

Book Reviews

Graham Dunstan Martin

Does It Matter? The Unsustainable World of the Materialists

Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2005, 288 pp. ISBN 0 86315 533 2 (pbk)

Reviewed by Paul Marshall

Materialist philosophies have had some notable advocates in recent times, but they have also drawn vigorous criticism, both in academic works and in writings aimed at more popular audiences. Graham Dunstan Martin's *Does It Matter?* belongs firmly to the latter category, eschewing detailed technical analysis for an impassioned and often entertaining exploration of an impressive array of topics to demonstrate that 'matter is not all'. In the book, physicists nuzzle up with mystics, French philosophers with science fiction writers, neurologists with poets. Martin takes seriously the view that the puzzle of consciousness demands radical reconceptualizations, and he is not afraid to look at theories that might all too easily be dismissed as fanciful. In fact, one of the book's attractions is its showcasing of some audaciously speculative theories.

'Materialism' gives only a partial sense of the range of views that Martin criticizes. His targets include not only eliminativists, reductionists and functionalists, but anyone who does not seem to give consciousness its proper due, by denying free-will, by envisaging consciousness in computers, or by taking neo-Darwinism and evolutionary psychology too far. Thus, Martin takes issue with the likes of Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Susan Blackmore, Steven Pinker and Nicholas Humphrey. He tries to pull the rug from under materialism in two ways, by exposing what he considers to be theoretical confusions and by assembling evidence to suggest that consciousness is fundamental to the universe. He argues that materialism survives behind a smokescreen of 'equivocation and slippery use of words'. If matter has been defined as devoid of consciousness, then consciousness can be derived from matter only by a verbal sleight of hand, a philosophical conjuring trick. In one of his more innovative moves,

Martin draws on Michael Polanyi's distinction between 'tacit knowing' and 'explicit knowing' to argue that materialism stems from a hopelessly ambitious reductionism that tries to squeeze essentially indescribable experience into the limited, selective descriptions of language and scientific theory.

If undiluted materialism is such a bad idea, then what better ideas are available? Martin is open-minded in his treatment of the alternatives, finding value in substance dualism, panpsychism, idealism and neutral monism (which he calls 'deep monism'). He does not reach any definite conclusions but gravitates towards idealism and neutral monism — and he likes Bergson's filter theory and John Smythies' non-Cartesian, interactionist dualism. In a most interesting, speculative chapter, Martin takes up the observation that Descartes was wrong to make extension the sole preserve of matter. Some mental contents clearly have extension, and therefore questions about extended 'phenomenal spaces' arise. Where are they located and what dimensionality do they have? Bertrand Russell, C.D. Broad and H.H. Price took an interest in such matters, and so too have some contemporary theorists, including Smythies, Max Velmans and Bernard Carr. Martin discusses Smythies' dualism of phenomenal space and physical space, and also Jean-Émile Charon's 'Complex Relativity', in which two sets of dimensions are posited, one physical and one mental. Martin, who confesses that he enjoys fantastic yet credible theories, explains that Charon locates mental space in the inner dimensions of electrons, an idea that Martin realizes has serious difficulties but which perhaps points the way to a more viable panpsychism.

Martin finds evidence for the fundamental status of consciousness in several fields of enquiry, including quantum physics. He favours interpretations of quantum theory that give consciousness a basic role in quantum processes, such as the one commonly associated with von Neumann and Wigner, which has consciousness bring about wave function collapse. In itself, this is hardly compelling evidence for the fundamental status of consciousness, given the availability of alternative interpretations that do not call upon the intervention of conscious observers. However, I am indebted to Martin's book for introducing me to one such alternative, namely John Cramer's unjustly neglected Transactional Interpretation, which provides a remarkably economical and straightforward explanation of quantum weirdness, inspired by the Wheeler-Feynman Absorber theory of radiation, in which waves propagate backwards as well as forwards in time.

