

ESSAY REVIEW

Three Routledge Reissues in Philosophy and Parapsychology

Lectures on Psychical Research: Incorporating the Perrott Lectures Given in Cambridge University in 1959 and 1960 by C. D. Broad. Routledge, 1962/2012. 450 pp. + xi. \$150 (hardcover), \$46.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-0-415-61072-8 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-415-61086-5 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-203-83187-8 (e-book).

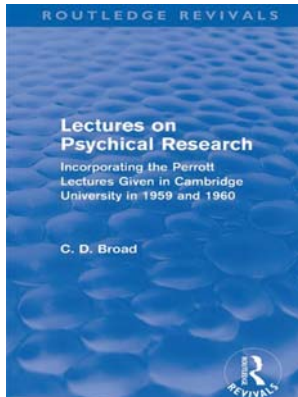
Matter, Mind and Meaning by Whately Carington. Routledge, 1949/2014. 258 pp. \$120.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-13-882491-1.

Brain and Mind: Modern Concepts of the Nature of Mind edited by J. R. Smythies. Routledge, 1965/2014. 272 pp. + x. \$120.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-1-13-882494-2.

With very little fanfare (as far as I've seen), Routledge has republished three books in the relatively recent history of psychical research. All are available in quite expensive hardback versions, and Broad's book is also mercifully available as a less expensive (but hardly bargain-priced) paperback. Moreover, all three can be purchased as e-books, but don't expect bargains there either. As of this writing, the best Kindle price I saw for Smythies' and Carington's book is \$92, although Broad's can be had for about \$35.

Broad's book (included in Routledge's "Revival" series) is especially valuable for its detailed and probing discussions of OBEs (out of body experiences), apparitions, and mediumistic evidence for postmortem survival. The book was intended originally to serve as a state-of-the-debate presentation of the evidence for psi generally (excluding PK). But unfortunately, the discussion of experimental evidence was limited to S. G. Soal's subsequently discredited card-guessing tests. However, that still leaves more than 300 pages of superb presentation and analyses of various strands of spontaneous case material and mediumistic investigations.

Make no mistake, Broad's book still warrants close attention today. Newcomers to the field (as I was when I first read it) will receive an absolutely first-rate education about the early work of the Society for Psychical Research by reading Broad's discussions of the SPR's "Census of Hallucinations," dreams and out-of-body experiences, which are

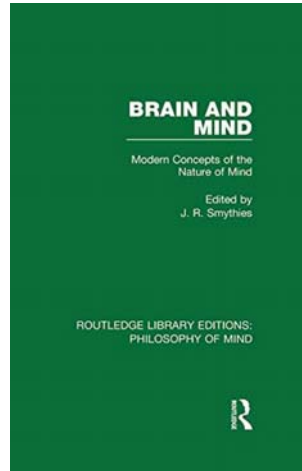


rich in case-detail, breathtaking taxonomic flourishes, and probing theoretical analysis. The same may be said about his discussion of trance mediumship, which focuses on the cases of Mrs. Leonard, Mrs. Willett, and Mrs. Warren Elliott. And in his Epilogue, “Human Personality, and the Question of the Possibility of Its Survival of Bodily Death,” Broad also offers a sophisticated analysis of the implications of survival evidence for our understanding of the mind.

The Epilogue (indeed, the entire book) is too subtle and rich in detail to be adequately summarized in this three-part Essay Review. For now I’ll just note that readers will find much to savor and also much to challenge. As an example of the former, in discussing what it is to be a person, Broad helpfully distinguishes three different kinds or levels of “streams of experience”: the personal, the animal, and the biotic (p. 391). And as an example of his controversial assertions, Broad argues that “*apart from and prior to all theory, it is a known fact* that a human being is a psychophysical unit, having two mutually irreducible but most intimately interrelated aspects, viz. the bodily and the mental” (p. 287) (*italics added*). Although I happen to agree with Broad’s claim about the mutual irreducibility of these two components, I doubt that Broad was justified in claiming either that this is a known fact or that this is a pre-theoretical commitment in this or in any domain of discourse. Indeed, although that metaphysical claim may be presupposed by some theories, it nevertheless seems to be paradigmatically theoretical itself. After all, those taking the evidence for postmortem survival seriously represent a wide spectrum of philosophical positions, including various flavors of dualism, panpsychism, and physicalism. Some approaches to survival, therefore, reject the mutual irreducibility of the mental and physical.

