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Review

Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007. xxxi + 800 pp. Hardcover, \$79.95. by Edward F. Kelly; Emily Williams Kelly; Adam Crabtree; Alan Gauld; Michael Grosso; Bruce Greyson

Review by: Mitchell G. Ash, Horst Gundlach and Thomas Sturm

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IRREDUCIBLE MIND?

Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century

By Edward F. Kelly, Emily Williams Kelly, Adam Crabtree, Alan Gauld, Michael Grosso, and Bruce Greyson. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007. xxxi + 800 pp. Hardcover, \$79.95.

This is an unusual volume, a manifesto based on the urgent claim “that current mainstream opinion in psychology *must* change” and “causally efficacious conscious mental life” be restored “to its proper place at the center of our science” (p. xiv). What might such a book contain?

The book’s chapters are singly authored, but the *Preface* states that the volume is in essence collectively written. The book is interdisciplinary in the sense that the authors come from various fields of psychology, science studies, and psychical research; no historians of psychology or philosophers of mind are included, although some literature from these fields is used. The authors’ goal is to reshape psychology by means of a strongly dualistic theory of mind and brain. They claim that this theory is supported by empirical studies of phenomena from psychosomatic medicine, placebo effects, near-death and mystical experiences, and creative genius, among others, which, in their view, have been neglected or explained wrongly. The dualism that is supposed to come out of this is indeed challenging: Mind is depicted here as an entity independent of body or brain, with which it causally interacts and the death of which it survives.

The volume begins with a sharply worded introduction and an overview by Edward Kelly of contemporary cognitive science and the “consciousness debates.” Most interesting to us are the following chapters, which combine historical and contemporary material. Frederic W. H. Myers (1843–1901), one of the founders of psychical research, plays a central role in the book. His *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) is included with the book along with contemporary reviews as a CD-ROM, and the following chapters all try to connect with it in various ways. Emily Williams Kelly presents a lengthy discussion of Myers’s theory of personality in historical context. The following chapters by Emily Kelly and the other authors take up various aspects of what Kelly calls “psychophysiological influence,” including the phenomena listed earlier. The book’s final chapter by Edward Kelly, “Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century,” begins with a brief discussion of contemporary reviews of *Human Personality*, then reassesses Myers’s theory of personality and purports to reconcile Myers’s and James’s dualistic “filter theory” of brain–mind with contemporary cognitive neuroscience. An introductory annotated bibliography of psychical research, including literature from all sides of the highly contentious debate on this topic, concludes the volume.

Because of our particular research interests, the following comments focus mostly on historical and philosophical aspects of the volume, although we will also discuss the authors’ claims for the existence of empirical evidence for their bold claims. We begin with historical considerations and discuss in particu-

lar, though not exclusively, the work by Emily Kelly on F. W. H. Myers. Other chapters also purport to contain historical material, but the level of discussion in these cases often does not reach that of specialists in the history of psychology. Edward Kelly's account of debates on mind during his graduate student days in chapter 1, for example, might be classified more properly as material for future historians than as historical scholarship in its own right. Nor does it or the philosophical remarks in other chapters represent the current state of philosophical discussion about the mind.

Emily Kelly's chapter on Myers is a serious effort to present the basic thrust of his work and the content of his posthumous book, *Human Personality*. She corrects a number of alleged mischaracterizations of Myers's views, showing, for example, that he did not believe that mind and body were separate from one another or that refutations of physicalistic accounts of consciousness inevitably implied that exclusively mentalistic or even parapsychological accounts were correct. Rather, as Kelly shows, he sought what he called a "tertium quid," that is, a more complex, interactionistic account of what he called "supernormal phenomena," including multiple personality, mystical experiences, and the reports of mediums.

