for pregnant women, Briggs writes, 'This was the real war on women'. The comment not only risks downplaying the Trump administration's renewed attack on the minimal freedoms secured by *Roe* v. *Wade*: it also misses an opportunity to show how pronatalism and anti-natalism reinforce each other. The task of a materialist feminism is, surely, to conceive of reproductive freedom as an expanded field in which childrearing is chosen, not enforced; shared and resourced, not privatised; refused by some, taken up by others, and detached from gender roles, racist coercion and moralising imperatives.

How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics offers a valuable description of the social reproductive contradictions of the present state of things, and rightly emphasises the tightly bound relation of racism and reproductive politics. Briggs' conception of the scope of change is, however, disappointingly narrow, especially compared to some of the historical movements it invokes. The book's closing pages note that 'even major corporations have long since realised that easing work/life burdens improves productivity'. In light of the immiserating social conditions sketched in this book, it is surely time to question whether the drive to improve productivity will ever be compatible with the movement for reproductive freedom.

Sophie Jones

Terror of the social

Galen Strawson, *Things That Bother Me: Death, Freedom, the Self, Etc.* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2018). 236pp., £11.99 pb., 978 1 68237 220 4

In his most recent book, apparently meant for a general audience and made up of essays previously appearing in non-scholarly publications, Galen Strawson has provided a nice recap of his general philosophical position. Most importantly, he has provided an opportunity to assess the relationship between philosophical discourse and what we might call common sense or everyday concepts. Strawson exactly captures the aporias and contradictions that are inherent, if often unnoticed, in the concepts with which we ordinarily operate in our everyday lives. However, I will also argue that we must treat these aporias and contradictions not as proven truths about reality, but as indications of where our common-sense understanding is in error. If we fail to notice these errors, as Strawson does, we are inevitably led to accept a certain amount of magical thinking and, more problematically, be convinced that we have no capacity to alter our lives, or the world, for the better.

Strawson is probably best known for his argument against free will, and so against the possibility of moral responsibility. In the introduction to *Things That Bother Me*, Strawson notes the angry response he has gotten to this argument over the years from those unable to refute it: 'The virulence of the messages suggests that those who send them think that the argument is sound, and this makes their anger a little odd … after all, they hold the same view themselves'. Strawson's rhetoric leads inexorably to conclusions most find troubling. However, few are able to interrogate the premises on which they are based, because they are premises on which almost everyone operates in everyday life. The point is that once we have accepted Strawson's use of our own everyday conceptions of free will, consciousness and determinism, then his conclusions *are* irrefutable. We must then accept the absence of all agency, the concept of the mind as a passive observer, and, most absurdly of all, panpsychism. However, if it is possible to examine these premises, so it is also possible to demonstrate the very different possibilities for human life that are revealed once we have corrected, or at least questioned, these assumptions.

In this collection, the concept of free will – the basis of Strawson's most troubling and best known arguments – is most explicitly addressed in two essays: 'Luck Swallows Everything' and 'You Cannot Make Yourself the Way You Are'. I take it that Strawson's idea of free will in these essays is precisely the one most people do indeed ordinarily operate under. Put

most strongly, it is something like this:

> One's mental nature *inclines* one to do A rather than B (to use Leibniz's terms), but it doesn't thereby *necessitate* one to do A rather than B. As an agent-self, one incorporates a power of free decision that is independent of all the particularities of one's mental nature, in such a way that one can after all count as ultimately morally responsible in one's decisions and actions even though one isn't ultimately responsible for any aspects of one's mental nature.

Strawson easily points out that this position is untenable, because of course the 'agent-self' then needs to provide an explanation of how it makes its choices, and, as such, an infinite regress ensues. Yet most people probably do believe that they have some extra or surplus self, separate from their mental nature, above and beyond all their thoughts, beliefs, dispositions, emotions, etc., which can come in to freely choose between desirable options. This belief is the problem that we need to address if we are to avoid the morass of free-will debates.

This concept of a surplus self beyond the contents of our mind is certainly central to all Lockean empiricist theories of the subject, although it clearly predates Locke. Servais Pinckaers, for instance, in his 2001 book *Morality*, locates the origin of the problem with William of Ockham, arguing that the idea that 'free choice is the first faculty of the human person', the belief that we can even 'choose to think or not to think, to will or not to will', is an error that is not yet common before the fourteenth century. Pinckaers refers to this as 'freedom of indifference', and his discussion of the alternative to this idea of free will can serve as a useful guide to escaping the dead end into which we are led by this concept.