Martin is perhaps on firmer ground when he looks to mystical experience for empirical evidence. He clearly has some empathy with

the mystical: he recalls a moment in his childhood when he had the disturbing thought that there is just one consciousness shared by everyone, a unicity that would make all the joy and all the suffering in the world a common lot. Martin is justified in raising altered states of consciousness because they do sometimes give an overwhelming sense that mind or consciousness is fundamental to the universe. I am reminded of Humphry Davy's exclamation upon taking nitrous oxide: 'Nothing exists but thoughts! The universe is composed of impressions, ideas, pleasures and pains!' (but Martin is suspicious of drug-induced cases). Of course, critics will maintain that mystical experiences are explicable in purely biological and psychological terms, but so far the reductionistic kinds of explanations have had significant weaknesses, and Martin disposes of a couple of them, including the fashionable supposition that mystical experiences are constructed largely or entirely from their religious contexts.

Perhaps the most contentious evidence put forward by Martin concerns 'design': physics seems remarkably fine-tuned for the development of life, and biology often seems too complex to have arisen by natural selection alone. Does this mean that conscious intelligence has also been at work? Martin looks at the probabilities and thinks so, and he goes on to argue that the designer is a consciousness that creates the universe outside time, an atemporal source that can be apprehended in some mystical states. But these are not dogmatic conclusions, and Martin is not out to peddle a particular theology.

Does materialism matter? Yes, it does, for 'materialism' understood broadly continues to be influential, overtly in mind–body philosophy and neuroscience, and more subtly in social and cultural domains through its impact on theories of human nature. Graham Dunstan Martin is to be congratulated for bringing together arguments and evidence that challenge materialist presuppositions in a lively and accessible fashion, and also for introducing readers to some fantastic but perhaps worthwhile theories along the way.

Uriah Kriegel and Kenneth Williford (Ed.)

Self-Representational Approaches to Consciousness

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2006. pp vi + 561. £25.95/£51.95

ISBN 978-0262612111 (pbk), 978-0262112949 (hbk)

Reviewed by Sophie R. Allen

The aim of this excellent collection is to present arguments for and against a view of consciousness which has, the editors rightly assert,

been largely neglected in recent literature. These accounts — the eponymous self-representational approaches to consciousness (SRT) — are proposed as an alternative to, and an improvement on, the two principal reductive accounts of consciousness currently in play, i.e. the higher order monitoring view (HOM) in which mental states are conscious in virtue of being represented or otherwise interacting with higher order mental states; and the representational theory of consciousness (RTC) according to which mental states are conscious if and only if they represent in some ‘right’ way. SRT will, its advocates claim, answer the main objections to HOM and RTC without giving rise to further, more serious, objections in the process.

The book divides into four sections: the first contains six papers giving arguments *for* SRT, including ones by each of the editors; the second section, rather unsurprisingly, contains arguments against; the third connects SRT with other accounts of consciousness, or other issues in the philosophy of mind; the fourth consists of only two, longer papers, one by David Rudrauf and Antonio Damasio, the other by Douglas Hofstadter, which connect the broad philosophical stance of SRT to their own research interests.

In some ways though, it would be a mistake for readers to regard the sections as indicative of what to expect from each, since papers classified together vary a good deal and share similarities with those purportedly representing opposing points of view. For example, some authors arguing for theories which they count as versions of SRT, such as Kriegel, and others arguing against SRT proper, are equally supportive of weakened versions of the theory. Self-representation, some say, is either not necessary or not sufficient for consciousness. Others suggest that potential problems with the notion of self-representation can be defused if it is characterized as a close, non-contingent or constitutive relation between distinct mental states or other aspects of the mind.

