

## BOOK REVIEW

**Crimes of Reason: On Mind, Nature and the Paranormal** by Stephen E. Braude. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 234 pp. \$70.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-1-4422-3575-5.

Here we have a collection of Stephen E. Braude's challenging philosophical forays into the criticism and evaluation of conceptual frameworks endemic to current trends in science of mind and reality (including the paranormal). Some of the essays in this volume are expanded and updated versions of previously published ones, and some have been written especially for this publication. It is good to welcome the new essays, and good also that the earlier ones should not be lost sight of, as all of them have ongoing value in the ferment surrounding questions of who and what we humans are, what is our relationship to the world, and how much of that relationship can be explained by a science committed to mechanism.

Because of the scope and variety of the included essays I will not attempt to discuss each in turn or even to discuss all of them. I will instead give a general sense of what Braude is up to, what is the overall structure of the book, and what a reader may expect to encounter. I will then take just one of the many possible directions a reviewer might take in considering such a multifaceted topic. That particular direction is of considerable interest to me personally and may also, I believe, be of interest to many readers. But there are lots of other directions that might be taken among the variety of topics and ideas to be found in this volume.

Each essay is a unique contribution in itself. Taken together they fall roughly into four not entirely unrelated categories. (1) The first two essays deal with the inadequacy of mechanistic explanations in the behavioral and life sciences. The first of these is "Memory Without a Trace," Braude's definitive rejection of the theory that memory consists of data stored in the brain. The second is Braude's review of Rupert Sheldrake's controversial *A New Science of Life*, where he uses a gentle touch (he considers Sheldrake a personal friend) but eventually must conclude that Sheldrake's theory is "seriously flawed." (2) The third essay, "In Defense of Folk Psychology: Inner Causes versus Action Spaces," takes a penetrating look at the inadequacy of psychological explanation when it tries to attribute human behavior to an "inner cause" (i.e. to brain states). I will be exploring this essay at some length in what follows. (3) The fourth and fifth essays,

which are “The Creativity of Dissociation” and “Multiple Personality and Moral Responsibility,” add to the author’s already extensive analyses in his book *First Person Plural* (Braude 1995) dealing with issues of multiple personality. (4) The sixth and seventh essays discuss the nature and limits of human abilities as seen from the viewpoint of parapsychological studies. The sixth, “Parapsychology and the Nature of Abilities,” is a penetrating look at the failure of clarity in “the scholarly community” regarding “the nature of human (and other organic) abilities.” The topic, of course, involves the nature and frequency of occurrence of psi abilities in the populace as a whole. This topic spills over into the seventh essay, “Some Thoughts on Parapsychology and Religion,” which I found especially stimulating. I will devote some time below to this essay. There is also an eighth essay, “Credibility under Fire: Advice to the Academically Marginalized,” which in my opinion would best be read first. It is a proper introduction to all those which precede it.

Braude’s commentaries are at a high level of professional philosophical analysis. Some who may not be familiar with the most sophisticated equipment in the philosopher’s toolbox may find the intricacy occasionally requires re-reading a passage. On the other hand, Braude writes with an eye toward clarity, gives many examples which increase understandability, and at times provides delightful humor based on his own life experiences. It would be a mistake to bypass Braude’s meatiest essays—especially those in the first two categories—and to turn only to the pages harboring the more exotic topic of parapsychological explanation. The two areas of interest, mechanistic explanation in the sciences and methodological concerns in parapsychological research, are closely related. In both cases, the danger lies in focusing primarily on the materials and methods of laboratory experimentation at the expense of the way things are in the broad scope of lived human experience. Braude makes this point especially in the third essay, “In Defense of Folk Psychology,” and in the seventh, “Some Thoughts on Parapsychology and Religion.”

... formal experiments in principle tell us virtually nothing about the nature of psychic functioning. ... It’s clear to me that at least some of the most interesting, compelling, and illuminating parapsychological data comes from venues outside the lab. (p. 183)

This perspective reflects a far more general issue having to do with the proper relation between science and human experience. It is a topic taken up almost universally, for example, in philosophical critique of mechanistic conclusions in cognitive science. Trying to compress the study of human life and behavior into the constricted atmosphere of any particular methodology

may distort understanding of the results to the point where the world *as it is experienced* is devalued—or worse, written off as unreal.

