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John Searle and the Mind-Body Problem

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Abstract

The mind-body problem is one of the most fundamental and complex issues in the philosophy of mind, addressing the relationship between mental states and brain processes. John Searle, the contemporary American philosopher, has attempted to offer a distinctive response to this problem through a theory known as biological naturalism. In his view, mental phenomena such as consciousness are not only the result of biological processes in the brain, but also constitute higher-level features of those processes. By distinguishing between causal reductionism and the ontological irreducibility of consciousness, Searle seeks to establish a middle path between reductive physicalism and dualism. Key concepts in his view—including intentionality, mental causation, and emergent properties—play a central role in explaining the workings of the human mind. Nevertheless, his theory has faced significant criticism from philosophers such as Dennett, Nagel, and Chalmers, some of whom consider Searle's biological naturalism to be a new form of property

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dualism. This paper analyzes the theoretical foundations and structure of biological naturalism, aiming to assess its explanatory power in addressing the mind-body problem and to clarify its relation to competing philosophical approaches.

Keywords

John Searle, mind-body problem, biological naturalism, consciousness, intentionality, reductionism.

Introduction

The mind-body problem is one of the most challenging philosophical issues, for which a satisfactory solution has yet to be found. Some modern philosophers, such as Colin McGinn, even argue that the mind-body problem is so far beyond our grasp that we will never be able to solve it, as we lack the necessary concepts to understand how consciousness emerges from a material mechanism.

The question of what the mind essentially is, its relationship with the body, and how a moist, gray substance like the brain gives rise to such an astonishing phenomenon as consciousness has attracted the attention of many philosophers. The interaction between the mind and the body has been a topic of interest since ancient times. It seems that Descartes was the first to explain consciousness within a modern conceptual framework and to raise the question of how this consciousness is connected to the brain. How can we interpret the connections between the mind and the body, two entities that appear to be entirely different? On one side, we have mental phenomena, such as our thoughts and feelings, which we consider to be subjective, conscious, and immaterial. On the other side, there are physical phenomena, which we regard as entities that have mass and spatial extension and interact causally with other physical objects. Many unsuccessful solutions to the mind-body problem end in either denying the existence of one of these two kinds of entities or minimizing its significance. Given the successes of the physical sciences, it is not surprising that at this stage of intellectual development, we are tempted to reduce the status and nature of mental phenomena (Searle, 2002, p. 22).

The image we have of ourselves is that we are mental, conscious, and free beings, whereas the image that science presents of the world is that it consists of physical particles, mindless and

purposeless. So, how can we reconcile this understanding and conception of the world with the image we have of ourselves?

The response of neuroscientists to this question is monism; they say that the mind is nothing but the function of the brain. Monism includes various viewpoints. Reductive monism does not speak of the mind; the only truth they recognize is the brain. Another form of reductive monism believes that what is called the mind is a capability that arises from the brain (Ziaei, 2013, p. 32).

The theory opposite to monism is dualism. Within this school of thought, various viewpoints have been proposed. One of them is property dualism. According to this theory, the brain is a physical substance with various physical and non-physical properties, such as being conscious, experiencing pain, and so on.

Both dualism and monism face intractable problems. John Searle, regarding the mind-body problem, suggests that the issue with the mind-body problem lies in the very formulation of the question. Terms like "mental" and "physical," materialism and dualism, body and soul, and so on, carry an erroneous assumption—that these terms must refer to entities that are distinct and separate. Furthermore, our conscious states, insofar as they are subjective, private, and qualitative, cannot be characteristics of the biological brain. Once we overcome this assumption, it seems that a solution to the mind-body problem becomes apparent. All of our mental states are the result of neurobiological processes in the brain and are realized as higher-level or systemic features of the brain. For instance, if we experience pain, that pain is the result of a chain of neuronal firings and is realized as an actual phenomenon in the brain (Searle, 2013b, pp. 51-52). In his book *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Searle refers to this view as "biological naturalism," which, according to him, is distinct from both dualism and monism. Although he explicitly rejects property dualism, some

believe that his view is a form of dualism with a different expression. Furthermore, while Searle considers traditional terms to be the source of the mind-body problem, he himself relies on these terms. This article aims to elucidate and evaluate Searle's perspective on the mind-body problem.

