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BOOK REVIEWS

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. Pp. xxxi + 800. \$79.95 (hardback). ISBN 0-7425-
4792-2.

This is a formidable book that may represent a milestone and turning point for parapsychology. The 800 pages are packed with information. The book can appropriately be described as a massive undertaking. A CD is included with an electronic copy of F. W. H. Myers's 1903 two-volume *Human Personality* and selected original reviews.

This book may be a turning point because it is a serious effort to understand the mind and the relationship between psi and consciousness. It breaks from the usual parapsychology books that focus on the controversies about evidence for psi and that, at most, offer cursory speculations about how psi relates to consciousness. It is revealing that the term meta-analysis is not included in the index and there is no section describing meta-analyses findings and associated controversies. (However, an appendix, "Introductory Bibliography of Psychical Research," does list several references on meta-analyses.)

This type of effort to understand consciousness and psi is badly needed. The authors believe that psychical research has become overly preoccupied with laboratory-based experimental investigations (p. 583). I would go further and say that the preoccupation with experimental evidence for psi has not produced significant scientific progress beyond the state reached in 1940 with the literature review and early meta-analyses in the book *Extra-Sensory Perception after Sixty Years* (Pratt, Rhine, Smith, Stuart, & Greenwood, 1940). The best hope for scientific progress is to begin attempting to understand psi from a much larger perspective rather than continuing the narrow, reductionistic focus on experimental details. *Irreducible Mind* is an important first step for a broader approach.

The starting point for the book is the work of F. W. H. Myers. William James's extensions of Myers's ideas are also given prominence. The authors view these writings as brilliantly insightful with great relevance for modern scientific questions and as having been dormant for decades during the ascension of behaviorism and scientific materialism. According to the preface, the basic plan for the book was (a) to provide an exposition of Myers's contributions, (b) to systematically examine related developments during the subsequent century, (c) to assess the current status of psychology and understanding of the mind, and (d) to offer suggestions for future

research directions. This plan was implemented with nine chapters that largely track topics covered by Myers.

Although specific authors are given for each chapter, this is not categorized as an edited book. There are many comments indicating agreement among the authors and few indicating differing opinions. Many of the same or related points are made in different chapters. For these reasons, I will not distinguish authors in this review.

The first chapter is an overview of contemporary neuroscience and consciousness debates. Of course, these are necessarily selected topics from the vast, diverse writings on consciousness in recent years. Psi phenomena are given a leading role in the evidence for the inadequacy of currently popular models of the mind. Like Myers, the authors believe that important insights will come from confronting phenomena that are difficult to explain with simple, materialistic models of the mind. In addition to psi, the topics discussed include creative genius, mystical experiences, secondary centers of consciousness (e.g., multiple personality and automatic writing), dramatic psychophysical effects of suggestion, and unresolved mysteries about the source of intentionality and volition. The relevance of these and other similar topics is noted in the first chapter, and later chapters discuss the topics in more detail.

The second chapter presents Myers's writings and ideas in context of the science of the period. Myers's ideas on the subliminal self were some of the first descriptions of an active unconscious mind and strongly influenced William James, who in turn influenced much subsequent psychological thought. Myers proposed that the "permeable boundary" between subliminal and supraliminal mental processes varied among people and was associated with creative genius, mental illness, psychic phenomena, and mystical experiences. The fact that these basic conclusions have apparently been independently (re)discovered and empirically supported in the writings on thin boundaries of the mind (Hartmann, 1991) and transliminality (Thalbourne & Delin, 1994) provides significant additional support. Myers's discussions of evolution are among many topics that have clear relevance for modern thinking about the mind.

The third chapter, on psychophysiological influences, covers a diverse range of topics, including psychosomatic medicine, religion and health, placebo effects, psychic healing, stigmata, multiple personalities, yoga, physiological effects in hypnosis, and numerous other similar topics. The topics that I have some knowledge of (psychic phenomena, yoga, religion, and health) were covered with more than sufficient thoroughness and accuracy to support the point that consciousness, including subliminal consciousness, can produce physical effects and is not a mere epiphenomenon as proposed by philosophical materialists.

Unlike the other chapters in the book, chapter four, on memory, has more philosophical commentary than empirically supported scientific

findings. A significant part of the chapter is devoted to Myers's ideas on post-mortem survival.

Chapter 5, on automatism and secondary centers of consciousness, is a well organized, easy-to-read exposition of these topics. The overall evidence appears to support the basic conclusion that "ordinary consciousness is not on top in any significant way, and that... what is most *sublime* in us and what is most *original*, derives from the subliminal, from what is out of sight, and from what, in the last analysis, must be our most essential Self (p. 364) [italics in original].

Chapter 6 covers the experiences, proposed explanations, controversies, and transformative effects of near-death and related phenomena. The key conclusion for purposes of this book is that the "challenge of NDEs lies in asking how these complex states of consciousness, including vivid mentation, sensory perception, and memory, can occur under conditions in which current neurophysiological models of the production of mind by the brain deem such states impossible" (p. 421).

