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Freedom and Neurobiology: Reflections on Free Will, Language, and Political Power, by John R. Searle. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. Pp. 113. H/b £15.20, P/b £9.95.

The two chapters of this small book are based on lectures given by John Searle at the Sorbonne in 2001. The first is on the problem of free will, the second on political power. The connection between the two chapters is not obvious, and Searle says in the introduction that he had never planned to publish them together. The French publishing house, where the lectures were first published, made this decision for him. But there is a connection, Searle explains. 'There is exactly one overriding question in contemporary philosophy', Searle says, namely: 'How do we fit in?' (p. 4). We are mindful, conscious, free, and rational agents. But we are also part of a world in which everything is composed of mindless and unfree particles. There is a tension, Searle says, between the facts of our rational and social nature and the facts of established scientific theories, such as physics and biology. So, the two chapters are connected in so far as they are both part of an attempt to give an answer to this overarching question. The first chapter aims to reformulate the problem of free will in a way that allows us to see how a scientific solution to this problem is possible. The second chapter attempts to shed fresh light on the fundamental questions of political philosophy by addressing ontological questions concerning social reality and political power.

The overarching project, of course, is neither new nor contemporary. One might even say that it is as old as philosophy. But how, exactly, should this question of 'how we fit in' be understood? Searle lists a number of features of human existence that have to be 'reconciled' with a scientific worldview: consciousness, intentionality, free will, politics, ethics and so on (pp. 4–14). One can ask, for instance, how all these things could have evolved or emerged from unanimated matter. Or one may wonder how all these things can be realized by physical entities and systems. And one can ask whether some or all of them are in tension or conflict with the facts of science. Searle does not distinguish clearly between these questions, and it is suggested that all of the mentioned higher-level facts of human existence are in tension with the facts of science. I am not convinced that this is the best way to understand the question of 'how we fit in', because it is not obvious that there is this unifying tension. The problem of free will, for instance, can be construed in terms of a tension between our self-conception as free agents and a scientific worldview. But it is controversial whether this is the best way to understand the problem. More impor-

tantly, though, the second chapter does not even reveal a prima facie tension between the reality of political power and the facts of science. Given that political society gives rise to duties, obligations, and powers, its reality raises metaethical questions. But there is no apparent tension, conflict, or incompatibility.

According to Searle, traditional political philosophy has neglected ontological questions concerning the nature of society and political power. What Searle has to offer is programmatic, laying out the bare bones of a social ontology. It is true that ontological questions are not often addressed explicitly by political philosophers (at least not within analytical philosophy). But many of the issues addressed by Searle, such as the nature of society, the status of public institutions, the justification of interference by the state, the question of whether all reasons for action are based on self-interest and so on, have been debated at great length, just not under the heading of 'social ontology'.

The core of the book, however, is the chapter on free will, which gave the book its title. The problem of free will, Searle reminds us, has been debated for centuries and we are nowhere near a satisfying solution. His aim is to make progress by providing a formulation of the problem which allows us to see how an empirical and scientific solution is in principle possible (p. 31).

What is the problem of free will? According to Searle, it is a problem 'about a certain kind of human consciousness' (p. 45). When we make a decision, we do not sense, as Searle says, that our reasons (such as beliefs and desires) are causally sufficient for our actions. We sense, rather, that alternative courses of action are open to us (p. 41). The experience of free will is the experience of 'gaps' between reasons, choices, and actions (pp. 42 f.). Searle assumes that these gaps are psychologically real, adding that it would be 'absolutely astounding' if all our behaviour was 'psychologically compulsive' (p. 46).

Free will requires psychological indeterminism, and it requires, according to Searle, the existence of an irreducible and non-Humean self, which chooses and acts on the basis of reasons. Given all that, the problem of free will is really this: how are the conscious processes that constitute the experience of free will realized by a neurobiological system? In particular, how can the operation of a conscious and free self be realized in a neurobiological system (p. 61)?

Searle considers two hypotheses. Either (hypothesis 1) the events at the neurobiological level have causally sufficient antecedents. Or (hypothesis 2) the neurobiological level is indeterministic in a way that matches the indeterminism at the psychological level. Searle rejects hypothesis 1, because free will is an illusion if psychological indeterminism is not matched by neurobiological indeterminism—an unacceptable consequence (pp. 66–70). But hypothesis 2, Searle argues, is equally unattractive, because there are 'no gaps in the brain' (p. 63). Indeterminism can only be found at the level of quantum mechanics. Hypothesis 2 would commit us to the claim that quantum mechanics is relevant to the explanation of consciousness and free will. But this is only to trade one mystery for another. It replaces the mystery of free will with the mystery of how quantum indeterminacy can be relevant to conscious volition (pp. 74–78).