Biological Naturalism

Although the term naturalism has become common in scientific and philosophical discussions since the twentieth century, as some of its contemporary defenders have pointed out, there is no consensus on its exact definition. Nevertheless, a general framework can be established to limit its meaning. Broadly speaking, naturalism can be divided into two components: ontological and methodological. According to the ontological component, reality has no place for "supernatural" or "spirit-like" entities; reality is confined to nature and does not include anything supernatural. Based on the methodological component, the scientific method is fundamentally valid and should be applied to research in all areas of reality (Papineau, 2007, p. 1).

Craig and Moreland also distinguish between strong and weak naturalism. Strong naturalism refers to a strict form of physicalism, which tends to describe and explain all phenomena in terms of physics, chemistry, or biology. In contrast, weak naturalism acknowledges the existence of emergent, irreducible features and entities, such as consciousness and the mind.

In an article titled "Biological Naturalism," Searle states that this is a term he uses to replace the traditional mind-body problem (Searle, 2004). From this statement, it can be inferred that Searle's naturalism is the primary and most fundamental form of ontological naturalism, as its main concern is to provide a simple solution to the mind-brain problem. By adding the adjective biological, he seeks to

explain the mind and consciousness as part of biology, which is essentially strong naturalism. However, his defense of emergentism, first-person ontology, and the irreducibility of consciousness also brings weak naturalism into play. The question that arises here is whether biological naturalism can be maintained without dualism.

Mind-Body Interaction

John Searle believes that the traditional mind-body problem arises from the Cartesian assumption that the mental and the physical are two distinct categories of phenomena that are metaphysically different. Based on this assumption, the question arises: How is the relationship between the mind and the body established? And how can the causal relationship between these two be justified? In response to this question, Searle states that since neither consciousness nor matter can be reduced to the other, they are distinct and separate phenomena in the world. Those who believe that consciousness can be reduced to matter are called materialists; those who believe that matter can be reduced to consciousness are called idealists. Both are mistaken, as they attempt to eliminate what truly exists and cannot be reduced to something else. Therefore, since both are wrong, the only reasonable alternative is property dualism (Searle, 2002, p. 58). However, property dualism cannot be correct either, because it posits that the irreducibility of a phenomenon implies that it is more than just its physical foundation. This creates an unsolvable problem for property dualism, whether consciousness acts causally or not. If it does, we face a problem of overdetermination: if I intend to raise my hand, it seems that there are two causes—one physical and one mental. However, if consciousness does not act causally, then we would have a form of epiphenomenalism (Searle, 2013b, pp. 129-130). In his book *A Short Introduction to the Mind*, Searle argues that some aspects of

materialism and dualism are true, while others are false. He says that materialism correctly asserts that the world is made up of physical particles but falsely claims that there are no irreducible mental phenomena. Conversely, dualism correctly acknowledges that irreducible mental phenomena exist but falsely asserts that they are separate from the physical world in which we live. He believes that these two views can be reconciled, but to do so, we must challenge traditional terminology and offer new definitions. He argues that consciousness is simply a brain process, subjective and qualitative, and cannot be reduced to third-person neurobiological processes. Consciousness is part of the ordinary physical world and nothing over and above it, causally reducible, but ontologically irreducible (Searle, 2013a, pp. 126-127).

The irreducibility of consciousness does not imply that consciousness is something more than its neurobiological foundation. Since the causal powers of consciousness and its neural substrates are identical, consciousness and neural processes are not two independent things. We are not speaking about two different kinds of entities; rather, we are talking about a single system at different levels. Therefore, consciousness is a dimension of the brain that, ontologically, consists of subjective experiences (Searle, 2007, p. 176).

