

CRIMES OF REASON: ON MIND, NATURE, AND THE PARANORMAL by Stephen E. Braude. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 2014. Pp. xii + 221. \$70.00 (hardback). ISBN 978-1-4422-3575-5.

In my review of Braude's first book, I indicated that he would make a significant contribution to parapsychology. Although we expect continuing contributions from the now retired Braude, this collection of articles, mostly published previously, presents a natural time to confirm my prediction almost four decades ago.

This book brings together articles that span much of Braude's broad range of interests. In the excellent Preface, he indicates that the title of the book has a two-fold meaning. It refers to the inadequacy of mechanistic approaches adopted in the behavioral sciences, but also in some cases by parapsychologists. On the other hand, it points to the charges by Braude's critics, who have accused him of engaging in pseudoscience or in other forms of irrationality. The book offers a defense of this thinking in both areas.

The book falls naturally into several sections. In the first three chapters (and merging into the fourth), he argues for four themes that are basic to his approach within philosophy and parapsychology. These are: (a) the poverty of mechanistic theories to explain behavior, (b) an adequate psychological explanation, (c) the importance of and nature of dissociation, and (d) an understanding of human abilities. In Chapters 4 and 5, Braude discusses dissociation and multiple personality, whereas in the final three chapters, he discusses parapsychological topics directly. I will focus on the first section; perhaps, as a fellow philosopher, I see Braude setting up the assumptions leading to the conclusions in most of these later chapters.

Chapter 1 discusses memory trace theory. Yet, it also introduces and argues for what turns out to be a foundational issue for Braude, the inadequacy of mechanistic theory. As this position is used often in the following chapters, either explicitly or implicitly, I will spend a little time on this argument.

Braude argues against the memory trace theory of explanation, which is used widely in philosophy, psychology, and neurophysiology. This kind of mechanistic explanation has risen almost to the level of being taken as heuristic in these fields, but this is because its assumptions have never been deeply examined. It is part of a larger

explanatory strategy that proposes that human behavior is a result of processes occurring in the human body, typically the brain. So, one merely has to analyze the causes of human behavior in terms of these (e.g., brain events) to produce an adequate explanation. Typically, this kind of explanation will assert that the reason I have a certain mental image of Larry LeShan now, let's say, is because decades ago I met Larry and the experience produced a trace in my brain, some sort of physiological engram that I can point to in order to produce an adequate causal explanation of the mental image I have today. It is that memory trace that produces my present mental image. This sort of explanatory strategy is basic to psychological explanation in the behavioral sciences, but Braude argues that such an engram is an impossible object.

Braude is careful to point out what he is against. He is not arguing against memory traces because they are often conceived of as physical, as located in the brain. His argument is not against materialism but against mechanistic explanation of behavior. It doesn't matter what the hardware is, whether these traces are physical objects or holographic objects; rather, the problem is that the objects demanded by this kind of mechanistic theory cannot exist. Braude is not objecting to the view that the brain plays some function in human behavior, but merely to the view that the brain stores memories. Braude seems comfortable with the view that the brain plays a role, perhaps an important one, in mediating behavior. Using an example from an old graduate school buddy of mine, John Heil, Braude describes a person who throws a party and wants to remember all the people at the party, so he asks each of them to leave an object, a trace, by which he can remember them. Let's say it was a photocopy of their driver's license. But if your driver's license photo is like mine, it at best resembles what I'd look like in a mug shot. And maybe it was an old license, so it was my decade-old self. Yes, you can still (barely) recognize me, but it looks as if you need another memory (or more) to be able to interpret the photo as being of me to connect the trace with me, but then we need another trace to connect those traces, and we end in a regression. What is needed to avoid this regression is an unambiguous representational calling card, as it were, a representation that is not interpreted. But such an object does not exist. All representational objects can be interpreted. As Braude says, "representing is not something objects can do all by themselves; and representation can't be an intrinsic or inherent relation between the thing represented and the thing that represents it" (p. 5).

Why is this rejection of memory traces important for parapsychology? Braude points out that William Roll explicitly developed a view of post-mortem survival based on memory traces. And, it turns out that this view is reflected implicitly in Rupert Sheldrake's theory, which Braude turns to in Chapter 2.

Braude says that he was surprised to find that Sheldrake's theory, proposed as an alternative to mechanistic theories, actually employs some of the same standard mechanistic errors. Sheldrake proposed his theory of morphogenetic fields as the only viable alternative to mechanistic and vitalistic theories to explain biological morphogenesis (in general, the issue of biological development of organisms from simple structures, and even the continued development of organisms when a part of the organism is removed). Sheldrake proposes that each morphic unit has its own morphogenetic field, and these fields affect morphic units through morphic resonance across time and space.

Braude argues that Sheldrake seems to take morphic units and morphogenetic fields as natural kinds, as things that exist outside of context, as a "context-independent set of natural furniture" in the world. But, as Braude argued in the previous chapter, there are no such natural kinds. Objects are interpreted by humans to be objects of such and such sort, and not, for example, simply parts of larger objects. Objects are distinguished as objects within a certain context, for a certain purpose, and as related to certain concerns. Braude argues that to think there are natural kinds is to commit the Platonic error of essentialism, to think that nature is parsed inherently in certain ways as eternally separate objects with essential qualities. Sheldrake's assertion of morphic units being natural kinds is such a retreat to mechanistic thinking. There is no inherent similarity in nature, but rather things are taken by us to be similar within certain contexts and for some purposes. Thus, even if Sheldrake's theory can adequately predict occurrences that other theories do not predict, it still cannot be used as an adequate explanation of these occurrences, according to Braude.

