

Braithwaite, Richard Bevan (1900-1990), philosopher, was born on 15 January 1900 in Banbury, Oxfordshire, the eldest in the family of three sons and one daughter of William Charles Braithwaite, of Banbury, barrister, banker, and historian of Quakerism, and his wife, Janet, daughter of Charles C. Morland, of Croydon. He was educated at Sidcot School, Somerset (1911-14), Bootham School, York (1914-18), and as a scholar at King's College, Cambridge (1919-23), where he became a wrangler in part two of the mathematical tripos (1922), and gained a first class in part two of the moral sciences tripos (1923).

In 1924 Braithwaite was elected to a fellowship at King's College, which he retained until his death. He was successively a university lecturer in moral sciences (1928-34), Sidgwick lecturer (1934-53), and Knightbridge professor of moral philosophy (1953-67). He did much to foster the philosophy of science in Cambridge, lecturing on it regularly for the philosophy tripos (his lectures on probability being particularly memorable). He also brought it into the natural sciences tripos, working with the historian Herbert Butterfield to found the department of history and philosophy of science.

Braithwaite's own work was in the Cambridge tradition of scientifically informed philosophy exemplified by Bertrand Russell, J. M. Keynes, Frank Ramsey, and C. D. Broad. His mathematical training showed most clearly in his philosophy of science, notably in his explication of the concept of probability invoked in modern science. This culminated in *Scientific Explanation* (1953), the published version of his Trinity College Turner lectures of 1945-6, a classic work whose influence ranks him as a methodologist of science with Sir Karl Popper and Carl Hempel.

Braithwaite's philosophy ranged far wider than the philosophy of science. His 1955 inaugural lecture, *Theory of Games as a Tool for the Moral Philosopher*, showed the significance for moral and political philosophy of modern theories of games and decisions. His 1955 Eddington lecture, *An empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, showed his long-standing concern with religion. In this he was greatly influenced by his Quaker upbringing, as in the pacifism later rejected, that made him serve in the Friends'

pacifism, later rejected, that made him serve in the Friends Ambulance Unit in the First World War. He eventually joined the Church of England, being baptized and confirmed in King's College chapel in 1948.

Braithwaite took a keen interest in public affairs, and was active in college and university politics. He took especial satisfaction in helping to promote the grace admitting women to membership of Cambridge University, and thus to its degrees. His principal recreation was reading novels.

It was the way Braithwaite philosophized that most inspired his students, colleagues, and friends. In height and weight he may have resembled the average Englishman, but not in his intellectual exuberance. In discussion, even in old age, deaf, with spectacles and thinning hair, sometimes apparently asleep, his attention rarely flagged; and the intensity of his contributions-often prefaced with roars of 'Now look here, I'm sorry ...'-was a continual refutation of the popular dichotomy of reason and passion. His curiosity was boundless, his grasp of issues quick and complete, his comments clear, forceful, and original. No one could be more passionate in the rational pursuit of truth, nor less concerned to impress, dominate, preach, or be taken for a guru. He was a great scourge of the obscure, the portentous, the complacent, and the slapdash-diseases to which philosophy is always prone and to which his incisive irreverence was the perfect antidote.

Braithwaite received an honorary DLitt from Bristol University in 1963, and was visiting professor of philosophy at Johns Hopkins University in 1968, the University of Western Ontario in 1969, and the City University of New York in 1970. He was president of the Mind Association in 1946, and of the Aristotelian Society in 1946-7. In 1957 he became a fellow of the British Academy and in 1986 a foreign honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1948 he helped to found what later became the British Society for the Philosophy of Science, of which he was president from 1961 to 1963.

In 1925 Braithwaite married Dorothea Cotter, daughter of Sir

Theodore *Morison, principal of Armstrong College, Newcastle upon Tyne, which later became Newcastle University. She died in 1928, and in 1932 he married Margaret Mary (*d.* 1986), daughter of Charles Frederick Gurney *Masterman, a noted Liberal MP and member of the 1914 cabinet. They had a son and a daughter. Braithwaite died of pneumonia on 21 April 1990 at The Grange, a nursing home in Bottisham, near Cambridge. His ashes were interred in King's College chapel, Cambridge.

D. H. Mellor

Sources

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Archive: King's College, Cambridge, Modern Archives Centre, notes, lectures, and press cuttings

Likenesses: photograph, 1952, Hulton Deutsch picture library

Wealth at death £148,072: probate, 16 Oct 1990, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

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