John Searle claims that the mind-body problem has a simple solution. The solution is this: mental phenomena are caused by the neurobiological processes of the brain and are also features of the brain. He calls this biological naturalism and argues that mental events and processes are as much a part of our biological natural history as the stomach, mitosis, or enzyme secretion (Searle, 1992, p. 1). To explain his view, he uses the analogy of water. Consider water. We are all familiar with the behavior of water in everyday, macroscopic terms—

for example, we know that it is wet, odorless, and liquid. The behavior of water can be explained by how the molecules of H_2O interact with each other. These macroscopic features are causally explained by the behavior of the smaller, microscopic elements (Maslin, 2009, p. 31). In this model, the mind is the macroscopic feature of the brain, and neurons are the microscopic features of the brain. Therefore, the mind is both caused by neurons and, at the same time, is a feature of neurons. The reason for this is that the mind is also physical.

But the question is, how is the relationship between the mind and the brain? The mind is caused by the brain, yet the mind and the brain have two separate identities. The mind is a mental entity, and the brain is a physical entity. Although the mind cannot exist without the brain, they are not the same. The relationship between the mind and the brain is like that between a building and its foundation. A building cannot exist without its foundation, yet the building and the foundation are two separate entities. Or, in another way, the relationship between the mind and the brain is like that between an astronaut and their spacecraft. The astronaut cannot survive without their spacecraft, yet the astronaut and the spacecraft are two separate identities. The mind and the brain are two different things. The mind cannot exist without the brain; however, the mind is not merely a feature of the brain but has its own separate identity. Despite the differences between the mind and the brain, they are not two separate domains but belong to one unified domain.

As you saw, Searle believes that mental phenomena are both caused by neurobiological processes in the brain and are themselves higher-level features. This view appears to be inconsistent, since it seems impossible for something to be both identical with and caused by something else. How, for example, can the liquidity of water be

both dependent on the behavior of its molecules and also a feature of the system of molecules? Causal relationships occur between two distinct entities. The relationship between the behavior of a microstructure and that of a macro-level system is too close to be considered causal. The behavior of water at the macro level is identical to the behavior of the molecules at the micro level; there are not two distinct phenomena here — the micro-level behavior and a numerically different macro-level phenomenon. Rather, there is a single phenomenon viewed from two perspectives. We cannot say that micro-level properties cause macro-level properties, because they constitute them. Micro-level properties are simply macro-level properties seen at a much closer range. It is meaningless to say that one causes the other, as that would amount to saying that a phenomenon causes itself (Maslin, 2009, pp. 248–249).

Another objection to Searle's view comes from the criticisms Thomas Nagel raises regarding the mind-body problem. Although Nagel does not directly address these criticisms to Searle, they are nonetheless applicable to his position. Nagel's central criticism of proposed solutions to the mind-body problem is that conceptual necessities are insufficient for resolving the issue. Causal explanations are essential in science—for example, the molecular composition H_2O allows us to understand solidity, liquidity, and other states. In contrast, there is no necessary connection between the physical and the mental. No matter how much we learn about the brain, we will never be able to fully grasp mental phenomena through it alone. As Michael Huemer points out, it is logically impossible to derive a subjective (mental) proposition from a non-subjective (physical) one. Similarly, as Hume famously argued, one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is," just as one cannot derive a geometric proposition from a non-

geometric one. Consequently, mental facts are not derivable from physical facts (Caplan, 1992).