Nothing illustrates this point better, perhaps, than the analysis Braude undertakes of the “Inner Cause Theory” of human behavior (ICT). This theory, espoused by many in cognitive science, attributes the cause of behavior exclusively to the activity of the brain, and assumes that an “explanation” of behavior consists in locating the brain states causing the behavior. (Of course, under the computer interpretation of the brain, those brain states in turn would be caused by the supposed programming of the brain as it responds to some sensory input, so ultimately any explanation of behavior would have to rely on the capability of the programming.) Braude’s approach to criticism of ICT is exemplary of his overall approach to the issues taken up in the book. I will focus first on how this approach develops in the third essay, and later on how this may relate to the seventh essay.

### **The Concept of “Action Space”**

In the third essay Braude holds that folk psychology, preemptorily dismissed in cognitive science, frequently provides satisfactory and productive explanations of behavior, while ICT is incapable of doing so. In his discussion of folk-psychological explanation, Braude comes up with a somewhat curious term, *action space*, referring to a “space” accommodating aspects of behavior necessary for explanation which are inaccessible to ICT. I find this notion of “action space” to be of considerable interest. Residing at the core of his analysis, it deserves close attention.

“Action space” is the “space” wherein certain features of human activity necessary for explaining behavior take place. Braude would naturally seem to be using “space” here metaphorically. If we were to speak literally about the “space” within which the causal factors in any particular instance of behavior are located, for ICT it would of course be the *physical* space within the cranium occupied by certain neurons; or, since the behavior in question must be decided upon by the brain’s programming in response to sensory input, the inner cause might be thought of as located in a *metaphorical* space, i.e. the “programming space” within which the computer-brain dwells—something like the metaphorical space Jeff Bridges runs around in when he is caught inside a computer in the movie *Tron*.<sup>1</sup>

That “programming space” may seem large, but actually it is miserably confined compared to what Braude calls action space. Action space is the lived milieu within which human behavior takes place. By focusing on this wider landscape Braude carries out his conviction that to understand behavior we must leave the confinement of the lab and look at the

experienced world in its full dimensionality. But now a question arises (at least in my inquisitive mind): Is the “space” in “action space” metaphorical, or literal? Is it a kind of space other than physical space?

This may seem a peculiar question to ask, and Braude does not take it up. In his discussion, “action space” clearly has the role of a useful metaphor. Ordinarily, when an agent performs some action, it is assumed this behavior takes place in the same physical space as that within which science locates objects and events. But the problem that arises on reflection is that certain things Braude lists as occurring in action space are not things that the space of physics is able to accommodate. There seems to be a distinction to be made between the two; and I believe considering this distinction has very interesting implications in relation to paranormal issues as they are taken up in Braude’s other essays in this book.

So what goes on in action space, and what does this have to do with explaining behavior?

Braude outlines four requirements, which are those things relevant to explanation that are going on in action space on the occasion of some particular instance of behavior. (1) the *intentions* of the agent engaging in the behavior; (2) the larger social–environmental *context* within which the behavior occurs (including the intentions, memories, and character traits of any others involved); (3) the stage of personal *development* of the agent such as the agent’s degree of maturity or immaturity (and that of any others involved); and (4) the background of experience that would allow for *anticipations* on the part of the agent as to what the consequences of various choices might be (and the anticipations of any others involved) (pp. 64–67).

Clearly then, the “action space” within which behavior takes place is a very complex affair. And most often it involves other individuals than just the immediate agent of the action. Braude shows how the representational theory of mind assumed by cognitive science as necessary for explaining how ICT can work cannot, even in theory, handle such a task (p. 77). Furthermore (although Braude does not explicitly make this point) on the mind–brain identity theory, which must rely on a mechanistic interpretation that eliminates purpose in causality, the factor of an agent’s *intentions* would have to be eliminated from the explanatory framework entirely. Such things as intentions, and for that matter *agents* having intentions, and the determining character traits of such agents as they manifest at the present stage of that agent’s development, belong to the “folk psychology” which cognitive science dismisses. But it is precisely there, Braude holds, where we must look for satisfactory explanations of behavior.

We see then a stark contrast between the space within which the cognitive scientist expects to find explanations of behavior (whether

physical space or computational space), and the space within which human life really takes place and which Braude insists must be taken into account in order for behavior to take place at all. Braude refers to this “action space” as one that can accommodate the *larger patterns of action* to be taken into account in any explanation (p. 59).

