

John Rogers Searle's Biological Naturalism: A Defense Of Traditional Mind-Body Problem

Soumya. A.S.

Assistant Professor

Department of Philosophy Sree Keralavarma College Thrissur, Kerala.

Corresponding Author: Soumya. A.S.

ABSTRACT: *Even in recent times majority among the neurobiologists do not regard consciousness as a suitable topic for scientific investigation. This disinclination is based on certain philosophical mistakes. There is this assumption that the subjectivity of consciousness made it beyond the reach of an objective science. Once we see that consciousness is a biological phenomenon like any other, it can be investigated neurobiologically. Viewed empirically Consciousness is a phenomenon entirely caused by neurobiological processes and is realized in brain structures. An important quality of consciousness we need to unlock is the unified qualitative subjectivity. In other words Consciousness differs from other biological phenomena since it has a subjective or first-person ontology. It is claimed that this subjective ontology does not prevent us from having an epistemically objective science of consciousness, and this seems essential if we need to overcome the philosophical tradition that treats the mental and the physical as two distinct metaphysical realms. Such an attempt has been made by John Searle and his popular attempt to resolve mind-body problem known as Biological Naturalism. The present paper intends to site Searle's attempt to resolve the puzzles in consciousness research as setting a new orientation for research in this area.*

KEY WORDS: *consciousness, Biological Naturalism, Subjectivity, Qualitativeness, Unity.*

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Consciousness is one of the most important problems in Philosophy. Some philosophers think that consciousness is basically a physical phenomenon and it can be explained with the naturalistic methods of science. In philosophy consciousness does not have a complete definition. Different philosophers explain consciousness in various perspectives.

Before some decades there was little interest among neuroscientists, philosophers, psychologists and cognitive scientists generally in the problem of consciousness. Reasons for the resistance to the problem varied from discipline to discipline. Philosophers had turned to the analysis of language, psychologists had become convinced that a scientific psychology must be a science of behavior, and cognitive scientists took their research program to be the discovery of the computer programs in the brain that, they thought, would explain cognition. It seemed especially puzzling that neuroscientists should be reluctant to deal with the problem of consciousness, because one of the chief functions of the brain is to cause and sustain conscious states. Studying the brain without studying consciousness would be like studying the stomach without studying digestion, or studying genetics without studying the inheritance of traits.¹ John Searle was first got interested in this problem seriously and tried to discuss it with brain scientists, but he found that most of them were not interested in the question.

I. THE DEFINITION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Usually we often hear that "consciousness" is terribly hard to define. According to Searle Consciousness consists of inner, qualitative, subjective states and processes of sentience or awareness. Consciousness, so defined, begins when we wake in the morning from a dreamless sleep - and continues until we fall asleep again, die, go into a coma or otherwise become "unconscious." It includes all of the enormous variety of the awareness that we think of as characteristic of our waking life. It includes everything from feeling a pain, to perceiving objects visually, to states of anxiety and depression, to working out cross word puzzles, playing chess, trying to remember your aunt's phone number, arguing about politics, or to just wishing you were somewhere else. Dreams on this definition are a form of consciousness, though of course they are in many respects quite different from waking consciousness.¹

This definition of consciousness is not accepted by all, but the word consciousness is used in a variety of other ways. Some people use the word only to refer to states of self consciousness, the consciousness that humans and some primates have of themselves as agents. Some use it to refer to the second-order mental states

about other mental states. i.e., a pain would not be a conscious state, but worrying about a pain would be a conscious state. Behaviourists say that it is a form of complex intelligent behavior. There is a genuine phenomenon of consciousness in the ordinary sense, however we choose to name it, and it is that phenomenon that Searle trying to identify, because he believe it is the proper target of the investigation. He also believes that some of the problems of consciousness are going to have a neurobiological solution, what follows is a shopping list of what a neurobiological account of consciousness should explain.²

II. THE FEATURES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness has three aspects it makes difference from other biological phenomena and the natural world. The three aspects are Qualitativeness, Subjectivity, and Unity. Searle used to think that for investigative purposes we could treat them as three discrete features, but because they are logically interrelated. It is best to treat them together, as different aspects of the same feature. They are not separate because the first implies the second, and the second implies the third. The following feature's are:

2.1 . Qualitativeness

Each conscious state has a certain qualitative feel to it, and we can see it from the following example. The experience of hearing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is very different from tasting beer, and both of those have a different qualitative character from smelling a rose or seeing a sunset. These examples demonstrate the different qualitative features of conscious experiences. One way to put this point is to say that for every conscious experience there is something that it feels like, or something that it is like to have that conscious experience. Nagel made this point over two decades ago when he pointed out that if bats are conscious, and then there is something that "it is like" to be a bat. This distinguishes consciousness from other features of the world, because in this sense, for a non conscious entity such as a car or a brick there is nothing that "it is like" to be that entity. Some philosophers describe this feature of consciousness with the word qualia, and they say there is a special problem of qualia. Searle implies that there are two separate problems, the problem of consciousness and the problem of qualia. But he believes "qualia" is just a plural name for conscious states. Because "consciousness" and "qualia" are coextensive, there seems no point in introducing a special term.

