

BOOK REVIEW

Science, the Self, and Survival After Death: Selected Writings of Ian Stevenson, edited by Emily Williams Kelly. Rowman & Littlefield, 2013. 424 pp. \$65 (hardcover). ISBN 978-1442221147.

Ian Stevenson (1918–2007), professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia, was the most prominent and prolific psychical researcher of the 20th century. Stevenson devoted his research activities to a large extent to phenomena relevant to the question of survival and to spontaneous phenomena. This he did while J. B. Rhine, the other most prominent researcher of the 20th century, had abandoned research concerning the survival question and became exclusively an experimentalist.

This volume consists of a collection of important papers published by Stevenson during his long and productive career. His long-time assistant, Emily W. Kelly, collected the texts for this volume, and writes a general introduction and a few brief introductions to his major works. She writes:

No one can hope to express Ian's ideas better than he himself did, and so, rather than write a biography summarizing his work, I have chosen to let him tell the tale. The remainder of this volume therefore consists primarily of selections from his own published work, either full papers or excerpts from papers and books, that I think convey most effectively what he was trying to do and why.

The book consists of 34 chapters of varying length, the oldest of them *Why Medicine Is Not a Science* published in 1949, and the latest *What Are the Irreducible Components of the Scientific Enterprise?* published in 1999. Note that half a century passed between these two publications. Still there were later publications, the last being autobiographical, *Half a Career with the Paranormal*, an Essay that he published in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* in 2006.

Stevenson's focus was on the large questions about the nature of human personality and unanswered question of the mind and the brain relationship. He saw the aim of psychical research as being precisely his own: to apply the methods of science to the still-unanswered questions.

The 34 chapters are organized into five sections: *New Ideas in Science*, *The Nature of Human Personality*, *Psychical Research—Principles and*

Methods, Research on the Question of Survival After Death—Reviews and Representative Case Reports, and Implications. The section on research on the question of survival is by far the longest.

Stevenson became best-known for his studies of children who claim memories of a past life (reincarnation cases). They are duly presented in several chapters such as *Some New Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation: The Case of Ampan Petcherat*, *Three New Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Sri Lanka with Written Records Made before Verification*, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type with Birthmarks and Birth Defects*, and *Birthmarks and Birth Defects Corresponding to Wounds on Deceased Persons*. The important paper *Reincarnation, Field Studies, and Theoretical Issues: 1977* is published in full, whereas most of the above chapters are not, where only excerpts—the essential or crucial part of the papers—are published, often preceded by a short commentary or overview by the editor. That way Kelly is able to cover a wide area of Stevenson’s work and still limit the text to some 400 pages.

The editor writes that the view of

[human personality] as something that interacts with but is neither identical with nor wholly dependent on the biological body, provided Ian with an avenue to understanding the problem that he called the ‘leitmotif’ of his career—namely, the source of individual differences, both in character and in susceptibility to particular diseases. (p. 61)

This source is in his view the *third factor* that molds human personality, the other two being the generally accepted genes and environment.

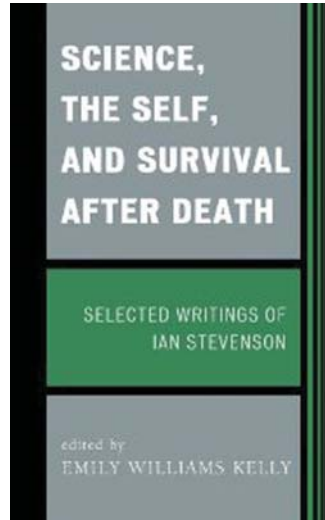
Chapters are devoted to Ian’s contributions to the study of apparitions (*Modern Apparitional Experiences*), death-bed visions, out-of-body and near-death experiences (*Cardiac Arrest Remembered*), and mediumship (*A Communicator of the ‘Drop in’ Type in Iceland: The Case of Gudni Magnusson*, that was co-authored by this reviewer). Only a few of his papers on apparitions are mentioned above.

Which papers to select must have been a difficult task considering Stevenson’s voluminous work, because of the breadth of his interests and the great variety of research projects that he worked on during his six-decades-long active career. One misses his research on special subjects, such as Ted Serios and Stephan Ossowiecki. As the title indicates, the emphasis is on Stevenson’s survival research and his approach to science, including his criticism of how many fellow scientists looked at science as a set of fixed assumptions but not as a neutral methodology.

Science, the Self, and Survival After Death, Selected Writings of Ian Stevenson concludes with an Index that the reviewer would have liked

to be more thorough. An example: One author who is mentioned a few times in the book is listed only once in the Index. An Appendix gives a complete bibliography of Stevenson's publications, beginning with his 15 published books, some of which have become classics and been translated into numerous languages, such as *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, and *Children Who Remember Previous Lives. A Question of Reincarnation*. His last major books were his two volumes *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birthdefects Volume 1: Birthmarks and Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birthdefects Volume 2: Birth Defects and Other Anomalies*. He also wrote a less technical summary of the material that was published as *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*. In these books he argues strongly for the existence of the *third factor*. His last major work was *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type* published in 2003.

Science, the Self, and Survival After Death, Selected Writings of Ian Stevenson gives an excellent overview of Stevenson's work. It is important that his great, outstanding contributions be remembered and brought over to the next generation of researchers. Emily Williams Kelly deserves praise for this highly recommendable and readable volume.



ERLENDUR HARALDSSON

Professor Emeritus, University of Iceland
 Erlendur@hi.is, www.hi.is/~erlendur