Smythies’ anthology is structured as a dialogue on the relation between mind and brain between several prominent theoreticians of the day—four philosophers (H. H. Price, C. J. Ducasse, Antony Flew, and Anthony Quinton), one neuroanatomist (Hartwig Kuhlenbeck), one neurologist (Lord Russel Brain), one psychiatrist (Smythies), one psychologist (John Beloff), and a cyberneticist (Donald M. MacKay). It begins by reprinting part of Price’s oft-cited (but I’d say overrated) paper “Survival and the Idea of ‘Another World’” (Price 1953), whose merits Smythies and philosopher Antony Flew then debate (with responses by Price). *JSE*

readers may already know that this is the paper in which Price argues that the concept of a disembodied life subjectively similar to our own is at least intelligible, contrary to what many skeptics critical of survivalist claims have alleged. Price claimed that a dreamlike world of images, supplemented by telepathic interactions between the deceased, could provide a surviving mind with a first-person analogue to our subjective ante-mortem existence. However, as I've noted elsewhere (Braude 2009), Price in fact offers no help to the survivalist. That's because he doesn't explain "how postmortem individuals manage to acquire veridical and apparently perspectival awareness of *this* world. In fact, Price makes no effort to explain how the deceased, locked into their own exclusively postmortem nexus of paranormal causality, interact with the living to produce *evidence* of their survival" (Braude 2009:201).



The remaining papers in the volume are as follows: The Identity Hypothesis: A Critique (Beloff); Some Aspects of the Brain–Mind Relationship (Lord Brain); Minds, Matter and Bodies (Ducasse); A Rational Animal (Flew); The Concept of Consciousness in Neurological Epistemology (Kuhlenbeck); Mechanism and Mind (McKay); Mind and Matter (Quinton); and The Representative Theory of Perception (Smythies). Contributors comment on the papers and also reply to the comments. Ideally, one would like to think that this kind of dialogue leads to some sort of progress, but as one reviewer of the original version of the book noted, "Although this adds to the interest of the book, and gives it a unity it would otherwise have lacked, one is not left with the impression of philosophers and scientists making much progress with one another" (Vesey 1966:382). Regrettably, that situation has changed very little in the nearly half-century since this book first appeared. In any case, although the philosophy of mind and empirical studies of consciousness have both advanced considerably in the interim, many of the core underlying issues remain the same, and so the various papers in this volume still have something to offer.

The weakest book in this trio is Carington's. It's actually an uncompleted monograph on philosophy, only a small part of which traces the consequences of Carington's epistemology for psi research (actually, primarily for our thinking about telepathy). The book's first five chapters were more or less finished at the time of Carington's death. The work was

then put into publishable form by H. H. Price, who added a few footnotes and cross-references to those chapters, contributed a brief Preface, and did what he could to complete Chapter 6 on Mind and Matter from fragmentary pencil notes written during Carington's final illness. Carington had intended that chapter to be the philosophical core of the book, but unfortunately that chapter is only a few pages long. So Price also added three appendices, which I gather were unpublished manuscripts. The first, Don't Shoot the Philosophers—Yet, is a more popular and accessible version of Chapter 2, The Failure of Metaphysics. Appendix 2, Life after Death, complements the material in Chapter 4, Mind. And Appendix 3, Does To-Morrow Exist?, presents some musings about precognition, parts of which complement Carington's theory of normal perception in Chapter 4 (and which suffer from the same defects as those noted below).

One gets the impression from reading this opus that it might have been written during a period when Carington realized his life was drawing to a close, and that he was seizing the opportunity to get various matters off his chest. There's a clear vein of anger running through the book, expressed through a steady stream of disdainful remarks—rants, actually—about the state of philosophy generally and metaphysics in particular. I have no problem with that, but overall I found Carington's book somewhat annoying, and annoying in the same way as many advanced student essays. Carington had obviously read enough philosophy to have detailed opinions about it, but his grasp of the relevant issues nevertheless remained rather rudimentary.

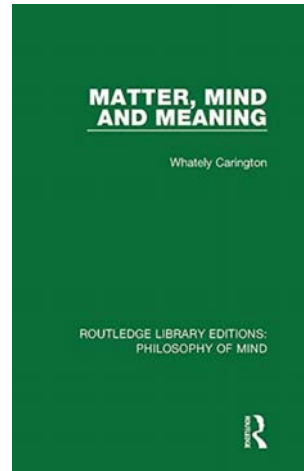
Before explaining why I say that, I must also note that, to his credit, Carington offers some delightfully cynical barbs and other choice comments. My favorite: "Spinoza . . . , though an archetypal metaphysician, can hardly be read without profit and a certain uplifting of the soul. But Spinoza was a very great man, whose thoughts about what he called 'God' were so far in advance of his age (and for the most part of ours also) that he was promptly denounced as an atheist; and *he probably could not have written a treatise on sewage analysis without infusing it with his own austere nobility*" (italics added) (p. 13).