Intentionality and the Mind-Brain Problem

Intentionality was employed by medieval philosophers in the concept of *intentio*, referring to the Latin term *esse intentionale* or intentional existence. Some have interpreted this as deriving from the word *intendere*, meaning "to aim at" or "to direct toward" (Maslin, 2009, p. 45). For instance, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) used the notion of intentionality to refer to anything capable of conceptually representing the mind (Crane, 1998, p. 817). Later, Franz Brentano (1838–1917) argued that mental phenomena possess this distinctive feature—namely, that they exhibit intentional existence, meaning that they are always directed toward an object. This object is related to the content and is directly referred to as the object. According to Brentano, despite apparent differences between the concepts of intentional existence and immanent objectivity, both relate to the same idea: a mental phenomenon that represents the world. Brentano believed that, unlike physical phenomena, mental phenomena arise immediately and directly; in this sense, they are inherently mental. This claim is known as Brentano's thesis (Brentano, 1995, pp. 68–69). As some commentators have rightly noted, the concept of intentionality forms a central pillar of Searle's thought. Not only his biological naturalism, but his entire philosophical project is built upon this concept. In the preface to *Intentionality*, Searle states that the main aim of the book is to provide a foundation for his two earlier works on language. In other words, what he sets out to do in *Intentionality* is to explain the fundamental features of language, which he sees as deriving from the essential features of the mind. However, in the subsequent pages, he lays out a

far more ambitious project—one that includes a solution to the mind-body problem and a comprehensive account of human behavior (Searle, 1983, pp. vii–x). It is precisely within this broader framework that the concept of intentionality is highlighted as an irreducible feature of the human mind.

According to John Searle, intentionality is the term used to describe the mind's capacity to be directed toward objects or states of affairs in the external world and the surrounding, or consequences arising from them. Thus, intentionality includes states such as belief, hope, fear, love, and hate, as well as sensory perception and intentional action. Searle summarizes intentionality as the mind's ability to represent objects and states of affairs in the world. He argues that every intentional state involves a direction of fit—a representation of the conditions under which it would be true or satisfied. Mental states such as desires and beliefs are inherently intentional. For example, if I have a belief about something, or a desire for something, or if I perceive an object or a situation in the world, these are all intentional mental states (Searle, 2013a, pp. 41–42). However, not all mental states are intentional, and not all intentional states are conscious. There is, of course, a significant overlap between the two. For instance, anxiety or unease may be conscious states without a clear intentional object—when a person feels anxious but cannot say what they are anxious about. Conversely, an intentional state can exist without conscious awareness; for example, it is not false to say "I believe that two plus two equals four" even while I am asleep (Searle, 2013a, p. 138).

Another key element of Searle's theory is the distinction between essential (or genuine) intentionality and derived intentionality, which helps explain the relationship between mind and language.

Only mental states possess essential intentionality, meaning that intentionality is a fundamental and irreducible feature of the mind. Speech acts, which involve a physical realization such as sound, derive their intentionality from the mind's genuine intentional states. Human actions, such as commuting from home to the university to give a lecture, acquire their meaning from human intentions—which themselves are a form of genuine mental intentionality (Searle, 2013a, p. 42). But how is this possible? How does this transfer of intentionality occur?

To explain how this is possible, Searle draws on the concept of mental causation, which he sees as a kind of efficient causation—a capacity of the mind to impose intentionality on non-mental entities and phenomena (Searle, 1983, pp. 117–132). It is through this form of efficient causation that the mind establishes a connection with the non-mental world. Linguistic events, in turn, make possible interaction and communication with other beings and social entities.

But after all this, one may still ask: What is the relationship between the theory of intentionality and biological naturalism? Or more precisely, how can the mental states approach resolve the mind-brain problem?

In fact, throughout the first nine chapters of his book, Searle defends the real existence of a class of irreducible and non-eliminable primary phenomena—namely, mental states. In these chapters, he confines himself to describing their essential features. It is in chapter ten that he attempts to show how mental states actually exist in the real world, and it is there that he introduces the term biological naturalism for the first time, where he asserts that mental states, like any other biological phenomenon—such as photosynthesis, mitosis, or digestion—are real. Mental states, like other phenomena, are caused

by biological processes. This view is called biological naturalism.