Kelly's account of the context of Myers's work is limited to intellectual history. The basic charge is familiar: that the founders of scientific psychology chose in the second half of the 19th century between two paths, science or mind, and opted for the appearance of solid science at the cost of deliberately avoiding issues such as mind over matter and life after death. The charge is not entirely unfounded. The ironic fate of William James—whose accounts of consciousness were recognized for their brilliance but whose advocacy of phenomena such as mystical experiences as worthy subjects for scientific study was rejected—is well known. Kelly faithfully reports both James's accepting account of some parapsychological phenomena and his friendly, if not entirely uncritical, account of Myers's theory of personality.

But Kelly's claims also contain serious omissions and distortions. Her account of the widespread acceptance of physicalistic accounts of mind in the 19th century lumps together varied allusions to mechanisms and causal law as though they all meant the same thing, and it even includes Darwin's evolutionary theory in the mix, although he never wrote that natural selection was a "mechanism" of anything, nor did he believe that it worked the same way as any ordinary machine. When she cites actual examples of

this supposed orthodoxy, Kelly quotes mainly biologists such as Thomas Henry Huxley or physicists like John Tyndall, not psychologists. The claim that the category of will disappeared from the 19th-century science of mind simply ignores Wilhelm Wundt, in whose psychology volition was central and whose depiction even of elementary conscious processes was explicitly voluntaristic (Woodward, 1982). In addition, Kelly appears to be unaware that another leading German psychologist, Carl Stumpf—a friend of James—advocated a form of mind-body interactionism in his presidential address to the International Congress of Psychology in 1896 (Stumpf, 1897; revised version in Stumpf, 1910).

Readers get only hints that Myers was not alone but part of an international movement including advocates of spiritism, theosophy, Christian science, and much more (see Oppenheim, 1985; cf. Coon, 1992), and we learn nothing about the multiple reasons for the emergence of these movements at that particular time. In any case, Myers is not as forgotten as the authors suppose. More than 40 years ago he received an individual entry in the eight-volume *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, alphabetically and nonetheless fittingly, though surely coincidentally, situated between the entries "My death" and "Mysticism, History of." The author of the entry relates that he "possessed to a high degree the Victorian wish to retain a belief in god and exemplified one of the more extreme forms of the Victorian obsession with immortality" (Schneewind, 1967, p. 419; see also Hamilton, 2009).

We turn now to some philosophical—meaning conceptual, ontological, and methodological—problems of the volume. In the *Introduction*, unnamed people not ready to recognize the validity of dualistic claims or the value of psychical research are referred to with assorted labels such as *mainstream*, *orthodoxy*, *mechanist*, *physicalist*, *narrowly physicalist*, *scientism*, *materialistic dogma*, and various combinations of these, such as "the materialistic consensus" (p. xiii), "currently recognized boundaries of 'accepted' science" (p. xiv), "current mainstream opinion" (pp. xiv, xxvi), "current materialistic synthesis" (p. xiv), "current scientific orthodoxy" (p. xxviii), "current materialistic synthesis" (p. xxviii), "current scientific consensus" (p. xxviii), and "biological naturalism" (p. 605). None of these terms is sufficiently explicated, which creates problems even for basic claims of the authors. Let us sketch five such problems.

First, the authors—here Edward F. Kelly—maintain that their arguments will provide a solution to

“the mind–body problem” (p. 1). Which problem? Philosophers no longer speak of a single “mind–body problem” but identify various problems. Some have to do with the fact that the term *mind* is not univocal. Depending on how one defines it, one may think of the problem of how something nonextended can be identical with something extended (one of the Cartesian challenges), the problem of how mental states can be *about* something, that is, how they can be intentional (Brentano’s problem), how mental states such as beliefs or desires can be *reasons* that have physical effects such as bodily behavior even if mental concepts are not reducible to physical concepts (Donald Davidson’s problem; cf. Davidson, 1980, chapters 11–12), or how material states can be *conscious*. It often appears that the authors claim to address the latter, which is today sometimes identified as the “hard problem” in the philosophy of mind (Chalmers, 1996). But this, again, is not just one problem. For instance, it is one thing to ask whether material states are identical to phenomenally conscious states (e.g., the experience of something as red rather than green, a problem hinted at by John Locke and advanced recently by Chalmers) or how it is possible to have a subjective or first-person perspective on the world (Thomas Nagel’s problem; see Nagel, 1974). In any case, these problems all depend on what we mean by *material states*, a question about which there is also little clarity (see Montero, 1999). The authors often fail to specify just which of these—or other—issues they are trying to address.