In chapter 7, on genius, the authors note that "our purpose is not to survey this enormous literature [on creativity] comprehensively, but to advance and defend a particular point of view" (p. 425). The authors describe Myers's ideas that genius is a supernormal uprush of inspiration from the subliminal mind and that psi and genius-level inspiration emerge from the deepest levels of the subliminal realm. They note that genius-level creative inspiration does not lend itself to controlled laboratory investigation, but they do not comment on the possibility that similar arguments may apply for psi research. After reviewing a wide range of evidence and ideas, the authors conclude that creative inspiration is not consistent with the popular computational and related cognitive models of the mind.

Chapter 8 is a nice discussion of mystical experiences. These experiences are "uniquely powerful and transformative" (p. 573), "[transcend] all national, rational, personal, and theological differences" (p. 574), and are linked with psychic phenomena and genius. The authors believe that the best available model for mystical experiences results from the ideas and data provided by Myers and James for an active, extensive subliminal consciousness that is normally "filtered" by the brain to focus the mind on the demands of the physical environment.

Chapter 9 provides the overall integration and evaluation. The chapter begins by discussing criticisms of Myers's work. Two of the more notable concerns are that (a) his evidence is often based on unusual experiences that may have limited generality and (b) there are unresolved dilemmas from the subliminal mind being conceptualized as a source of both positive and negative results (i.e., dissolution and mental illness but also higher integration and inspiration). The primary conclusion is that Myers's ideas are a useful working model that is better than existing alternatives, but the ideas do need much further conceptual and empirical development. In particular, the characteristics and capabilities of the

subliminal mind and their relationship to normal consciousness need to be developed.

Another key point in this chapter is that the models derived from the ideas of Myers and James "appear potentially capable of explaining most and perhaps all of the 'rogue' empirical phenomena catalogued in this book, and they ratify, rather than reject, our everyday experience of ourselves as purposeful, causally effective, conscious agents" (p. 640). For comparison, with the currently dominant scientific perspective "our experience of ourselves as causally effective agents has come increasingly to be portrayed as mere illusion, with consciousness itself at best a causally ineffectual by-product of the grinding of our neural machinery" (p. 640). The authors concur with a quote from Whitehead that "scientists animated by the purpose of proving themselves purposeless constitute an interesting subject for study" (p. 641). In fact, it appears to me that the experiences and evidence related to volition, intention, free will, and decision-making may ultimately be more persuasive for an enhanced concept of consciousness than the unusual phenomena that Myers emphasized.

Irreducible Mind is not easy to read. Some chapters appear to have a greater emphasis on thoroughness than on organizing information in a way that brings key points into focus. These sections tend to place the burden on the reader to sort through large amounts of detailed information to identify which facts are important. In addition, the book is intended for academic readers and the writing in some parts is on the high side of a dense academic writing style. Given that so much of the original material was from the late 1800s, it may be inevitable that the tendencies for long complex sentences and paragraphs that were more common in that era were partially transferred to the current work. These factors may limit the appeal and impact of the book, but it is well worth the effort for readers, particularly the final chapter.

I am hesitant to suggest that certain topics were not adequately covered given the diversity, depth, and length of the book. As a compromise, I will note that there are a couple of topics that I think will need to be explored and developed before consciousness and psi can be understood. One topic is the role of biological evolution in consciousness and psi. Dualistic approaches appear to place consciousness and psi outside of biological evolution. I anticipate that a better understanding of how biological evolution has or has not impacted consciousness will be important for understanding consciousness and psi. The other topic is the capricious, evasive nature of psi (Kennedy, 2004). I think it is likely that this property of psi also will be a key factor in understanding both consciousness and psi.

For example, the authors regard the evidence that some form of consciousness survives beyond death as possible and perhaps probable, but the implications related to evolution and to capricious, evasive psi remain to be developed. If an aspect of consciousness survives and is able to have contact with the physical world, near-death and mystical experiences

suggest that the motivations and awareness for that spiritual realm are very different from the self-serving materialistic motivations that have driven biological evolution. From the self-serving materialistic perspective, these spiritual motivations and manifestations may appear capricious and evasive (Kennedy, 2004). To a significant extent, experimental parapsychology has had the goal of developing applications of psi that would ultimately be useful for the military and business. It may be no accident that the capricious, evasive nature of psi prevents that from occurring. The capricious, evasive properties of psi that have dominated psychical research and that parapsychologists have tried to ignore or to overcome may actually provide insight and evidence for the most profound aspects of consciousness.

Overall, this book is an important resource that will likely have a significant role when major scientific progress is eventually made in understanding consciousness and paranormal phenomena. The book itself may not contain final answers, but it sets a direction that may lead to answers. The authors state that they intend to prepare a follow-up book that develops the next level of hypothesis and theory (p. 638). I for one take that as a firm commitment and look forward to their future work on these topics.

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