To defend the validity of his theory, Searle employs two distinct arguments. First, he asserts that there is no problem in accepting that mental states are both features emerging from the brain and realized within the brain at the same time. To explain this claim, he uses the analogy of water: The relationship between molecular behavior and the physical properties of water's surface is clearly causal. For example, if we change a molecule, the surface properties also change. We can have ice or steam, depending on whether the molecular motion slows down or speeds up. The liquidity of a surface of water is nothing beyond the H_2O molecules. When we describe the substance as liquid, we are simply describing those molecules at a higher level than individual molecular descriptions. (Searle, 1983, pp. 265–266)

In his second argument, Searle raises the issue of mental causation. For instance, can we explain that my conscious decision to raise my hand causes my hand to rise? Here, Searle again draws an analogy with the physical world, arguing that this situation is very similar to the combustion of fuel in a car engine. One might say that the oxidation of hydrocarbon molecules releases thermal energy, which then applies pressure to the molecular structure of the alloy. These are not two independent descriptions of two sets of causes but rather descriptions at two different levels of the same complete system (Searle, 2013a, p. 203).

In the final lines, Searle admits that his analogies are incomplete, and in fact, we currently have no theory explaining how the brain gives rise to mental states. However, he clearly expresses his belief that advancements in neuroscience will eventually resolve this issue (Searle, 1992, p. 272).

Consciousness as a Biological Problem

In *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Searle systematically examines consciousness. In the book's introduction, he emphasizes that consciousness is the central phenomenon of the mind. One of the main objectives of the book is to explore the issue of consciousness and to overcome the dominant philosophical traditions regarding the mind, namely dualism and materialism, offering a new approach to the philosophy of mind. In this book, Searle introduces two scientific theories: the atomic theory of matter and the evolutionary theory. The atomic theory asserts that subatomic particles and their causal and systematic relationships constitute the ultimate reality of the world, such that many macro phenomena can be explained through micro phenomena. The evolutionary theory analyzes biological phenomena in terms of genetic mechanisms. Functioning at the molecular level, molecules in living organisms generate biological behaviors (for example, plants perform photosynthesis because their biochemical structure secretes auxins, causing the leaves to bend toward the sun). Thus, regarding both theories, Searle allows for the possibility of understanding consciousness (Searle, 1992, pp. 84–93).

In *The Mystery of Consciousness*, Searle states that if we distinguish between analytical definitions and the common-sense definition of consciousness, defining it would not be difficult. According to the common-sense definition, consciousness refers to states of sensory perception and awareness, which begin when we wake up and continue until we either fall asleep again, enter a coma or die, or become unconscious in any other form (Searle, 2014, p. 1). According to this definition, consciousness is an inner, first-person, and subjective phenomenon. In fact, by rejecting dualism, he views consciousness as a biological phenomenon, akin to growth, digestion, or bile secretion (Searle, 2014, p. 12).

He cites two reasons why his view is often considered dualistic. First, many people believe that if brain processes cause consciousness, then there must be two distinct things: the brain processes that act as the cause and consciousness that serves as the effect. The second reason is that causal relationships are typically assumed to occur between separate events that follow one another in time. In response to these misconceptions, he distinguishes between event causation and non-event causation. Consider the objects around you and the causal explanations for the fact that a table exerts pressure on a carpet. While this can be explained by gravitational force, gravity is not an event. Take the solidity of the table, for example. This can be causally explained in terms of the behavior of the molecules composing the table, yet solidity is not an external event—it is merely a property of the table itself. Examples of non-event causation, by providing suitable models, help make the relationship between my current conscious state and the underlying neurobiological processes that generate it intelligible (Searle, 2014, pp. 13–14).