Chapter 3 is a defense of folk psychology. Most explanation in the behavioral sciences depends on the view that one needs to trace back a behavior to an initiating causal state inside the agent. One can readily see, however, based on the previous chapters, that such an approach is mechanistic and therefore flawed for the reasons given before. The interesting tack that Braude takes in this chapter is to apply that rationale to argue that such a mechanistic approach is inadequate to explain a person's character. We normally explain a behavior by saying that a person is

honest, or compassionate, or tactless, and so on. But mechanistic explanation fails to explain such character traits and dispositions. Further, in explaining a person's actions, we need to take into account what the person intended, but mechanistic explanations fail to account for such patterns of actions. Braude argues that if we say that a person is ungrateful, we can say this only against a background of knowing what alternative behaviors and intentions were possible; only in having knowledge of such "action spaces" can we characterize an action as ungrateful. Folk psychology can take into account such action spaces, a more adequate psychological explanation, whereas mechanistic explanation excludes them.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Braude turns from a discussion of the inadequacies of mechanistic explanation to a discussion of what we can learn from dissociation and from multiple personality. The point he wants to make about dissociation is how creative it is. Think, for instance, of a person being hypnotized and being told that an elephant is not in the room (while it is). The person must fill in the space that the elephant occupies to make it a "normal" perception; subjects actively deal with their world in creative ways. Further, if we extend the analysis to dissociation, in which a person must cope with expressing and maintaining an alter or alters, we see that a person not only expresses an ability that a particular alter may have, but also the character traits of the alter. One can think of Braude's conclusion as having implications for such parapsychological issues as an analysis of reincarnation, which is made more explicit in Chapter 6. I see no direct implication for parapsychology coming from Braude's Chapter 5 discussion of multiple personality and moral responsibility, so I will merely commend this chapter to you for its insight into explanation of multiple personality, which also sets the stage for a discussion of human abilities.

The final three chapters directly concern parapsychology, and they may be most interesting to the readers of this journal, but Braude uses the analyses he has given in earlier chapters as the foundation for the moves he makes in these chapters. Chapter 6 is titled "Parapsychology and the Nature of Abilities." We often think of psi as a human ability, but Braude argues that we are not clear on what the term means. Braude distinguishes three things that one might mean when using the term "ability": (a) a capacity that is universal and rudimentary, like the ability to digest food or hear; (b) an ability (as he wants to use the term) that is higher order and refers to dispositions, for example, to be able to cook but also to become a competent musician or athlete; and (c) a skill, which refers to a mastery over more organic endowments, such as sculpting a human figure or controlling one's heart rate. Because we don't know which of the three categories to place psi functioning in, we don't know what methodologies are appropriate to use to investigate it, or how we should view its occurrences. Braude makes a number of important points, and I will mention only a couple. The first is that the highest-level abilities are context dependent, so we should not expect to elicit psi on demand, nor should we expect a person who displays psychic functioning in one area to be able to display it in another; just as a musician may not be a great chef, so someone who can affect an RNG may not be able to remote view. Additionally, given the evidence from dissociation and savants, we need to be careful in assuming that special skills, such as the sudden ability to speak a foreign language, prove post-mortem survival. He concludes that "since no conventional experimental controls can prevent people from using whatever psi abilities they can muster to achieve whatever result they want ... the real trailblazers of parapsychological research will be those who recognize that conventional experimental methods and controls may be practically useless" (p. 175), and that the best experimenters will be those who simply are good observers, displaying perceptivity and sensitivity.

In Chapter 7, Braude offers "Some Thoughts on Parapsychology and Religion," although he is more concerned with nondeist (and nonreligious, it seems to me) explanations. If we really take seriously the nonexperimental evidence from psi (as he believes it is better), we find evidence for super-psi, which means we don't know the limits of PK and ESP functioning but it seems to be widespread and connect people and the environment in fundamental ways. What is most interesting to me in this chapter is what he calls naughty and sneaky psi. Many want to think that psi is used only in the service of good purposes, but if it is a human ability, we know that there are "naughty" people, as well as naughty and sneaky sides of all of us. Then we should not be surprised if we use psi negatively, even to the point of employing it unconsciously to wreak revenge.

The final chapter is more personal, as Braude reflects on the criticism he has received for his research in marginal areas (those discussed in this book). The insights and advice he offers are important for us to hear as we continue to work in this area and, presumably, continue to bear the brunt of criticism.

Braude writes with a clarity and subtlety that cannot be captured in this review. His examples are great (and copious and often funny), and he's not one to hold punches. He is subtle in his analysis but blunt in his views.

Braude's conclusions often don't conform to those of many in parapsychology, but he offers his arguments and conclusions straightforwardly and, like any good academic, urges us all to engage in the discussion. I assume that Braude will offer additional work in the field, but this book offers a nice overview of some of his important work over the past several decades; it's a fitting dessert for a grand meal. Now we'll wait and see if he offers us sherry and cigars.

HOYT EDGE

*527 Henkel Circle  
Winter Park, FL 32789, USA  
hedge@rollins.edu*