Second, the authors want to reject materialism, apparently in all of its varieties. However, they are not fully clear about the state of the art concerning objections to materialism. Let us consider the variety of materialism called the identity theory, the view that mind and body are the same entity. A major objection Kelly et al. present and accept (on p. 4f.) is what is usually called the argument from multiple realizability. It is directed against the “type identity” thesis, that is, the strong materialistic claim that each *type* or kind of mental state is identical to, or can be reduced to, a certain type of brain state. As the objection goes, mental states cannot be type-identical to brain states because the “mind–brain system in general is enormously adaptable or ‘plastic.’” (p. 4). Friends of the argument from multiple realizability say that the very same type of mental state can be realized by a variety of physical states. An analogy may be helpful here: The same text can be found either in a book or on a computer; that is, the same text is realized by differ-

ent physical devices. Likewise, it is conceivable that mental states can be realized by different types of brain states.

However, does that suffice to refute the type identity theory? Various objections would have to be considered. To begin, to conceive a possibility is not enough. If we do not yet know which types of brain states are identical with which types of mental states, that does not imply that an identity between them does not exist. Furthermore, there may be limits to the multiple realizability of mental states. Plausibly, there are constraints for which brain states are candidates for being realizers of, say, my experiencing a certain color (e.g., the brain states need to have certain causal properties to be able to realize an experience of a certain color; Kim, 1992). Finally, it may be that the assumptions of type identity and of multiple realizability are *not* incompatible. The widespread assumption that they are incompatible can be undermined by the quite reasonable demand to differentiate a bit. Perhaps we can and should group together certain brain states into neurophysiological types without this requiring that these types share all microphysical properties. These neurophysiological types might then be identical to mental types while allowing for multiple realization at the microphysical level (Pauen, 2003). To sum up, the authors have not argued clearly and cogently against their main opponent, materialism. Although the type-identity theory and other forms of materialism may be unconvincing, Kelly et al. have not actually shown this.

Third, the authors apparently think that all psychologists have accepted the claim that consciousness is nothing more than an epiphenomenon of brain activity. In the few cases in which explicit statements of this supposed orthodoxy are cited in the *Introduction*, the authors are not psychologists but neurophysiologists, such as Antonio Damasio (cited on p. xx), or their philosophical supporters, such as the Churchlands (see p. 51n). Moreover, what or whom do the authors mean by the all-embracing term *psychology*? One of us has described psychology as a Protean discipline, “suspended between methodological orientations derived from the physical and biological sciences and a subject matter extending into the social and human sciences” (Ash, 2003, p. 251). A volume edited by two of us, reviewed in this issue (Ash & Sturm, 2007), discusses a number of methods used in psychology, including the use of “paper tools” such as questionnaires—hardly a technique based on a commitment to an ontological physicalism. Do the authors really believe that all of

the more than 150,000 professional psychologists, or even all of the thousands of basic scientists who still call themselves by that name, really accept “the materialistic consensus”? Some evidence might have made such assertions more credible.

Fourth, let us turn to the authors’ acceptance of the so-called filter theory of the mind: The mind is “not generated by the brain but instead focused, limited, and constrained by it” (p. xxx). In this view the brain is something like a radio receiver or a television set receiving what the immaterial mind emanates. As a defective receiver reduces the quality of what it receives, so does a defective or impaired brain. So the good news is that Alzheimer disease may act on your brain, but your mind may stay unaffected. The bad news is that you may not be sure that what your brain receives is emitted by your mind. It may stem from somebody else’s mind, your neighborhood psychic, your deceased relative, or whatever free-floating mind happens to have the proper vibration. Paranormal phenomena are supposed to be evidence for this position, but we will discuss these in a moment.