Thus, according to Searle, consciousness is a natural biological phenomenon. While it arises from the brain's lower-level micro-processes, it is also considered a property of the brain at higher macro levels. The relationship between consciousness and brain processes is similar to the relationship between the solidity of a piston and the molecular behavior of H_2O, or the explosion in an engine cylinder and the oxidation of individual hydrocarbon molecules. In each case, higher-level causes are not over and above those present at the micro level of the system's components. Rather, causes at the level of the system's entirety can be fully explained in terms of the relationships between its micro-elements and are causally reducible to them (Searle, 2013a, p. 202). In short, Searle believes that the brain is the cause of

consciousness. The brain is an organ like any other, and consciousness is the result of lower-level neuronal processes in the brain, thus considered a property of the brain itself. Mental phenomena are both the result of and occur within the nervous system. Therefore, micro-level features give rise to macro-level properties that do not exist at the micro level. For this reason, Searle regards consciousness as an "emergent property" of the brain, arising from specific neuronal actions.

The emergent property of a system can be causally explained through the behavior of the system's components. However, this property does not belong to the individual components, nor can it be considered merely the sum of their individual properties. The liquid state of water provides a good example to illustrate this point. The behavior of the collective H_2O molecules explains the liquid state, but none of these molecules, individually, are liquid (Searle, 2014, p. 24).

Consciousness and Reductionism

Reduction means to explain or transform one phenomenon into another. When you reduce A to B, you show that A is nothing other than B. For example, material objects can be reduced to molecules, because material objects are nothing other than a collection of molecules. Similarly, if consciousness can be reduced to brain processes, then consciousness is nothing other than brain processes (Searle, 2013a, p. 111). However, the concept of reduction is ambiguous in several ways, and to resolve this ambiguity, it is important to distinguish between causal and ontological reductions. A phenomenon of type A is causally reducible to a phenomenon of type B if and only if the behavior of A's is entirely causally explained by the behavior of B's, and A's have no causal powers beyond those of B's. For example,

the solidity of an object is causally reducible to the molecular behavior of its components. The features of solid objects are causally explained by molecular behavior, and solidity has no causal power independent of molecular behavior. Phenomena of type A are ontologically reducible to phenomena of type B if and only if A's are nothing other than B's. Therefore, solid objects are nothing other than a collection of molecules.

Searle believes that consciousness is causally reducible, but it cannot be ontologically reduced without losing its meaning. Consciousness is causally explained by neuronal behavior, but we cannot say that consciousness is nothing other than neuronal behavior. The reason for this is that consciousness possesses first-person and subjective qualities. Therefore, consciousness differs from other phenomena that have outward features, such as liquidity or solidity, in that we do not wish to analyze the outward features and redefine the concept of consciousness in terms of the causes of those features. In fact, we recognize the concept by its subjective qualities, not by its outward characteristics (Searle, 2013a, pp. 119–121).

Searle, on the one hand, asserts that consciousness is reducible, but on the other hand, he denies its irreducibility. To resolve this apparent contradiction between eliminative reductions and non-eliminative reductions, he makes a distinction. Eliminative reductions suggest that the phenomenon being reduced does not actually exist. For example, reducing the sunset to the movement of the Earth is an eliminative reduction because it shows that the apparent movement of the sun downward is merely an appearance. However, the reduction of solidity is not eliminative. Eliminative reductions rely on a distinction between appearance and reality. We cannot show that the existence of consciousness, like the sunset, is an illusion because, in the case of

consciousness, the appearance is the reality (Searle, 2013a, pp. 122–123).

Criticism and Evaluation

Although Searle himself claims that his biological naturalism provides a suitable solution to the mind-body problem, many critics, including Dennett, Chalmers, and others, have raised objections to his view. Some even believe that his solution may simply be another form of property dualism.

Dennett argues that Searle's use of the term "ontological first-person" is vague and unprecedented. According to him, Searle never explains what he means by the term "ontological," but only uses it to deny that the subjectivity of the mental is merely an epistemological reality (Dennett, 1993, pp. 193–205).

The term "ontological first-person" only makes sense if we are precisely discussing two different domains, each as a distinct reality: a subjective reality and an objective/physical reality, each with its own ontology (just with different layers). Moreover, it seems that the irreducibility of the ontological first-person requires different levels of ontology.

