jr., and indicated that he was a pilot on the *Natoma Bay* and had died on March 3, 1945, while the *Natoma Bay* was supporting operations at Iwo Jima. By the fall of 2002 the Leiningers learned that the Jack Larsen who was stationed on the *Natoma Bay* during the Battle of Iwo Jima was still alive. By December 2002, Bruce Leininger acquired details concerning the circumstances of Huston's death.

Tucker appeals to the 2002 ABC program and a small assortment of other documents to piece together a set of claims attributed to James before Huston was identified. But significant attempts at verification had been under way for nearly two years at that point. The Leiningers collected the above information, had it on hand, were ruminating over it, and discussing it in their household for two years, before deciding that Huston was the previous personality. If we could trust the Leiningers' ability to provide a reasonable guarantee that their "facts" were not contaminated, that would be another matter. But we can't trust them in this way. They have demonstrated that they are incredibly poor judges of obvious ordinary sources of information that shaped James's experience, claims, and behavior—see the next section for a summary of this. We have good reason to suppose that, if facts were contaminated, the Leiningers would be poorly situated to detect it.

Moreover, apart from the problem of selection bias, the ABC program only documents the Leiningers telling of the story in spring of 2002. Documenting *what* they said is not equivalent to documenting the *accuracy* of what they attributed to James. The mind isn't a video recorder. Memory represents a reconstruction of earlier events. It's considerably less reliable than we assume, especially at the level of detail required in the JL case. And Bruce Leininger's memory is no exception. It actually fits the rule. He has, by his own admission, misremembered multiple important facts in this case.

So, the documentation in this case prior to the identification of the previous personality is problematic in ways that Tucker has not acknowledged. There are more ways to get things wrong than to get them right, and I don't see that Tucker has alleviated these concerns. Consequently, the reliability of the early-bird documentation in this case is at best anyone's guess.

I raise the above issues only because Tucker has em-

phasized documentation in this case. Although the concerns I expressed above are serious, they are not central. The central question is evidential. Until Tucker provides clarity on what counts as evidence and why, whether cases are A or B or some other type is a distinction without a demonstrable evidential difference.

Ordinary Sources of Information

Tucker's response to my extensive discussion of the content of ordinary sources of information James was exposed to involves considerable obfuscation and misdirection. On the one hand, he acknowledges that James was exposed to information about planes and WW2. On the other hand, he doesn't think this is significant because the important stuff can't be explained in this manner.

Sudduth shows a fundamental misunderstanding here of what is most important in these cases. James doesn't get credit for the item based on whether or not he had heard of a Corsair; he could have been standing in front of a Corsair when he said he had flown one and still gotten credit. What makes the statement significant is that he claimed he flew a Corsair in his past life and, in fact, the previous personality did indeed fly one. We know that James was exposed to many types of World War II planes—Sudduth argues he might have been exposed to planes in ways we don't even know about. Out of all those planes, the one James named—the one discussed in the ABC interview before Huston was identified—was one that the previous personality flew. Absolutely no one suggests that James learned at the museum that *Huston* had flown a Corsair. And that is what counts. (p. 86)

First, while I acknowledge the significance of sources of information James might have been exposed to but which we don't know about—the so-called dark data problem—the focal point of my argument concerns *what we know he was exposed to*, and which apparently Tucker didn't know about.

Second, if we're considering the plausibility of ordinary sources of information shaping a claim a subject makes at time *t*, then we have to consider what sources were available to him *at time t*, the time at which he made the claim in question. I outlined the claims the Leiningers say James made in the period of March 2000 to August 2000 (Sudduth, 2021, 956, 958), the period of the genesis and early evolution of the story. James's allegedly claiming *he flew a Corsair in a past life*—Tucker's attribution—is not among those claims. Nor is *Huston had flown a Corsair*. Initially, in

August 2000, James gave the name *Corsair* when answering his parents' questions about the content of his dreams. He made no reference to a past life *at that time*—the time I'm concerned with. According to Bruce Leininger, James's first explicit reference to living a past life was in fall 2001. This would have been months after the Leiningers had been telling James that what he was experiencing had happened to him before—this was the advice Carol Bowman gave them. In my paper, I outlined the chronology of claims James made at specific times and the content of sources to which he had been exposed *at the time he made those claims*. There's no need to rehash the detailed argumentation here. Tucker's tactic seems to be to ignore the Leiningers' own chronology, invent a new one, and substitute stronger claims (which James possibly made at a later date) for weaker ones (he made at the time in question). This is a logical sleight of hand.