2.2. Subjectivity

The existence of conscious states is experienced by some human or animal subject. In that sense, they are really subjective. Searle used to treat subjectivity and qualitativeness as distinct features, and properly understood, qualitativeness implies subjectivity, because in order for there to be a qualitative feel to some event, there must be some subject that experiences the event. No subjectivity, no experience. Even if more than one subject experiences a similar phenomenon, say two people listening to the same concert, all the same, the qualitative experience can only exist as experienced by some subject or subjects. And even if the different token experiences are qualitatively identical, that is they all exemplify the same type, nonetheless each token experience can only exist if the subject of that experience has it.³ Because conscious states are subjective and it has first-person ontology, as opposed to the third-person ontology of mountains and molecules, which can exist even if no living creatures exist.

2.3. Unity

Conscious experiences at any given point in an agent's life appear as part of one unified conscious field. If I am sitting at my desk looking out the window, I do not just see the sky above and the brook below shrouded by the trees, and at the same time feel the pressure of my body against the chair, the shirt against my back, and the aftertaste of coffee in my mouth, rather I experience all of these as part of a single unified conscious field. This unity of any state of qualitative subjectivity has important consequences for a scientific study of consciousness. unity is already implicit in subjectivity and qualitativeness for the following reason: If you try to imagine that my conscious state is broken into 17 parts, what you imagine is not a single conscious subject with 17 different conscious states but rather 17 different centers of consciousness.⁴ A conscious state is unified, and the unity will follow from the subjectivity and the qualitativeness, because there is no way you could have subjectivity and qualitativeness except with that particular form of unity.

This combined feature of qualitative, unified subjectivity is the essence of consciousness and it makes consciousness different from other phenomena studied by the natural sciences.

III. THE TRADITIONAL MIND-BODY PROBLEM

The major problem facing by the philosophers and neuroscientists are: what exactly is the relation of consciousness to the brain? It is noticed that the philosophical solution without using any of the traditional views of "dualism," "monism," "materialism," and all the rest of it. We have a choice between dualism and materialism. Dualism says that there are two kinds of phenomena in the world, the mental and the physical;

materialism says that there is only one, the material. Dualism ends up with an impossible bifurcation of reality into two separate categories and thus makes it impossible to explain the relation between the mental and the physical. But materialism ends up denying the existence of any irreducible subjective qualitative states of sentience or awareness. In short, dualism makes the problem insoluble; materialism denies the existence of any phenomenon to study, and hence of any problem.⁵

IV. BIOLOGICAL NATURALISM

According to John Searle all forms of consciousness are caused by the behavior of neurons and are realized in the brain system, which is itself composed of neurons. All conscious states are caused by lower level neuronal processes in the brain. We have conscious thoughts and feelings. All conscious states are caused by neurobiological process in the brain and they exist as biological features of brain system. Searle suspicious of isms, but it is sometimes helpful to have a name, just to distinguish clearly between one view and another. His view is called “Biological Naturalism”, because it provides a naturalistic solution to the traditional mind-body problem and avoids both materialism and dualism.

Searle claims that the solution to the mind-body problem really be simple because we know for a fact that all of our mental processes are caused by neurobiological processes and we also know that they are going on in the brain and in the rest of the central nervous system. We know that they function causally, though they have no causal powers in addition to those of the underlying neurobiology, and we know that they are not ontologically reducible to third-person phenomena, because they have first person ontology. We know for a fact that they are caused by neuronal processes and the feelings themselves are processes going on inside the brain.

V. CONCLUSION

We know enough about how the world works to know that consciousness is a biological phenomenon caused by brain processes and realized in the structure of the brain. It is irreducible not because it is ineffable or mysterious, but because it has a first person ontology. Therefore it cannot be reduced to phenomena with third person ontology. Some people made mistake in both science and philosophy has been to suppose that if we reject dualism, then we have to embrace materialism. Searle believes materialism is just as confused as dualism because it denies the existence of ontologically subjective consciousness in the first place. Searle's view that denies both dualism and materialism is called Biological Naturalism.

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