

In addition, the reader gets an intimate view of Stevenson, the man and scientist, who has devoted his life to an investigation that his peers would prefer not to be bothered by. Their preference is due partly to his methods, which necessarily violate some widely accepted criteria of what can count as scientific research, and partly to the fact that they have already ruled out the possibility of his conclusions being acceptable. As one critic quoted by Shroder (p. 146) put it: "The problem lies less in the quality of data Stevenson adduces to prove his point, than in the body of knowledge and theory which must be abandoned or radically modified in order to accept it." Stevenson's response (p. 210) is a commonplace in the history of science: "There's an old aphorism . . . 'Science changes one funeral at a time.' There is a powerful conservatism among the scientific establishment. You don't persuade people with your evidence. They have to pretty much die off for new ideas to come to the fore."

Much of the power of this highly readable book comes from the fact that the author himself, while not doubting the facts of Stevenson's cases, since he participated in the investigation of some of them, is still undecided about their interpretation at the end of the book. What he witnessed cannot be explained away as fraud, coincidence, delusion, or any of the ordinary options. The apparent memories challenge "the body of knowledge and theory which must be abandoned or radically modified" in response to them. At the end of the book, Shroder recounts an investigation he did himself into the case of a boy in Virginia who remembered events unconnected with his present life, whose accuracy Shroder's research confirmed. The last chapter ends with an unanswered question the boy asked about his memories: "Why is that, Mom?" It is Shroder's question as well.

Ian Stevenson's point is simply that if we want an explanation for certain mysteries he has studied, the simplest, most adequate, and therefore best explanation is reincarnation. Reincarnation is often understood very simplistically. And simplistic views are almost always wrong. But a wrong simplistic view does not invalidate a more sophisticated one that accounts for the facts.