So now the dimensionality of “action space” begins to loom rather large. It looks less and less like a metaphorical space and more and more like a literal kind of space. Just as physical space accommodates energies and material particles and is defined geometrically, action space accommodates different sorts of things, such as intentions, agents, personality characteristics, and so on, that do not fit into the geometric, purposeless nature of physical space—and that is exactly why consciousness itself is generally problematic and often even denied existence in reductionist accounts. Braude’s bringing action space into the discussion vividly highlights this critical point. To put the idea rather bluntly: *You cannot reduce action space to physical space*. And certainly the next question would be: What then *is* the relation between action space and physical space? And how might one answer such a question?

These, I believe, are very profound questions right on the cutting edge of the problem of the relation of science to humanity. And this brings me to the main point I would like to make. Taken not in isolation, but as a whole body of careful philosophical work, the essays in this book are literally overflowing with what I might call “idea potential.” I could not read any of them very far without being stimulated to think more about this or that point in this or that essay, and also about the potential for new ideas stemming from the relations *between* the essays. So I must beg the pardon of the author as I use this Review to illustrate this point by engaging in a kind of thought experiment which comes to mind when considering the potentials inherent in Braude’s concept of “action space” and its relation to his essays on paranormal phenomena—particularly to the seventh essay

### **Action Space and Situations**

The “larger patterns of action” accommodated by action space I understand to be the *situations* wherein behavior occurs: Action space is the space that accommodates *situations*. Behavior does not occur in a vacuum. It is always found within a *situation*. In a folk–psychological explanation of behavior, understanding the situation is an absolute necessity. This is essentially the reason for Braude’s conclusion that ICT cannot come up to the mark. It cannot handle situations.

A situation in this sense is not a static rigid entity, such as the placement of actors in various positions on a stage prior to raising the curtain. It only

becomes a *situation* when the actors move, speak, exhibit intentions and traits of character, and respond to one another as the course of their separate and concurrent actions and intentions unfolds in time. These actions also unfold from the past, reflecting what *was* going on, what brought them there in the first place and from whence they came. A situation is a *temporal existence*, within which each actor is moving—both physically and psychologically—in the fulfilment of individual motivations, interests, intentions, and reasons. And their anticipations of possible future results are also part of the situation. To describe a situation is to describe a temporal field of human experience.<sup>2</sup> Duplicating such situations in a laboratory setting, or in the form of some sort of preprogrammed logical structure inside the brain is patently impossible, as Braude points out, not only because of the variables involved but also because such things as agents and the intentions of agents do not (and cannot) compute. Braude effectively argues that no programming of a computer-brain, however sophisticated, can deal with such a situational space, and he has chosen “action space” to describe the wider and deeper milieu necessary for adequate explanation.<sup>3</sup>

To this point of Braude’s I would add: A machine is never in a situation.

### **Esoteric and Paranormal Considerations**

Now then, we are ready to take a look at what happens if we consider action space from a *non-metaphorical* standpoint. We suppose, for the sake of argument, that action space has an ontological existence; that it is a dimension of reality in addition to the scientifically recognized three dimensions of physical space and one of time.<sup>4</sup> Then Braude’s concept of action space will reveal a possible relation to the discussion of paranormal phenomena found in the seventh essay. To suggest that there is yet another dimension (and possibly more than one other) which is not a geometric dimension and which accommodates fundamental properties of human behavior would be to shake the foundations of the scientific view of the universe, wherein such a thing as a *situational* space having the ontological status of a dimension must be nonexistent and must remain entirely metaphorical—if for no other reason than that it is by definition capable of containing agents having intentions.

Let us be daring enough, then, to extrapolate from Braude’s idea and suggest that action space might be an additional but unrecognized (non-geometric) dimension with true ontological status.<sup>5</sup> This must bring us to consideration of the relation between action space and the “spaces” called in esoteric and clairvoyant literature “planes of being” such as the so-called astral plane.<sup>6</sup> I don’t know whether this extrapolation would meet with the author’s approval, but after all it is his idea that brings it to mind. And if a

connection between action space and the astral plane were to be speculatively entertained, it seems to provide a link between Braude's analysis of what can *go on* in action space (i.e. in *situations*), the testimony of psychics and clairvoyants, and the paranormal phenomena discussed in his seventh essay.