Third, Tucker's reasoning is otherwise implausible. He says, "What makes the statement significant is that he claimed he flew a Corsair in his past life and, in fact, the previous personality did indeed fly one" (p. 000). Tucker chides me for allegedly not understanding what's significant in these cases. I understand that Tucker *thinks* this particular item is significant in some sense, but he hasn't shown that it's evidentially significant. And that's what matters if we wish to make evidential claims. Tucker has not answered the evidential question. Until he does so, his reasoning is question begging and merely impressionistic.

Tucker later adds obfuscation to his implausible line of reasoning.

Yes, James was exposed to information about planes and World War II. It is not enough, however, to show that he learned that planes can take off from boats or that planes can crash. It is also not enough to show that James was exposed to imagery of planes crashing or burning or even imagery of a pilot named Larsen or a Corsair plane. He was exposed to many, many images and names in his young life, including many planes. What is important is whether the ones he said were part of his past life actually matched a life someone lived. James reported memories of being a particular person in a particular place. You would need to show that he learned that a pilot took off from the *Natoma* and that his plane crashed during the Battle of Iwo Jima in a particular way and that his friend Jack Larsen was nearby when it happened. Sudduth has not done that. (pp. 88–89)

First, as far as my argument goes, the issue is not simply whether James was exposed to WW2 imagery, etc., *in his young life*. The issue is whether James was exposed to

salient sources. As I repeatedly explained and illustrated (Sudduth, 2021, pp. 944–945, 950–953, 956–965) that's not merely a matter of whether the content of a subject's claims match the sources. It's also a matter of where such exposures occur in the chronology of claims and behaviors attributed to James. When a subject is exposed to content-relevant sources prior to having experiences, making claims, or engaging behavior which matches the content of the sources, we acquire reasons for supposing that any match (between the subject and a previous personality) is less surprising than it would otherwise be. Tucker may challenge this point if he wishes, but he must first acknowledge it if he intends to address the argument I presented.

Second, Tucker's "*It is not enough*" is unclear. Not enough for what exactly? *You would need to show . . .* I would need to show this for what exactly? This is a good example of how Tucker's discussion is saturated with the very lack of precision that characterizes his analysis of the JL case in the first place. It's unclear what goal requires that I satisfy what Tucker here demands.

Third, the plausibility of the reincarnation hypothesis depends on there being no equally good non-reincarnation hypothesis. But ostensible non-reincarnation explanations need not maintain that every (actual) fact in the case is explicable by James's exposure to some ordinary source of information which he assimilated. I certainly don't claim this. As I made clear in section 7 of my *JSE* paper, *different* factors, one of which is ordinary sources of information, may converge to create the appearance of a genuine case of reincarnation. Tucker is strawmanning my actual argument.

Fourth, my modest claim is that Tucker hasn't ruled out plausible ordinary sources of information. I can't see that I *need* to do any of what Tucker says above to show *that*, and Tucker provides no argument showing otherwise. The stronger claim I argue for is that the considerations I adduce are among those that lower the plausibility of the reincarnation hypothesis (for this case) by increasing the plausibility of ordinary sources of information. As far as I can see, Tucker hasn't even addressed that argument. And I don't see that he can address it without spelling out his criteria of evidence and his view of how defeasibility or disconfirmation works. Until then, it's at best unclear what the net evidential result is of my not showing what Tucker specifies above.

But let me comment further on the above point.

Tucker and the Leiningers regard the presumed facts in this case as evidence for the claim that James Leininger is the reincarnation of James Huston, Jr. Tucker never states what he thinks the evidential force of the total set of facts is, nor what normative criteria would justify this inference. But let's set that aside and simply make a remedial point about defeasibility and cumulative case arguments. Let

N represent the total evidential force of some set of facts $f_1 \dots f_n$ for the reincarnation hypothesis R . Suppose further that N depends on there being no plausible ordinary sources of information for $f_1 \dots f_n$. In that case, as you get plausible ordinary sources of information for some of the facts, the total force of $f_1 \dots f_n$ for R will decrease—this is an example of incremental defeasibility. In other words, the probability of R given $f_1 \dots f_n$, where some of the members of $f_1 \dots f_n$ has a plausible ordinary explanation will be less than the probability of R given $f_1 \dots f_n$, where none of the facts has a plausible ordinary explanation. One can effectively argue that the kinds of source-relevant facts I disclose in my paper do lower the probability of R without having to show that every fact or even the most important of the lot can be traced to an ordinary source of information. Curiously, I made a similar point in my JSE paper (p. 1003). Tucker chose to ignore it.