The “receiver” view of mind–brain interaction may appear unlikely to the physicalist, but it is not impossible. Or is it? The authors do not address some objections that might be made here. For example, Wilhelm Wundt (1879, 1885) pointed to the consequences the reality of “paranormal phenomena” would have for science and technology. Astronomers, physicists, and medical scientists could never be sure whether their measurements are reliable or just results of psychokinesis. How could technicians dare to build atomic power plants or hand grenades if they would be placing themselves and their fellows at the mercy of such uncontrollable spirits by doing so? How about the attempts to find evidence for parapsychical phenomena inside and outside laboratories? Would not all failed experiments prove what they fail to prove because, as the history of parapsychology often shows, the spirits abhor to be detected by mortals and therefore interfere with attempts to establish their influence?

Finally, what about the authors’ claims that there is indeed empirical evidence in support of their dualistic “receiver” view of the mind? They cautiously hint at first that there exist “many large bodies of evidence” (p. xiv) and “well-documented empirical phenomena” (p. xxiii) of mental causation. (Of course, the physicalist does not deny that there is mental causation; quite the contrary. He just thinks it is a kind of physical causation, because mental states simply are physical states. But let us here speak as

though the occurrence of mental causation would imply dualism.) Eventually, they explain that “sufficient high-quality evidence has long since been available” in “observations adduced in the course of over a century of effort by workers in ‘psychical research’ and its somewhat desiccated modern descendant, ‘parapsychology’” (p. xxvi). Evidence is perceived to be stored in F. W. H. Myers’s book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903). It “provides impressive—and in my view, compelling—evidence for the reality of supernormal phenomena” (p. 353). There one finds “cases that seem to point to continuing personal agency, awareness, and memory on the part of the dead” and also “striking evidence for . . . the possibility of post-mortem survival” (p. 355).

Readers in search of specifics are routinely referred to the bibliographical Appendix. Readers expecting to find accounts of this research and convincing arguments that parapsychology should no longer be treated as pariah psychology will be disappointed. Emily Kelly goes through a large body of this material in chapter 3, proceeding carefully from psychosomatic medicine (anecdotal evidence of the efficacy of “the will to live,” placebo effects, and the like) to *psi* phenomena, and focusing quite properly on the question of how rather than whether such causality might take place. As she notes, certain psychosomatic phenomena in medicine are now acknowledged to be real, once clear accounts of how they are produced (i.e., of the underlying neurophysiological processes) have been provided. Yet once she gets to the point where parapsychological “facts” get into the argument, Kelly also refers the reader to the *Appendix*. For example, “It seems reasonable to extend this picture by proposing, based on the extensive evidence for *psi* (see the Appendix), that . . .” (p. 219). The same thing happens in other chapters: “Since I can here provide only the scantiest introduction to this enormous literature (see also the Appendix), I will simply summarize the principal facts about a medium cited by Myers as providing unusually powerful evidence for the presence of supernormal capacities, and even for the continued existence of the departed” (p. 357). The authors appear to have decided simply to presuppose that this highly contentious issue has already been settled.

One might worry about the tendency of younger researchers in cognition to call their field cognitive neuroscience, perhaps as a move to gain or regain respectability and thus to cede the term *psychology* to self-help and management gurus. Yet the term *cogni-*

tive neuroscience itself is plainly an indication that serious researchers have not given up on the reality of the mental. In any case, subjects' verbal reports are still taken seriously enough even by neuroscientists to be used as correlates of brain observations. That correlation does not equal causation is clear to all serious participants. It seems clear to us that research on cognition can and does remain active and scientifically fascinating, but we do not have to accept anecdotal accounts of near-death experiences or other psychological phenomena.