Searle rejects the interpretation of biological naturalism as a form of property dualism, which denies the existence of different metaphysical realms: Property dualism wants to say that consciousness is mental and therefore not a physical feature of the brain. I want to say that consciousness is mental and therefore a biological and physical feature of the brain (Searle, 2002, p. 61).

Given this, the mental has the same ontological status as the physical, yet it is not reducible to the physical. Understanding this is truly difficult. Searle's claim is that mental events and processes are

just as much part of our biological natural history as the stomach, mitosis, or enzyme secretion are (Searle, 1992, p. 90).

No satisfactory epistemological explanation of consciousness is provided. Even if we sympathize with Searle's attempt to naturalize consciousness, we still cannot fully understand his description of consciousness and its irreducibility as higher-level properties of the neurobiological system (Ibid, 1992, p. 28). This is because all ordinary biological features are reducible to the physical.

Searle considers consciousness to have the same ontological status as a physical property, claiming that consciousness is simply an emergent higher-level property of the brain, much like liquidity is an emergent property of H_2O molecules (Searle, 1992, p. 14). When he states that consciousness is a result of the brain, it seems he overlooks the fact that liquidity is not the result of a physical feature of H_2O; it is constituted by the physical features of H_2O. (Chalmers, 1996, p. 130) The distinction between causing and constituting is crucial, and it can be illustrated with the following example: three straight lines, designed in such a way that their angles sum to 180 degrees, form a triangle. The triangle logically entails specific arrangement of the lines. However, the triangle is not created by the specific arrangement of the lines. It is made by a person who arranges the lines in such a way that they form a triangle. If consciousness is constituted by the physical, it logically must be physical, which brings the interpretation of consciousness closer to a materialistic view of consciousness.

There are also other problems with Searle's view. He claims that he wants to free himself from the philosophical tradition and its terminology, and overcome it. However, despite his repeated assertions that biological naturalism is new relative to its predecessors,

in reality, it is a repetition of several elements from the same tradition. For example, the influence of Brentano and Husserl on his theory of intentionality is not surprising, yet he never explicitly references either of them.

Similarly, the comparisons he draws between consciousness and biological functions such as digestion have been used by materialists since at least the eighteenth century, as has been shown elsewhere (Freitas Araujo, 20013).

The categories that form the framework of his discussions come from the very traditions he seeks to avoid (such as subjectivity, first-person perspective, etc.). Of course, in defending the irreducibility of consciousness, he refers to thinkers like Nagel and Jackson. However, according to him, they mistakenly treat subjectivity purely as epistemological, while he considers it ontological. Unfortunately, despite his efforts in this regard, he fails to present an independent ontological concept, as everything he says is based on the epistemological experience of human consciousness, as Churchland has also pointed out (Jackson, 1982, pp. 127–136).

Conclusion

John Searle, with his theory of "biological naturalism," has made a serious attempt to rethink the mind-body problem. By rejecting traditional dualism and physicalist reductionism, he has sought to explain consciousness within a biological framework, while also acknowledging its subjective nature, using concepts such as intentionality, mental causality, and emergent properties. According to him, mental phenomena are just as natural and biological as processes like digestion or photosynthesis, with the difference that they also have first-person and qualitative aspects.

However, a critical analysis of Searle's theory shows that, although it contains innovations, it ultimately fails to fully overcome the existing epistemological and ontological challenges. The ontological irreducibility of consciousness, despite Searle's emphasis on the unity of the nervous system, still raises the question of how one can bridge the gap between third-person and first-person realities. As a result, many of his critics accuse him of, in practice, reverting to a form of property dualism.

Despite these criticisms, Searle's theory is considered an important step in bridging the findings of neuroscience with philosophical analysis. While it may not be regarded as a final solution, it has undoubtedly opened new horizons for reflection on the mind-body problem.

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