Papers in the first section, which favour versions of SRT, are extremely varied in their approaches and disagree over important philosophical issues, such as the explicability of consciousness, or whether consciousness or phenomenal properties attach to local or global mental states. Further differences arise since some proponents of SRT find the chief motivation for their view in the failings of RTC and HOM, while others attempt to find a broader philosophical basis for their positive arguments. For example, the case for SRT presented by Horgan *et al.* is rather intriguingly based in the asymmetry between the apparent rationality of radical scepticism about the external world and the irrationality of scepticism about the internal world: the latter

simply does not present itself as a genuine epistemic possibility. This mismatch is, they argue, only explicable in terms of conscious states having a peculiar self-presentational feature that makes them immune to sceptical attack and is not shared by representations of external states of affairs. The difficulty they face here, of course, is convincing the reader that their way of explaining the asymmetry is the only one — strictly speaking an impossible point to prove (as the authors realize). Their support for SRT thus seems rather far-fetched, since it amounts to claiming that the truth of SRT is the *only* way in which to account for the the near immunity to scepticism of our conscious experience.

The paper by Joseph Levine — one of the few in the book clearly opposed to SRT being a suitable account of consciousness — occupies what is, for him, familiar territory as he argues that self-representational theories cannot account for both the qualitative character and the subjectivity of consciousness and thereby bridge the explanatory gap. His main complaint is that SRT suffers from broadly similar difficulties to *non-reflexive* representational accounts in explaining what it is like for a particular subject to have a certain conscious experience. The fact that the representation and the monitoring of it, which are together constitutive of consciousness, are realized by one state in SRT (rather than the two states of HOM) he regards as an implementation matter, not a psychological one (p. 196); and so SRT shares the difficulties in explaining consciousness inherent in other causal-functional accounts of the mind. Furthermore, Levine is dismissive of proponents of SRT who accept that an explanatory gap remains in their theory — for instance Horgan *et al.*, who specifically admit that making self-representation constitutive of consciousness leaves both subjectivity and qualitative experience unexplained (p. 55).

More generally, the reader might worry from the outset that SRT comes dangerously close to replacing one deep mystery with another and could find a growing sympathy for authors who try to allay the fear that self-representation is merely a form of obfuscation — whether or not their attempts to explain what makes a mental state conscious, or to show how SRT comes about, appear convincing. Both the two longer papers centre on these problems, with Rudrauf and Damasio's exploration of the affective nature of consciousness being perhaps the more promising (a theme echoed by Wider in her philosophical article); Hofstadter's witty, engaging and cleverly written piece on the self-referential loops of mathematics and feedback phenomena could infuriate as many readers as it entertains. Falling precariously as it does between anecdote and serious philosophical

argument, Hofstadter is likely to be accused of being too technical by some and not digging deeply enough by others, leaving nobody satisfied; and despite his determined stance that self-reference is neither unusual nor ultimately mysterious, this reader was left unconvinced by his continued insistence in this matter, which simply seems to reject the idea that self-referential 'paradoxes' of mathematics and set theory which troubled Russell and Gödel are truly paradoxical at all.

On a more historical note, a recurring theme in both the positive and negative papers (perhaps especially in those articles supporting SRT by Van Gulick and Wider) is that the phenomenological tradition has much to offer in mitigating the problem of explaining consciousness. Dispersed throughout the book, one encounters the underlying insistence that analytic philosophy's habit of largely ignoring this tradition may come at the high price of consciousness appearing more mysterious than it actually is. For once, in such a largely analytic publication, the names of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and (less controversially) Brentano appear alongside those of contemporary Anglo-American philosophers of mind, reminding the reader that the 'hard' problem of consciousness has not arisen recently, but was one which also troubled and engaged the psychologists, psychophysicists and philosophers of nineteenth-century Europe and their followers in the continental tradition.

The brevity of this review has confined me to a very brief survey of some of the articles and themes from the broad range considered by the authors. In general, it is a very worthwhile selection with much rich and varied argumentation to offer, both for those who are engaged in research in the area and for those who simply have an interest in the explanation of the conscious mind.