At any rate, despite the occasional well-deserved chuckle and felicitous turn of phrase, the substance of Carington's criticisms is quite thin. He proudly aligns himself with the views of the logical positivists and complains repeatedly about the writings of philosophers (apart from logicians). His primary philosophical target is a certain style of rationalistic metaphysical inquiry (classic examples of which would be the works of Leibniz and Spinoza) that was already becoming passé in his day, and which at the time he wrote his book had already been effectively criticized

by the American pragmatists (among others), who were shrewd enough to realize that not all approaches to metaphysics deserved to be scuttled. In fact, they realized that metaphysical commitments are ultimately *unavoidable* in trying to understand the empirical world. What the pragmatists realized, and what Carington apparently failed to understand, was that every branch of science rests on untested and individually untestable philosophical assumptions, methodological, logical, and metaphysical (see Braude 2014). But in that case, all science rests upon the kinds of philosophical claims to which Carington objects. Moreover and somewhat curiously, although Carington seems to have read quite a lot of philosophy, he apparently didn't read the brilliant works of one of his contemporaries, R. G. Collingwood, whose *An Essay on Metaphysics* might have clarified a great deal for him about the nature of both science and philosophy—perhaps especially Collingwood's emphasis on the role of what he called science and philosophy's "absolute presuppositions," and also his well-known analysis of three senses of the word *cause* (Collingwood 1940/1998).

Moreover, Carington's positive epistemological views rest on a notoriously shaky foundation. First, he maintains that we can and should fall back on "hard and 'atomic' statements of fact [about] the irreducible constituents of what we are actually aware of, or do immediately know (cognize)" (p. 15). Indeed, he believes that rational empirical inquiry ought to begin with such observational claims. But empirical statements, at best, are always conditionally, rather than absolutely or categorically, acceptable. That is, there are no empirical statements that are inherently irreducible or simple and that themselves are not undergirded by, or inextricably linked to, an extensive network of assumptions or commitments, the totality of which can only be evaluated pragmatically.

Furthermore, when he explains what his candidates for hard and atomic statements are, Carington embraces a rather naïve sense-datum theory of perception, a form of causal realism positing a Humean "veil of ideas" between us and the objects, the impressions of which (or the properties of which) we report. For example, Carington writes, "we must examine the situation known as perceiving a material object. When we do so, we find that the only entities of [sic] the existence of which we can be absolutely sure are certain 'sensations' (e.g., visual) or 'sensa'" (p. 20). Ironically, that



view is the source of some of the bad philosophizing to which Carington objects, and Carington doesn't see that it leads very quickly to solipsism and relies on the kind of metaphysical commitment against which he'd been ranting—in this case, a commitment to the existence of other minds. (For an account of how that works, see Aune 1970, 1985). Moreover, it's a view that Wittgenstein, for example, attacked successfully in his later philosophy, showing that our use of terms referring to subjective impressions and ideas is actually parasitic on inter-subjective agreements about language-use applied to public objects. See, e.g., the famous beetle-in-the-box example from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1955, para. 293ff).

For those who might be interested—and especially because many still think our most basic and unimpeachable knowledge claims concerns our first-person inner episodes—let me briefly explain. Wittgenstein didn't make the point very clearly (he was struggling to formulate some important points for the first time), but in a nutshell his view was this. Wittgenstein writes:

Suppose that everyone had a box with something in it which we call a "beetle." No one can ever look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box.

So consider: In such a situation, how is it possible for people to communicate about what they have in their respective boxes? In fact, how is it possible for people to *know* what's in their private boxes? The answer is: only by agreeing to use the term *beetle* with respect to some ostensibly identified public object. We still won't know what the other person has in his/her box (i.e. what the person is experiencing privately, what the person's qualia might be), but this is the only way the term can have a real use. Now replace the term *beetle* by the word *pain* or *red*. The meaning of these terms—hence our knowledge of what's in the box or what we're experiencing—can't be fixed solely by connecting it to what's in our private boxes, as many sense-datum epistemologies claim, because there's no way to compare what we're referring to and determine whether the terms are being used correctly or not. That's possible only when the meanings of those terms had been linked to a public object of some kind, such as a beetle one could point to, or something language-users could agree is a red object or an example of pain behavior. That's not to say that Wittgenstein is offering any positive theory of meaning to replace the (still lamentably fashionable) subjectivist theory he's criticizing. In fact, the later Wittgenstein opposed the idea that meanings can be given merely by making a connection (private or public)

between a word and a thing. Rather, he's simply noting that the terms we use to pick out inner states need to be anchored in intersubjective practices to have any use at all. In that respect, knowledge can be said to move from outer to inner, not the reverse.

But, back to the books themselves. The clear winner in this trio is Broad's classic text. The other two books are now rather quaint, although Smythies' volume still offers rewards. Carington's book, I regret to say, is primarily of historical interest.

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