The authors' sincerity and the extent of their labors are beyond question. Nonetheless, after making the enormous effort needed to read this large book, we felt only fatigue and a certain sadness that nothing more convincing has been presented here.

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Yes, Irreducible

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Forum

YES, IRREDUCIBLE

The dismissive review by Ash, Gundlach, and Sturm (2010) of our book *Irreducible Mind* misses the main point. Our central argument is that contemporary physicalism—by which we mean broadly the view that there is nothing in minds and their actions not causally traceable to physical processes in brains—is falsified, empirically, by its inability to accommodate a wide variety of psychological phenomena.

We develop this argument chiefly through six heavily documented chapters covering extreme psychophysiological influence, problems in conventional trace theories of memory, psychological automatisms and secondary centers of consciousness, experiences occurring under extreme physiological conditions such as general anesthesia and cardiac arrest, genius-level creativity, and mystical and psychedelic experiences.

The reviewers inexcusably bypass all this material and focus instead on subsidiary matters. Much of their review involves criticism of historical and philosophical material provided in our *Introduction* and first two chapters, but this material was intended only to provide general background for readers who may need it, such as students, and not as an in-depth discussion of the history of psychology or the philosophy of mind (p. xiv). The reviewers also deplore our references to paranormal phenomena, which they try to portray as the main or only evidence against physicalism, but in fact we deliberately chose *not* to include a chapter on parapsychology, precisely because the empirical inadequacies of physicalism are evident whether one takes the evidence from psychical research seriously or not.

Like William James (1986), however, we do take psychical research seriously, and this clearly is what most bothers our reviewers. Following James's own critics Hall, Jastrow, and Münsterberg (Coon, 1992) and many others (Collins & Pinch, 1979), they want to purge psychology of all vestiges of this troublesome subject. I do not doubt their sincerity in defending the boundaries of science as they conceive it, but my bet here is on James. Their offhand, often sarcastic dismissal cannot nullify thousands of experimental and case studies published in peer-reviewed journals, and our book demonstrates that psychical research cannot be isolated and quarantined in this way.

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A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY MISUNDERSTANDING: REPLY TO KELLY

We chose to focus our review on the aspects of the volume that relate most closely to our expertise in the history and philosophy of psychology. Edward Kelly now describes these aspects of the volume as “subsidiary matters.” This is surprising, in view of his own and the other authors’ decision to include a historical text by Myers (1903) in full as a CD-ROM with their publication and to publish a long chapter (by Emily Kelly) on the history of psi and related research since the 19th century. We saw no statement in the volume that this material was intended merely as background information for students.

We did not miss the volume’s central point, that is, the authors’ claim to have presented empirical evidence against physicalism. We argued that the authors describe physicalism in such a broad and oversimplified manner that it is unclear what doctrine, precisely, is allegedly refuted by the empirical research described. This is a serious criticism, to which Kelly has not responded.

Because we could not cover every empirical claim made in this volume, we focused instead on the manner in which the authors advance their claims, which we found difficult to accept. For example, the authors state that a four-stage account of creative genius—preparation, incubation, illumination, and

verification—is accepted by “nearly everyone who has studied the subject of genius seriously” (Kelly et al., 2007, p. 428). No reference is given for this claim, and it is not clear to us whether this model is supposed to be explanatory or descriptive. When creative genius is invoked to support claims about mind–body dualism, critical examination of what is meant by the concept is in place. Similar points could be made about the authors’ discussion of mystical or psychedelic experiences.

Kelly further accuses us of trying to “defend the boundaries of science.” In fact, we did not propose any criteria for distinguishing science from non-science, because we are sensitive to the historical and philosophical issues involved in establishing such demarcations. Our considerations do not imply that the scientific study of mind requires the acceptance of some form of physicalism. Rather, we pointed out that Kelly et al. do not do justice to some central arguments in the current philosophical and historical debates about these issues. Regrettably, Kelly appears to be uninterested in these debates.

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