Bruce E. Wexler*Brain and Culture*

Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, MIT Press, 2006, 307 pp. \$25.84
ISBN 0 262-23248 0

Reviewed by Michael Bavidge

This is a book of two halves. The first, which is a good deal more convincing than the second, deals with maturation of the human brain in the early years of life. It focuses on effects of sensory experience and upbringing on the structure and function of the brain. In the second part, Wexler considers adulthood when the brain is developed but much less plastic. While in infancy individuals have little control

over their environment, as adults their ability to act is much increased and is driven by 'a neurobiological imperative' to make the environment conform to the relatively fixed, neuropsychological structures that they develop as they mature. Organising the book around this contrast of increasing competence and diminishing plasticity as we move from infancy to adulthood seems attractive, but we may doubt how useful or enlightening it is. Through studying effects of social and sensory inputs, we have learnt a great deal about brain maturation. But have we learnt, or can we expect to learn, much about social conflicts and tensions from neurobiology?

The first part of the book reviews and explains 'the deep and extended sensitivity of the human brain to shaping by psychosocial and other sensory inputs' (pp. 2-3). The account begins with a detailed survey of research done on effects of sensory stimulation on mammalian nervous systems. It goes on to consider the human case, where processes observed in non-human animals are accentuated, in part because of the extended period of human infancy during which brain plasticity is at its highest. An analogous account is then given of studies of the effects of social interaction on animal and human brains. Here the extent of the plasticity of human nervous systems is even more marked.

Wexler makes ambitious claims for the significance of these researches. Once we learn the lesson that the brain is not a machine for processing in predetermined ways data that comes to it from the physical and social environment, we can overcome dualisms that bedevil our thought about mind and world. The realisation that 'our biology is social' has reconfigured nature and nurture arguments: 'It is our nature to nurture and to be nurtured' (p. 13).

'The relationship between the individual and the environment is so extensive that it almost overstates the distinction between the two to speak of a relationship at all' (p. 39). Well almost, but not quite, and therein lies a central problem in cognitive science. However closely we entwine individual and environment there will be a relationship between creatures with anything worth calling a mind and the world. It is a relationship that involves varying degrees of independence which is manifest not just in memory (as Wexler suggests) or imagination — where thought and feeling spin off from what is currently available in the environment — but in any mental act of belief, intention or imagination. We may aim for a naturalized theory of mind but not a theory that wraps our thoughts so tightly into the world that we cannot account for sense and reference or truth and falsity.

Nevertheless, recent discoveries about brain plasticity make a significant difference to how cross-disciplinary issues are, or should be, discussed. Wexler gives a clear and elegant account of the current state of research, which is particularly valuable in this context. He is right to see these discoveries as weakening the dualisms that haunt issues in cognitive science. In general they provide an intellectual environment which encourages externalist lines of thought and social theories of mind.

It is perhaps not fair to attribute to Wexler a particular view on the more theoretical aspects of these problems. His primary aim is to explain the current state of research and insist on its importance, rather than wax philosophical about it. However we catch glimpses of the philosophical petticoat from time to time. For example, he writes:

the brain is surpassed in its autonomy by the digestive system in its interactions with the environment. The stomach efficiently takes apart a wide range of inputs, reducing them to components that contain no reference to their initial organisation ... In contrast, the brain recreates in itself a representation of environmental input which ... conforms highly to the complexities of that input.

This is a variant on Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis' analogy 'The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile'. The brain produces thought the way the liver produces bile — only bile is viewed as less *like* the food from which it originates than thought is *like* the world it represents. Undiluted Representationalism like this is hard for most of us to digest!

In the second part of the book Wexler draws out implications of the decreasing plasticity of the brain for action and behaviour. His basic claim is that the fixed structures of the mature human brain make us increasingly resistant to change. He refers to the recurring suspicion that traditional accounts of motivation have been too rationalistic and that neurobiological factors need to be drafted in to rectify the picture.

It is not clear that this claim is made any more plausible by being expressed in terms of what he calls 'the principle of internal-external or neuroenvironmental consonance' (p.18). In any case, one has to question the value of using the principle to throw light on phenomena as diverse as the suppression of the Albigensian heresy and the difficulty that older people have in learning a new language. The discussion ranges within a couple of pages over many topics, drawing analogies between support for sports teams, reactions to the Clinton/Lewinsky affair, and inter-marriage between Republicans and Democrats.