How might we hope to reject the common assumptions about free will without merely demonstrating its logical impossibility and so leaving us with the worst kind of fatalism? We can begin by considering other ways of conceiving of freedom that were common in the past: for instance, what Pinckaers calls 'freedom for excellence', a concept he suggests would have appeared true to Thomists a century before Ockham's position became dominant. For Thomists, it is essential that our freedom follows from, rather than precedes, both our reason and our intentions. We cannot choose to think or not think, we can only think and in that thinking arrive at an understanding of what is best to do. Freedom would then consist, as Pinckaers puts it, of 'the capacity to bring to good completion works of long duration that bear fruit for many.' This is not a matter of some kind of pure choice of an undetermined surplus self, a choice to tip to the side of good or evil when faced with alternatives. Instead, we must understand freedom as the increase of knowledge about the way the world about us works, which in turn increases our power to act in the world. Of course, this isn't what we normally think of as free will. Freedom to work long and hard at projects which are constrained by the way the world really is doesn't fit what we normally mean by freedom. We normally mean something like freedom *from* such effort and such constraints. And that is exactly the point. We need to abandon the mistaken idea of freedom, in order to grasp the kind of freedom we actually can have.

However, in order to understand just how we need to rethink these things, we need to first become more cognizant of the fundamental errors in at least two more of our most deeply held assumptions. This is essential if we hope to change the world rather than merely observe it. To that end, it is worth considering two deeply interconnected concepts: consciousness and determinism.

Strawson devotes perhaps his most impassioned arguments in this book to refuting the idea – which he calls the 'silliest claim that has ever been made' – that consciousness does not exist. As he writes: '[W]hen people say that consciousness is a mystery they're wrong, because we all know what it is. In fact we know exactly what it is. It's the most familiar thing there is, although that doesn't mean we can easily put it into words.' In what sense can we know *exactly* what something is, but be unable to explain it in language? There is a nice bit of equivocation here, concerning the different meanings of the word 'know'. For instance, consider something like an ordinary modern automobile. We would all say we 'know' how the car works, because we get in one and drive it successfully every day. But most of us don't 'know' how the engine actually operates, and could not hope to successfully design a working car given any amount of time and

access to Google. The point is, we 'know' how and when to use the *word* 'consciousness', but we don't actually have any clear idea of what it *means*.

I would suggest that it actually 'means' nothing, that it functions as a kind of floating signifier useful to cover over an aporia in the empiricist ideology of the subject. And we have all learned to use it in exactly that way, usually without being bothered at all by the lack of a concept behind the term (this is just how floating signifiers work). Although it ought to be obvious to scholars working in the field of philosophy of mind, surprisingly few people even in that field have noticed that the concept was simply invented by John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* The term was a neologism in the seventeenth century, first appearing just over a decade before Locke published his work, and he gives it a new function which it continues to serve to this day. (On this, see Stella Sandford's 2013 introduction to Etienne Balibar's *Identity and Difference: John Locke & the Invention of Consciousness*.) The word serves to cover over a difficulty in the empiricist project, specifically the difficulty of accounting for the nature of the subject if it must be conceived of as *preceding* all sociality. If the subject must arise from sensory experience organised into concepts *prior to* entering any social dimension, then we are left with an enormous explanatory gap, the one we are still struggling with today: how exactly can this deterministic material body and brain give rise to anything like a mind? This perennial problem arises, then, only once we assume an atomistic subject, preexisting the social dimension, which can freely choose to enter into relationships with others. Locke's solution is to assert the existence of a consciousness (and a 'self', another neologism at the time), and give it domain over its empirical experiences.

Locke's concept of consciousness serves to avoid the aspect of the subject most troubling to reductivist materialisms from empiricism up to today's reductive

neurocognitivism: the sociality of the human mind. We are left puzzling over how things like the experience of 'redness' can exist because we cannot conceive that in such experiences there are two components: the biological sensory experiences *and* the socially produced concept of redness that exists in our language and places that sensory experience in a context that is not solely dependent on the passive empirical reception of light waves. This social aspect cannot be eliminated from our experience, because it precedes and shapes our experience. The Lockean model of the subject helped remove the social from epistemology, from thought, and even from ethics. However, once we have removed the social aspect of consciousness, we are left with a mechanistically determined subject, whose consciousness plays no significant role in the world. In making his argument against free will, Strawson makes the claim that 'determinism is unfalsifiable', and that once we accept that assertion we are led inevitably to deny any kind of free will, to accept that absolutely everything about 'the way you are is, in every last detail, a matter of luck'. But it also means, I would point out, that we must accept his panpsychism, since it follows from his definition of determinism.

What does Strawson mean by 'determinism' then? Simply that 'One is the way one is, initially, as a result of heredity and early experience.' The determinism Strawson finds unfalsifiable is dependent on his very specific concept of 'experience'. In the essay 'Real Naturalism', in which Strawson argues that panpsychism is a necessary correlate of realism, he explains what he means by 'experience' this way:

> One way to convey what it is to be a realist about experience is to say that it's to continue to take colour experience or taste experience or pain experience, considered just as a mental occurrence, *to be exactly what one took it to be, quite unreflectively, simply in having it, before one did any philosophy:* when one was six, for example, and was given a food one didn't like.