Already the way in which the problem is presented invites objections. It is questionable, firstly, that the problem of free will is in the first place a problem about consciousness. Traditionally it has been construed as a metaphysical problem, for the reason that phenomenology is potentially a misleading guide to the causes of our actions. Some time ago, Schopenhauer pointed out that we must not confuse the lack of awareness of causal necessitation with the awareness of a lack of causation, a claim that has more recently received support from empirical evidence concerning the timing of choice and movement. Apart from that, it is unclear what it is, exactly, to experience a 'gap' in causal connections or the absence of causally sufficient conditions.

Secondly, the suggestion that causal necessitation by mental states is the same thing as psychological compulsion flies in the face of a philosophical tradition with a strong strand of compatibilist thinking. To be fair, Searle is aware of the fact that he dismisses compatibilism simply by defining free will in libertarian terms (p. 47). Nevertheless, even few libertarians would follow Searle in *defining* free will as incompatible, acknowledging that the compatibility question is a substantial philosophical issue.

Further, it is questionable that all this brings us any closer to a scientific treatment of the problem. Searle offers two hypotheses in his attempt to make the problem accessible to empirical investigation. But then he rejects the first on purely philosophical grounds. The second hypothesis is confused. As Searle himself says, there are no gaps in the brain. However, what does this mean? What are 'gaps' in causal connections? Is this the same as probabilistic causation? All this remains rather unclear.

Philosophically, we are left with more mysteries than Searle admits. What is the self? Some passages suggest that the self is an emergent entity with downward causal powers, quite similar to the agent of agent-causation. But Searle says that it is merely a 'formal entity' (p. 33) which comes with conscious and rational agency (pp. 72 f.). Whatever it is, the self 'acts in the gap', according to Searle, freely and on the basis of reasons (pp. 55 f.). I find all this puzzling and unsatisfying. Is not this power to act freely on the basis of reasons precisely what is in need of explanation? And all this, it seems clear, is further removed from empirical treatment than any version of compatibilism.

Like most of Searle's work, this book is accessible and highly readable. Some will find it thought-provoking and engaging. But it lacks the rigour of academic research. There is not one reference to empirical evidence, and philosophers will miss precise formulations and careful argument. The reader should bear in mind that this book is based on public lectures and seminars. In the introduction, Searle provides plenty of references to books and articles where he discusses many of the issues raised in this book in more detail.

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Reasons without Rationalism, by Kieran Setiya. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 131. H/b $30.95, £18.95.

Kieran Setiya's *Reasons without Rationalism* is a fascinating, closely-argued, and rewarding book. It is clearly, concisely, and attractively written, and it contains a wealth of perceptive and original insights. The overall vision that emerges from its pages is an important alternative to the more familiar pictures of the relevant issues. In my judgement, however, the book's arguments are flawed at several crucial points. In this review, I shall concentrate on the points where I disagree with Setiya. In spite of all these disagreements, my view is that this is a wonderful book. As all philosophers know, one of the greatest achievements in our subject is to be wrong in an interesting and instructive way.

This book is concerned with a central issue in practical philosophy—how we have reason to live, and what we have reason to do (p. 1). Setiya connects this issue very closely with the question of what counts as 'a good disposition of practical thought' (p. 12). His central answer to this question is that a disposition of practical thought that is 'good' in the relevant sense is simply 'a disposition of practical thought that is good as a trait of character' (p. 69). That is, as Setiya understands these terms, a good disposition of practical thought must be an *ethically virtuous* disposition. So in his view, what we have reason to do coincides with what these ethically virtuous dispositions of practical thought incline us to do.

As I have already noted, Setiya's starting point is the idea that there is a fundamental connection between what you have most reason to do, and what counts as 'good disposition of practical thought'. According to his account of this connection (p. 12), the fact that *p* is a *reason* for you to φ just in case you have some set of mental states *C* (where *C* does not include any false beliefs) such that the disposition to be moved to φ by the combination of *C* and the belief that *p* would be a good disposition of practical thought. We might quibble about the precise details of this account (I have raised some of these quibbles in a couple of contributions to the ethics weblog *PEA Soup*; see http://peasoup.typepad.com/peasoup/2008/04/problems-for-se.html and http://peasoup.typepad.com/peasoup/2008/04/setiyas-reasons.html). However, it surely is highly plausible that there is at least *some* way of understanding the term 'good' on which there is indeed a fundamental connection of at least roughly this kind between what you have 'reason' to do, and what would count as a 'good' way for you to make up your mind about what to do.