Of course, I have no idea how Tucker thinks of evidence. I can only appeal to principles baked into widely endorsed views of defeasibility, total evidence, and cumulative case arguments. Tucker can challenge them if he likes and present his own. I wish he had. After all, there might be a fruitful area of dialogue concerning just how much the kinds of source-relevant facts I introduce lower the probability of the reincarnation hypothesis. Among other things, that will depend on how individual facts in the JL case contribute to the total force of the facts. Again, I had hoped Tucker would offer something like that in his critique. He brought stones, but what's needed is bread.

The Credibility of the Leiningers

I devoted considerable space in my JSE paper (sections 4 and 5) to showing that the Leiningers were unreliable in ways that diminish the credibility of their narrative. Tucker chides me for going after the Leiningers' integrity, but he ignores most of the reasons I gave for doubting their reliability as informants. While I don't expect Tucker to have addressed all the reasons I presented, I should have thought it in his best interest to provide a more substantive response. Anyone who carefully reads my paper will see that Tucker ignored most of the credibility-diminishing issues I presented, as well as how I was leveraging them.

Tucker says, "in telling their story over the years, Bruce and Andrea Leinger may have been inconsistent at times on some of the details" (p. 89). *May have been . . . on some of the details?* This from Tucker who admits that Bruce Leinger placed James giving the word *Natoma* in late October/early November 2000 in the 2003 chronology but in the official 2009 chronology (in the book *Soul Survivor*), the Leiningers said James gave the word *Natoma* on August 27, 2000—this is an inconsistency. Furthermore, Tucker

has presumably seen the 2003 chronology I acquired and so knows that the 2003 and 2009 chronologies are inconsistent on several other crucial details of the story. Tucker has presumably read Mr. Leinger's prize-winning Bigelow essay (Leinger, 2021), in which Mr. Leinger introduces more inconsistencies in the latest iteration of the story—for example, locating James's highly specific claims about the Corsair plane in summer 2000, when the 2009 chronology explicitly indicates that James never made these claims until spring 2002. (See Sudduth 2022 for my critical examination of Bruce Leinger's Bigelow essay.)

Consider the above. Tucker can't bring himself to acknowledge that the Leiningers were inconsistent despite this being a clear entailment of Tucker's own words. And despite the myriad other examples. Why not say, *yes, you know, they were inconsistent, but let me show why, contrary to what Sudduth argues, these inconsistencies are not significant*. Instead, Tucker chose the path of denial and offered no argument at all.

The attention Tucker brings to the possibility of the Leiningers' inconsistency is another example of Tucker's failure to address my actual arguments. My argument isn't that the Leiningers are inconsistent therefore they're not credible. I invoked several issues in a cumulative case manner to raise doubt about the Leiningers' reliability as informants. Inconsistency is only one of several credibility-diminishing issues in my cumulative case argument.

Let me restate some of these considerations.

□ Andrea Leinger misrepresented the content of the Cavanaugh Flight Museum when dismissing the possibility that James could have acquired relevant information from the museum, but the exhibits are relevant sources of information for what she attributed to James. This counts against her credibility.

□ The Leiningers have repeatedly given assurance that James wasn't exposed to imagery of burning or crashing planes prior to the genesis of his nightmares which contained such imagery, but such images were on the Blue Angels video he regularly watched prior to the nightmares and for over a year while the nightmares were ongoing. Similar images were also on display at the Cavanaugh Flight Museum. This counts against the Leiningers' credibility.

□ Bruce Leinger has repeatedly referred to the Blue Angels video referenced above by the title *It's a Kind of Magic*. This is incorrect. There is no Blue Angels video by that name. This counts against Bruce Leinger's credibility.