This definition assumes that all experience is only empirical, that there is in fact experience 'before one did any philosophy'. But there isn't, if we think of 'did any philosophy' in the broadest sense, since that philosophising has already been done and is included in the socially constructed language in which we know our experiences of taste or colour or even pain – maybe not for a newborn infant, but certainly for the six-year-old that Strawson has in mind as his primitive subject. Once we've accepted this definition of experience, however, it seems logically to follow that determinism must be what Strawson understands it to be. It is then no leap at all to panpsychism, because if one kind of mechanistically determined matter (us) clearly has experience, we can't come up with any possible reason to suggest that conscious experience is not a property of all matter: 'nothing in physics requires or entails that the structure-transcendent nature of concrete reality is or must be fundamentally or irreducibly nonexperiential in character.' No, it doesn't, on this definition of experience. But we need not think of experience this way, if we lose our fear of recognising the socially-constructed nature of the mind. We could simply suggest that 'conscious' experience is a power that *emerges* because of the particular nature of human beings as social animals making use of and dependent on language.

Strawson seems to be as bothered by emergence as he is by sociality. He suggests that any alternative to his panpsychism would require that we 'posit some sort of "radical emergence"'. But it wouldn't. It only seems so if we think, like Strawson does, that 'some physical stuff is experiential in nature', that experience is a property of matter, something matter *has*, like mass. But if we understand that 'conscious' experience is something we *do*, not something we *have*, we aren't stuck in Strawson's dilemma. In this case, we would not need to suggest that subatomic particles or stones or galaxies have experience, any more than we would suggest that they have the capacity to build nests or make honey just because we know birds and bees have these capacities. Experience is not a property of matter, but an emergent capacity of a particular form of matter, and it need not seem any more 'radical' than a bee's ability to make honey unless we make the mistake of assuming that 'consciousness' is somehow essential to the existence of the universe. Once we eliminate this concept of experience, we are no longer stuck in Strawson's deterministic world in which everything about our lives is purely a matter of luck, with nothing at all we can do about it.

It is worth thinking here about the ideological

function of these fundamental concepts, as of much of the discourse of philosophy. When we think of free will in the manner Pinckaers refers to as 'freedom of indifference', we are left with a kind of fatalism about the world. We can at best respond, individually, to the world as it is, but we can never hope to transform it. That is, we are excluded from the realm of the structures of social formations, left only with the limited freedom to choose to stop thinking altogether. 'Freedom for excellence' – however little it sounds like what we usually mean by freedom – would leave us able, by contrast, to understand and transform the social world around us. Most of us use the term 'free' only in the former sense, because that is the sense it has taken on in most Western languages. When philosophers debate free will, they assume the same meaning of the term, and debate whether and how we might have it rather than whether it is the correct concept of freedom to have. Every new essay or book or college course on the free will problem, then, only reifies this concept, and works to reproduce an ideology in which our social world is of the same kind as the natural world, and not something we can do anything to change.

Similarly, the common concept of consciousness, essentially a floating signifier functioning to close a gap in a particular ideology of the subject, is almost never interrogated critically. As Strawson, and many others, have pointed out, this term is originally part of a forensic concept of personal identity, meant to define the legal status of individuals, and to proclaim their moral responsibility for participation in social formations that must remain beyond their power to change – in fact, beyond their capacity to think of as *social* at all. It is perhaps time to stop writing books trying futilely to explain the ineffability of consciousness, and just point out the ideological function of the term. Mechanistic determinism, of the kind so popular today in all forms of reductionism, and which implicitly informs the current popularity of theories about our inability to think rationally and the purportedly inborn predispositions that do all our thinking for us, is the most crippling of these fundamental concepts. However, terror of the social perhaps makes it the most difficult assumption to question, because how can we possibly accept that the only alternative to mechanistic determinism is that our agency requires the social negotiation of meaning, goals and intentions?

The task of philosophy ought to be to expose and critique the ideological concepts which inform our everyday practices. Unfortunately, much philosophical discourse has largely taken as given the concepts we use in our everyday thought about the world, our common sense understanding embedded in our language. This is why a book like Strawson's can cross the usually unbridgeable divide between professional philosophy and mainstream non-fiction. The assumptions of the discourse of philosophy just *are* the assumptions of common sense. What we need are more attempts to cross this divide, but to do so in an attempt to demystify these unquestioned assumptions. Every time we recycle the old debates about the mind-body problem or free will, we simply reify the ideological concepts fundamental to the functioning of the current social formation. Critiquing, but more importantly *replacing*, these concepts is thus the only way in which we can enable the functioning of our emergent capacity to know, and so effectively transform, the world we live in. That we can do this should be completely obvious to anyone who drives a car, talks on a cell phone, or lives in a city. Why we deny that we have that power is no mystery: it results from accepting the assumptions we have been examining here. Strawson says that the most absurd claim of all is the denial of consciousness; I would suggest that instead it is Strawson's own belief that everything we 'are' can only be left up to luck.

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