

Anthony Freeman

Editorial Introduction

Philosophers of mind find themselves drawn in many contradictory directions, almost as though there were unseen forces at work to lure them into paths they would rather not travel. Certain destinations retain their power to attract and repel in almost equal measure, and no matter how often their absurdity is alleged by the majority, a few brave souls are always to be found ignoring the no-entry signs and flirting with these ‘dangerous doctrines’. Solipsism is one such tempter; another is epiphenomenalism; but nowhere is the ambiguity of a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* more apparent than in the interpretation of the mental–material relation known as *panpsychism*.

Panpsychism, at its simplest, is the belief that everything having a physical aspect also has a mental or conscious aspect. It is regarded by many as either plain crazy, or else a direct route back to animism and superstition. The apparent claim that a hunk of rock has a conscious thinking mind is so easy to ridicule: why should anyone take such an idea seriously? Yet David Skrbina (2003; 2005) has convincingly demonstrated that panpsychism has been an underlying theme in Western philosophy over many centuries.

Galen Strawson has always held that realism about consciousness requires one to accept that consciousness ‘is among the fundamental properties that must be adverted to in a completed or optimal physics’, if physicalism or materialism is true (Strawson, 1994, pp. 61–2), and that a ‘panpsychist version of materialism could handle the idea that experiential properties might be fundamental physical properties’ (ibid.), although it certainly need not imply that things like rocks are conscious subjects of experience. He used to find this conclusion ‘very alarming’ (ibid.), as also did Chalmers, who spoke of the ‘threat’ of panpsychism (Chalmers, 1997, p. 29, quoted on p. 186 below). Now, however, Strawson embraces the position with enthusiasm. Whereas Chalmers concedes the possibility of panpsychism reluctantly, as a price worth paying for his non-reductive and ultimately

dualistic ontology, Strawson presents it as a necessary and not unwelcome consequence of his thorough-going physicalism, or realistic monism, as he now calls it.

Strawson's target paper setting out this position, and the impressive array of commentaries upon it, would alone suffice to make this a notable discussion of the hard problem of consciousness. But there is more: we are treated to Strawson's hundred-page reply to his commentators (pp. 184–280), with its celebration of an unlikely hero in today's philosophical climate: 'the magnificent, contumacious Descartes' (p. 199). This is 'the real Descartes, not the "Descartes" of present-day non-historical philosophy,' and among the first things to note about him, 'given that we (the generality of philosophers) refer to him so much, and so freely, and so inaccurately' is that he is '*not a substance dualist* in any conventional understanding of this term' (pp. 201–2, italics original).

Making us look afresh at this great figure in the philosophy of mind is part of a larger campaign to reassess the whole question of consciousness, in the course of which Strawson lists 40 or so theses which together constitute 'the basic framework' within which the problem has to be tackled (pp. 221–34).

When I first heard a version of the target paper at the Toward a Science of Consciousness 2005 conference in Copenhagen, and conceived the idea of publishing it in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* — and even when I sent out the target paper to commentators — I little imagined that it would result in so prodigious an undertaking. I am grateful to Galen Strawson and all his collaborators for the great amount of effort that has gone into this collection, which I am sure will prove to be the launch pad of an even wider debate.

References

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- Skrbina, D. (2005), *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
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