□ Bruce Leinger attributes to his son a statement derived from a pilot in a Corsair video Mr. Leinger elsewhere admits James watched prior to making the statement, but he still regards the statement he attributes to James as dumbfounding evidence that his son lived a previous life. This counts against Mr. Leinger's credibility.

□ Bruce Leininger claimed that Carol Bowman began counseling the Leiningers in the summer of 2000, but really it wasn't until February 2001. This counts against his credibility. In his 2021 Bigelow essay, Mr. Leininger cuts Bowman out of the narrative altogether, thereby masking the fact that when James first refers to having lived a past life (fall 2001), the Leiningers had been instilling this narrative in him for months as part of Bowman's therapeutic advice. Given the relevance of Bowman's advice, cutting her out of the narrative counts against Mr. Leininger's credibility.

□ Bruce Leininger authored a chronology in 2003 that is inconsistent with the official 2009 story on multiple vital points of the story—for example, what James said, when he said it, contextual details between 2000 and 2002. This counts against his credibility.

□ Bruce Leininger said that James pointed to a map and said that's *where* his plane crashed, but later—after Mr. Leininger discovered that Huston's plane didn't crash there—he changed what James said to that's *when* my plane crashed. The former attribution is obviously false; the latter is not obviously false. The narrative change is evidentially salient. Lapses in memory on important matters count, and here it counts against Bruce Leininger's credibility.

□ The Leiningers suppress or otherwise mask statements in the *Natoma Bay* aircraft action report that don't fit their narrative—for example, the plane was not on fire and no damage to the plane was observed. They also ignore (as does Tucker in his response) the ways in which the aircraft action report makes any struggle to escape a sinking plane improbable. This counts against their credibility.

□ In the 2009 version of the story, the Leiningers claim James first made specific statements about the Corsair—the plane got flat tires on landing and tended to turn left on takeoff—in spring 2002. In the chronology Mr. Leininger provided in his Bigelow essay, he placed these statements in summer 2000. This counts against Bruce Leininger's credibility.

Then we come to Tucker's response. He calls attention to my misciting the date of a particular email correspondence with him, but he gives the Leiningers a free pass, ignoring most of what I've summarized above. Tucker seems more interested in posturing than addressing the credibility-diminishing issues I've detailed. And if he thinks the above examples are not credibility-diminishing, he should explain why and state what he would consider credibility-diminishing, other than an indisputable demonstration of fraud.

The logical inconsistency of the Leiningers' story is clearly only one of several considerations that I present to raise significant doubt about the Leiningers' credibility. The post hoc alterations to their story is also a problem. Not acknowledging the ways in which the aircraft action report conflicts with James's claims also is a problem. But what's

most important is the Leiningers' failure to acknowledge plausible if not obvious ordinary sources for the content of James's nightmares (the genesis of the story), his behavior, and the information he provided at the various stages in their chronology. This lack of situational awareness contaminates crucial aspects of the case—from the documents Tucker brandishes to our ability to retroactively rule out ordinary sources of information to the Leiningers' two-year process of connecting dots. That the Leiningers insist with certitude on the impossibility of ordinary sources informing the items I catalogued in my paper further diminishes their credibility as informants. A reliable informant always understands the limits of their own perspective.

The *Natoma* Claim

Tucker spends a few paragraphs discussing what I say—not my argument—for the *Natoma* attribution to James. Since Tucker mishandles this aspect of my paper, let me clarify. There are three issues concerning this feature of the case: its actual veracity (whether James actually said what's attributed to him), its early-bird status (when the claim attributed to him was documented), and its evidential weight if we grant its veracity and early-bird status.

Regarding the veracity of the attribution, in section 5 of my *JSE* paper I presented several reasons to doubt its veracity. I won't repeat the argument here, especially since Tucker didn't respond to the cumulative case considerations. If there's no response to my *argument*, no counterargument is required.

Regarding the claim's early-bird status, Tucker is correct that I claimed there is no justification for including the *Natoma* claim as an early-bird claim. He is also correct that I'm not challenging the "fact that *Natoma* was part of the story at that time" (p. 85). It's unclear whether Tucker understands the difference between arguing that we don't have good enough reason to affirm *p* and arguing that we have good reason to deny *p*, but the distinction is important. With respect to the early-bird status of the *Natoma* claim, I argued the former, not the latter.