No evidence is produced that people with this or that particular brain structure or function will behave in this or that particular way.

Wexler acknowledges that trying to establish causal connections between neurological factors and large social events is an uncertain endeavour. However, it is not just that the claims made in the second part of the book are less certain, more impressionistic and more speculative than those in the first. They encourage reductionist lines of thought which are less intrusive in the first part. He claims, for example, to have provided 'a rational basis for the apparent fact that people fight because of differences in religion and other beliefs; they fight to control the opportunity to create external structures that fit with their internal structures...' (pp. 230–1). This suggests that the real factors involved in aggressive behaviour are constituted by 'a neurobiological imperative' and that the reasons people give for doing what they do are only 'apparent'.

The early parts of this book show how neurological studies have been influenced by researches into the effects of upbringing and enculturation. It is not so clear that neurology will have a similar impact on our understanding of historical events and cultural phenomena.

The book ends with a suggestion that some might think endearing at first sight; namely that universities may provide a model for the future development of societies. However, given their dependence on funding from external sectors, their hierarchical structure, their constant auditing and monitoring of standards and achievements, this proposal actually seems neither desirable nor likely to transpire.

K.W.M. (Bill) Fulford, Tim Thornton & George Graham

Oxford Textbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry

Oxford University Press, 2006. 912 pp. ISBN 0 19 852694 6 (hbk)
ISBN 0 19 852695 4 (pbk).

Reviewed by Peter Howorth

In psychiatry, to a much greater degree than in other areas of medicine, almost every question carries a baggage of associated conceptual or ethical conundrums. Indeed, it is a key contention of the authors of this book that what distinguishes psychiatry from other specialties is not doubtful scientific validity but greater conceptual complexity. For mentality is central to it, though of only peripheral concern to much of the rest of medicine.

Examples of the sorts of questions that arise include:

What does it mean to 'have' (be the owner of) a thought and how much we can ever know of other people's minds — especially in the context of schizophrenic hallucinations and delusions?

How far are people responsible for actions — a question particularly acute in relation to personality disorders and in the light of modern brain imaging?

Questions of personal identity, capacity and autonomy are especially pressing when it comes to caring for people with dementia. When are we justified in making decisions on another person's behalf? How far can a 'person' be said to survive amidst profound deterioration in cognitive function and behaviour? When are we justified in judging someone to be 'mentally ill'? — cases can readily be found in which a narrative, discursive understanding would arguably be more helpful than an 'illness' approach.

The mental health field is permeated with philosophical concerns. Questions of value and arguments about the meaning of terms confront those who work in this area at every turn. Practitioners thus need a working knowledge of the theoretical basis for the decisions they make, while others interested in mentality may find the clinical problems to be illuminating.

This book covers all of the questions above, and more. It is certainly comprehensive. I felt, while reading, that I was on a tour of all the key areas in modern philosophy — and with a very crowded itinerary. Much of the material was familiar, but some was new and generally explained with clarity and depth. One of the strengths is integration of knowledge from practice — cognitive psychology, clinical psychiatry, neuropsychology and neuroimaging — with traditional philosophical approaches.

The overall approach is that of a handbook. Readers are expected to put in a considerable amount of work themselves, and there are frequent exercises designed to encourage independent thought and reflection on the text. The emphasis is on philosophy as a practical activity (although I do wonder how diligently readers will apply themselves to the tasks prescribed). The aim is to give readers tools to dissect claims and analyse positions themselves, by pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of different arguments. Accompanying the fairly weighty volume is a CD-ROM containing a comprehensive selection of background reading — mainly selections from classic philosophical texts and papers chosen to illustrate the various themes of the main text.