To take one example, consider this passage from that essay. The seventh essay is not confined to intellectual analysis and conceptual criticism; it is creative speculation. In it Braude considers the possibility that occurrences of PK (psychokinesis) and ESP (extrasensory perception), as well as of other psi phenomena, may be more prevalent and active in ordinary social situations outside the laboratory context than is ordinarily thought, and he explores the implications of such an idea.

. . . if we accept the best nonexperimental evidence for observable (or macro) PK, then we have reason to believe that humans can intervene in day-to-day occurrences . . . everyday PK might blend smoothly and imperceptively into ordinary surrounding events, and real-life PK might affect or cause events of a sort that we usually believe are independent of PK (e.g., heart attacks, car crashes, good or bad "luck," ordinary decisions and volitions, and both healing and illness). (pp. 184–185)

Braude further speculates that psi events like ESP and PK may be *unconsciously* carried out by those involved in a social situation—even to the extent of being triggered by the unconscious purposes and emotions of individuals in that milieu, for positive or destructive reasons (p. 183).

. . . we might be living in a world where we need to fear a profound lack of mental privacy, the direct psychic influence of others' malevolent thoughts, and the potential and daunting responsibility for the psychic efficacy of our own uncontrollable unsavory impulses and desires. (pp. 187–189)

What is remarkable about Braude's speculation is that his concept of action space very closely matches the descriptions in occult literature having to do with the alleged astral plane: The sorts of things that happen in action space and those alleged to happen in the astral plane have a rather startling similarity. I must pause here however to dispel one likely misinterpretation. I am *not* suggesting that the concept of action space somehow supports or verifies the metaphysical menagerie of the occultist. I would rather suggest that what the occultist clothes in obscure metaphysical guise may be demystified, or normalized, by Braude's notion of action space. But with this I am opening a very large field of study, which I will not be able to explore in great detail. All I can do here is to make some suggestions. I will therefore try just briefly to outline the similarities I have noticed. I will focus

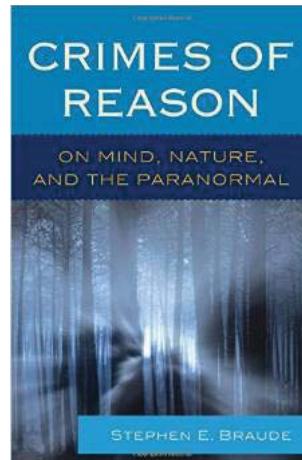
on just one text of esoteric or occult literature, the detailed kabbalistic interpretation of the Tarot by Mouni Sadhu (pen name of the polish occultist Mieczyslaw Sudowski) in his book *The Tarot* (Sadhu 1962).

Suppose we look closely (with our third eye, if you please) at the following hypothetical situation. We are at the site of a plane crash in a remote location. A group of surviving passengers is gathered around one of their number who is a doctor and who is deciding whether she should operate immediately to save the life of a severely injured passenger (CEO of a large corporation), or whether it is too dangerous to attempt such an operation in these circumstances.

Now let's look at this as a *situation* in action space. Is the doctor's decision—and her ultimate behavior—separate from the wishes, anticipations, and concerns of the surrounding group? One of the group is agitating for them to form a protective perimeter for protection against a native tribe whose frenetic drumming can be heard in the distance. Another is begging for the doctor's attention to her child who has a nosebleed and is in hysterics. Others are giving encouragement and unwanted advice to the doctor. Can we describe this situation as a kind of *vortex* of energies in action space? And isn't the ultimate action to be taken by the doctor either in opposition to some of the distractions in this vortex, or concordant with some of the supportive energies that are swirling about?

Well, that swirl or vortex of impulses, agitations, desires, motivations, and energies matches a kind of existence on the astral plane that is called by the occultist a *tourbillon*, described as a kind of "astral" vortex, a "creation of force" which has to be managed by someone caught up within it by "finding the point of support for the tourbillon on the physical plane" (Sadhu 1962:29). I would say that this "tourbillon" is what I have called a *situation*. The doctor must find the pivotal point of her decision within the turbulence of the action space and manifest it in behavior in physical space.

Now let's add Braude's idea, in his seventh essay, of various psychic influences that may be swirling around the doctor (and perhaps also emanating from the doctor, and from the patient as well), including manifestations of ESP and PK that are being produced unconsciously by different individuals in the group. And suppose that at least one, or maybe several, individuals in the group happen to be sworn enemies of the patient





and their combined psychic energy is unconsciously exerting a PK influence that might cause the patient to die—an influence that the doctor, in action space, must find a way to resist.

