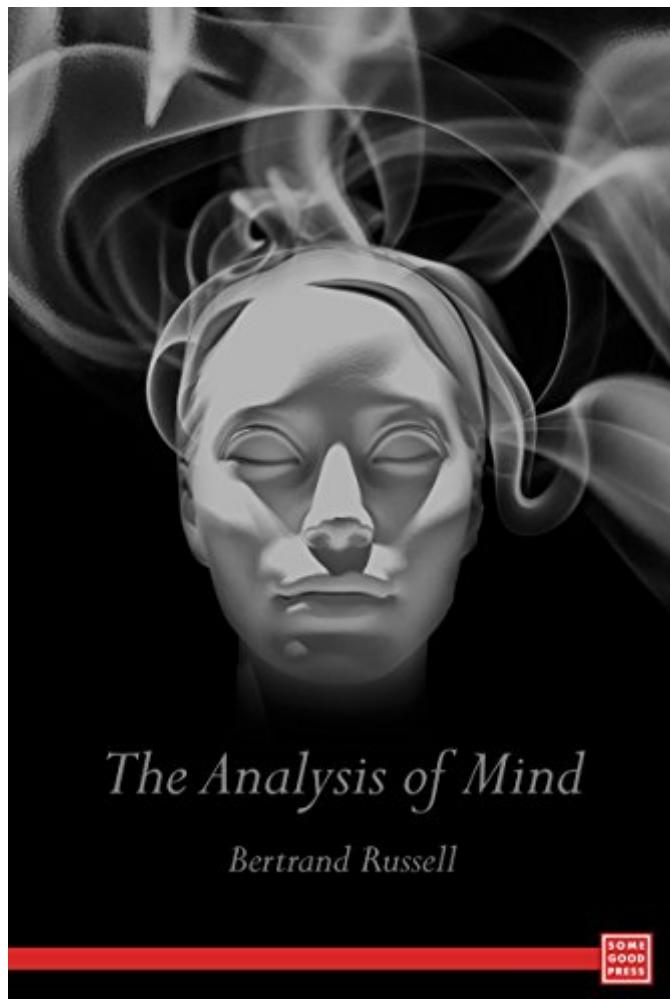


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The Analysis Of Mind



Synopsis

A collection of essays that explore the relationship between psychology and physics particularly as it relates to matter or “stuff”

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Customer Reviews

Great book from a great philosopher

Bertrand Arthur William Russell (1872–1970) was an influential British philosopher, logician, mathematician, and political activist. In 1950, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, in recognition of his many books such as A History of Western Philosophy, The Problems of Philosophy, Mysticism and Logic, Why I am Not a Christian, Religion and Science, The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, Our Knowledge of the External World, Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits, etc. [NOTE: page numbers below refer to the 1956 310-page hardcover edition.] He wrote in the Preface to this 1921 book, “This book has grown out of an attempt to harmonize two

different tendencies, one in psychology, the other in physics, with both of which I find myself in sympathy, although at first sight they might seem inconsistent. The view that seems to me to reconcile the materialistic tendency of psychology with the anti-materialistic tendency of physics is the view of William James and the American new realists, according to which the stuff of the world is neither mental nor material, but a neutral stuff, out of which both are constructed. I have endeavoured in this work to develop this view in some detail as regards the phenomena with which psychology is concerned. He notes, "While we are talking or reading, we may eat in complete unconsciousness; but we perform the actions of eating just as we should if we were conscious, and they cease when our hunger is appeased. What we call consciousness seems to be a mere spectator of the process; even when it issues orders, they are usually just such as would have been obeyed even if they had not been given. This view may seem at first exaggerated, but the more our so-called volitions and their causes are examined, the more it is forced on us. The part played by words in all this is complicated, and a potent source of confusions." (Pg. 5-6) He points out, "everything constituting a memory-belief is happening NOW, not in that past time to which the belief is said to refer. It is not logically necessary to the existence of a memory-belief that the event remembered should have occurred, or even that the past should have existed at all. There is no logical impossibility in the hypothesis that the world sprang into being five minutes ago, exactly as it then was, with a population that

remembered a wholly unreal past; therefore nothing that is happening now can disprove the hypothesis that the world began five minutes ago. I am not suggesting that the non-existence of the past should be entertained as a serious hypothesis. All that I am doing is to use its logical tenability as a help in the analysis of what occurs when we remember. (Pg. 159-160) He observes, "The thing we have to consider to-day is this: seeing that there certainly are words of which the meaning is abstract, and seeing that we can use these words intelligibly, what must be assumed or inferred, or what can be discovered by observation, in the way of mental content to account for the intelligent use of abstract words? Taken as a problem in logic, the answer is, of course, that absolutely nothing in the way of abstract mental content is inferable from the mere fact that we can use intelligibly words of which the meaning is abstract. (Pg. 213) He suggests, "consciousness, as we have seen, is a complex notion, involving beliefs, as well as mnemonic phenomena such as are required for perception and memory. It follows that no

datum is theoretically indubitable, since no belief is infallible; it follows also that every datum has a greater or less degree of vagueness, since there is always some vagueness in memory and the meaning of images. (Pg. 298) He concludes, "Physics and psychology are not distinguished by their material Mind and matter alike are logical constructions" The two most essential characteristics of the causal laws which would naturally be called psychological are SUBJECTIVITY and MNEMIC CAUSATION. Habit, memory and thought are all developments of mnemonic causation. It is probable that mnemonic causation is derivative from ordinary physical causation in nervous (and other) tissue. Consciousness is a complex and far from universal characteristic of mental phenomena. Mind is a matter of degree, chiefly exemplified in number and complexity of habits. All our data, both in physics and psychology, are subject to psychological causal laws; but physical causal laws can only be stated in terms of matter, which is both inferred and constructed, never a datum. In this respect psychology is nearer to what actually exists. (Pg. 307-308) This book has somewhat "dropped off the radar screen" of Russell's works, which is unfortunate; it is actually one of his most interesting philosophical works.

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