Tucker presents reasons to think the *Natoma* claim is an early-bird item. Okay. So what? It's commonplace to have reasons, even good reasons, to believe opposite conclusions. This is why you can't refute an argument for some statement *p* by simply claiming *not-p*. Even presenting reasons for *not-p* is insufficient. One must show that the reasons for *not-p* outweigh the reasons offered for *p*. That's how you critically respond to an argument. Tucker doesn't do this. He doesn't even present my argument.

What I argued (p. 1004) was that what Tucker presented in Tucker (2013) was not an adequate justification for including the *Natoma* attribution as an early-bird item. In other words, given the evidence Tucker presented there,

there's no justification for including the claim as an early-bird item. Tucker (2013, p. 69) refers to the printout of the *Natoma Bay* entry from *the Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*. But that document by itself is not documentation of what James said. More precisely, it's not—as Tucker later says (2013, p. 77)—an example of “definite documentation” in the form of a “printed record” of a statement from James Leininger. At most, it documents something Bruce Leininger printed out on 08/27/2000. Tucker then infers the early-bird status of the claim from this document and the narrative Bruce Leininger later provided about the circumstances surrounding the printout.

The crucial question is when Bruce Leininger's narrative about the document was itself first documented. If the narrative was itself documented in spring 2002 in connection with the filming of the *Strange Mysteries* program, then yes, that would be a sufficient justification for regarding the attribution as early-bird in Tucker's sense. But as Tucker admits, it wasn't in the 2002 ABC program. And I don't see a reference in either Tucker 2013 or Tucker 2016 to any specific piece of documentation that would be a record of the *Natoma* narrative prior to fall 2002. It's reasonable to raise the concerns I did given Tucker's previous presentations of the case.

Now, in his response to my paper, he provides amendments. He appeals to “emails and postings about it” (p. 85) and what Shalini Sharma told him. This looks like a stalemate to me. Sharma told me something different. But more importantly, until Tucker can provide more details about the emails and postings to which he vaguely refers—when, where, and what's the content?—his rejoinder is too diffuse.

But this is neither here nor there, or—if I may pilfer one of Tucker's phrases—beside the point. Even if the *Natoma* attribution is afforded early-bird status, this is nowhere nearly sufficient to underwrite the kind of big claims Tucker wants to make about the evidential force of this particular item, the Jack Larsen claim, or any other item in the JL case, much less the net assessment of the case as a whole. Apart from the concerns expressed earlier about Tucker's B-type cases, it's unclear why any early-bird item is (good) evidence for reincarnation. Tucker has clearly not provided an adequate response to the other kinds of issues I discuss in section 7 of my *JSE* paper, much less the underlying evidential questions.

Concluding Remarks

Tucker's response, though it clarifies a few issues, fails to engage the arguments I presented. He cherry-picks claims I made here and there in the course of arguments I presented, then responds to these claims—not the arguments—with question-begging assertions. His narrative is largely a deflective rehashing of what he's already written about the JL case, peppered with passionate rebukes that

evade my arguments rather than adroitly address them. A considerable portion of his response is little more than a hairsplitting of tangential details and distinctions, as well as quibbling over minutiae of the case and the micro-exegesis of content of his terse correspondence with me. Tucker manufactures a handful of errors, most of them of dubious consequence, which he then attributes to me, but he grants the Leiningers full-blown immunity despite their cacophony of demonstrable error and misdirection. The inconvenient facts he cannot deny, of course. So, he's content to dismiss by simply redescribing them as insignificant, not realizing that it's precisely *significance* that is under scrutiny here.

The most disappointing aspect of Tucker's response isn't the large swath of material and argumentation he ignores. It's his failure to address the central question my paper was designed to ferret out: *Why are any of the presumed facts of this case evidence—decent, dandy, or damn good evidence—for reincarnation?* If we're not clear about this fundamental epistemological question, we can't possibly be clear about whether, or to what extent, anything I present undermines such a claim. Tucker has squandered a wonderful opportunity to address this evidential question. Until he does so and addresses my actual arguments, I'm afraid he has prematurely popped the celebratory cork. Unlike Evodius's response to St. Augustine, Tucker has not knocked vigorously. He has not knocked at all.

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