Braude's speculations include such negative impulses as well as benign ones, all of which could be happening in the action space, or the astral plane, or whatever you want to call it. In the esoteric metaphysics of the astral plane, all kinds of forces, reified as entities, are named, and many of them are inimical. The "body" of a person as it exists on the astral plane is called an astrosome. Translating to an action space context, we can say that this "body" is what we understand as a self, having intentions and all the other properties that make up a living human being. (The physical body of this self can be described by physical science, but the astrosome of the person cannot.)

There are aggregates (called egregors) of astrosomes, which are collective entities (e.g., like corporations or clubs), some of which may have destructive purposes. The Magus (a person skilled at perceiving astrosomes and egregors) can learn methods for warding off these destructive entities. Translating, the doctor may be able to deal with the crying, nosebleeding child and her mother's demands, and may be able to focus her concentration enough to resist the PK impulses being directed toward her by the egregor of those present who would like to kill the patient. And so on. Sadhu's book outlines all these sorts of things that exist in what we can call action space, and even gives a way in which the assailed individual can make a "magic sword" with which to combat them—actually a metaphorical "sword" implying enhancement of concentration (which is just what the doctor needs to save the patient) (Sadhu 1962:60).

Well, regrettably I do not have enough space here to go into all the parallels between what is said by the occultist and what Braude describes as happenings in action space. I will however add one very interesting factor. In discussing action space, Braude says that both behaviorist and ICT explanations of behavior fail because "both bodily movements and the posited inner causes [in those respective kinds of explanations] occur at too low a *level of description* to adequately classify and systematize behavior" (p. 61, my emphasis).

So where we have in occultism the three chief planes of being, the Physical, Astral, and Mental, in Braude's analysis we find different "levels of description." But what are these "levels" and how are they related? I have seen this device, appealing to levels of description, many times in such discussions, but I have always found that the question as to the relation of these "levels" (call them planes?) to reality and to each other is not forthcoming. Perhaps we might look at what the occultist says:

The astral plane is, according to definition, mixed with the physical and mental planes. They interpenetrate one another. So in the astral there must be visible the reflections of those planes, which correspond to its sphere. (Sadhu 1962:47)

So Braude might have proceeded a step further. Instead of three planes of metaphysical reality, we would have dimensions of the world to be dealt with on three levels of description: physical space, action space, and mental space. These, following Sadhu, are “mixed” and must “interpenetrate one another.” But “mixed” and “interpenetrate” are unexplained metaphors. I cannot take this further here because of space limitation, but I will give a hint. The nature of the relation between the “planes” or levels of description is contained in the final sentence of the Sadhu quote above about how each of the levels is “reflected” in the others.

This must bring my Review to an end. I hope that I have shown the depth of the waters which Braude has stirred up by his penetrating analyses, and encouraged others to follow yet other paths through the essays in this book.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Tron* (1982), produced by Walt Disney Studios, directed by Steven Lisberger, and starring Jeff Bridges, was nominated for two Oscar Awards.
- <sup>2</sup> For a corresponding analysis of the nature of a situation with regard to explanatory value, see Dewey (1938:66–67).
- <sup>3</sup> Philosophers make a distinction between mere movement and action. An action is a movement with intent. A machine makes movements, but only an agent can perform actions. As a result, the expression “action space” would indicate a space that can accommodate agents with intentions.
- <sup>4</sup> The dimensions of physical space are defined as directions 180 degrees apart used in determining the location of a physical object. The dimension of time has been in effect subsumed under the same definition, as really a fourth “direction” for the determination of position. An action space, in contrast, would not be found by “going in yet another direction,” but by looking for a different layer of reality.
- <sup>5</sup> What I mean by non-geometric here, is a dimension not defined by one or more additional “spatial” dimensions, such as the ten dimensions in string theory, where the extra dimensions are geometrically defined (see note 4).
- <sup>6</sup> I would caution the reader, though, not to assume that this means acceptance of the esoteric metaphysical representations of the “astral

plane” as it is usually understood on the part of aficionados of occult practices.

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### Post-Publication Note

My interpretation of the extent of Braude’s “Action Space” goes somewhat beyond what Braude himself indicates. He appears to limit “Action Space” to the space of possibilities envisioned by the participants in making a decision for choice of action. My argument is that it is not possible to separate the anticipations of the actors in the dramatic situation from the other relevant factors, which are identified in detail in this Review.