An offshoot of the ever growing interest in philosophy in the mental health field was the launch (in 2003) of the series ‘International Perspectives in Philosophy and Psychiatry’, of which this is the latest volume. Excellent though previous titles have been, there is no doubt that this is the Big One. It aspires to offer a comprehensive overview of philosophical issues in psychiatry, and to a large extent succeeds. Its range of topics is impressive, as is the thoroughness with which they are dealt. The style is admirably even and the book works well as a whole. A danger of a unified approach, like the one provided here, can of course be that authors’ biases go unchecked. However, in this book, the authors mainly concentrate on recounting what they see as the significant contributions to a field rather than providing tendentious argument. That said, they do question received opinion at times.

An exception to the general even-handedness involves discussion of something called ‘Values Based Practice’ (VBP). It introduces management-speak and political issues that sit uneasily with the rest of the book, reading like a hand-out from some official body.

However the rest of the book does not disappoint. It is divided into five main sections. We start with an Introduction to the disciplines of psychiatry and philosophy and their interconnections. Then Part I moves on to a discussion of psychiatric diagnosis, psychopathology and classification. The all-important notions of fact and value are introduced; these run as underlying themes through the text as a whole and provide an overall unity to the argument. Later on further key dichotomies are introduced — between causes and meanings, explanation and understanding, the natural sciences and the social sciences, and the analytical and Continental philosophical traditions — which occur as leitmotifs in various settings throughout the text. Part 1 ends with a concise introduction to philosophical logic and further analysis of the concepts of illness, disease, function and dysfunction.

Part II is concerned with the phenomenological tradition in psychiatry. The space devoted to this is fully justified, given the huge influence of phenomenology on the development of twentieth-century psychiatry. The most influential figure here was Karl Jaspers, and much of the discussion centres on him. If I have a quibble it is that perhaps too much attention is paid to fairly subtle distinctions between different phenomenological theorists.

The influence of phenomenology, with its emphasis on the nature of subjectivity, is balanced in Part III by an exploration of the scientific tradition in psychiatry, with its claims to objectivity. This section includes a useful general introduction to the philosophy of science, moving on to consider how the principles derived from it have been

applied to psychiatry. The overall message is again that matters of both fact and value need to be incorporated into any view of psychiatry as a science.

Part IV is more to do with practical ethics for practitioners. Finally, Part V tackles difficult but central questions arising from the philosophy of mind — the mind–body problem, other minds, the content of mental states and the nature of agency. The treatment of how mental states come to have content is particularly thorough. This is appropriate for a topic which is central not only to recent philosophy but also to the core subject matter of psychiatry. Two chapters are devoted respectively to reductionist and non-reductionist accounts of how mental states express meaning. These include particularly clear accounts of functionalism (thankfully devoid of too much technical detail) and of the work of Davidson, probably the most important recent philosopher working in this field. The arguments in the text are supplemented by substantial excerpts from Fodor, Dennett, Davidson and others. The influence of findings from advances in neuropsychology and brain imaging on our notions of freedom and responsibility make this section particularly relevant to us all.

This book is not an easy read. Some sections are relatively straightforward, whereas others are conceptually complex and difficult. It is written however in an approachable style and has a coherent and satisfying structure (though I hope the numerous typos will be corrected in future printings). Much of its content would prove educational and relevant for anyone with an interest in mentality. The authors can be applauded for bringing a major task to such a successful conclusion.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Mention here neither implies nor precludes subsequent review

- Alter, Torin & Walter, Sven (ed.), *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism* (OUP 2007)
- Burge, Tyler, *Foundations of Mind* (OUP 2007).
- Gillispie, Joanie Farley and Gackenbach, Jayne, *Cyber.Rules: What You Really Need to Know about the Internet* (Norton 2007).
- Linden, David J., *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and God* (Harvard/Belknap 2007)
- Shannahoff-Khalsa, David S., *Kundalini Yoga Meditation* (Norton 2007).
- Solomon, Robert C., *True to Our Feelings: What Our Emotions Are Really Telling Us* (OUP 2006)
- Turner, Mark (ed.), *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity* (OUP 2006)
- Velmans, Max & Schneider, Susan (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* (Blackwell 2006)