

Making Sense of Biological Naturalism

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Abstract

Searle's theory of Biological Naturalism has been largely ignored in the philosophical literature and Searle's commentators are confused by his seemingly contradictory views. In this dissertation I attempt to make sense of Biological Naturalism. In chapter 2 I will ascertain which concerns prevent Searle's readers from understanding his position. The remaining chapters aim to dissolve the tensions and dispel any confusion.

Chapter 3 considers Searle's notion of first-person ontology, finding that it expresses a belief that experiences are essentially subjective and qualitative. In chapter 4 I consider the notions of levels of description, causal reduction and what Searle means by causation and realisation. Chapter 5 turns to the question of how to categorise Searle's position. Many of his critics charge him with being a property dualist. By highlighting the difference between the meaning of irreducibility intended by the property dualist and Searle I show that there is sufficient difference in their use of the term so as to reject an interpretation of Biological Naturalism as a form of property dualism. Chapter 6 is where I turn to the other end of the physicalism/dualism spectrum and assess whether Searle should be seen as holding a form of identity theory. I first argue for a neutral form of identity that I call real identity, which does not include the inherent reductive privileging of standard identity. I then argue that Searle should be seen as advocating a form of real identity theory; a form of token identity theory which does not privilege the physical over the mental.

In chapter 7 I return to the main barriers to making sense of Biological Naturalism which I identified in chapter 2 and lay out my response to each. I conclude with a coherent interpretation of Searle's position.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1. A unique position within philosophy of mind?

Experiences seem to be subjective and first-personal, physical items seem to be objective and third-personal, and yet we know that experiences are correlated with states of the brain. The puzzle of how first-personal subjective experiences are related to third-personal objective brain processes has been under debate for centuries. The current landscape of positions which are available is broad and varied. At one end are extreme physicalist positions such as eliminativism, which tries to eliminate subjective experiences altogether, resulting in a view of the world which contains only strictly physical items. At the other end is substance dualism, which takes the reality of subjective experiences so seriously as to posit a fundamental divide in the ontology of reality between the mental and the physical. In between are a whole host of other options, such as reductive physicalist positions which accept subjective experiences but claim that they are nevertheless “nothing but” some kind of physical state. Towards the other end, property dualism accepts the ontological divide between mental and physical, but only in relation to properties, that is to say that certain physical items will have both mental and physical properties.

Realistically, the majority of philosophers of mind position themselves not at one of the physicalist or dualist extremes but somewhere in the middle, where they try to find a balance between respecting the advances made in understanding both the universe, and the knowledge gained from neuroscience, whilst avoiding denying the obvious facts that we really do experience qualitative subjective states of conscious experience. John Searle’s theory of Biological Naturalism tries to walk this fine line between reductive physicalism and dualism. Searle states,

‘I see the human brain as an organ like any other, as a biological system. Its special feature, as far as the mind is concerned, the feature in which it differs remarkably from other biological organs, is its capacity to produce and sustain all of the enormous variety of our consciousness’¹

He sees himself as providing a theory which contrasts with both reductive physicalism and property dualism, believing that he has taken the best of both of these theories and discarded

¹ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.227

their mistakes to forge a unique position. Searle believes that Biological Naturalism has embraced physicalism's claim that 'the universe is entirely made up of physical particles that exist in fields of force and are often organized into systems' but rejected physicalism's insistence 'that there are no ontologically irreducible mental phenomena'.² At the other end of the scale, Searle considers Biological Naturalism to accept the property dualist's belief that 'there are irreducible mental phenomena' whilst denying that such irreducibility means that experiences 'are something apart from the ordinary physical world we all live in, that they are something over and above their physical substrate'.³ The point here is that property dualism and reductive physicalism are usually seen as mutually exclusive positions, at opposite ends of the spectrum of possible positions. Reductive physicalism for example, reduces experiences to physical brain states, yet property dualism views experiences as *irreducible*. Searle is, in effect, trying to have his cake and eat it – he is trying to create a theory which is both partly dualistic and partly physicalist, whilst denying he is either. It is therefore unsurprising that Searle has been interpreted by some as being a property dualist and by others as being an identity theorist. In other words, it seems that his critics think Searle fails to successfully walk the very fine line between the two positions that Searle considers himself to have achieved. In this dissertation I will be defending my belief that it is possible to make sense of Searle's theory of Biological Naturalism as a coherent theory, and indeed view it as a position which does provide an unusual combination of claims from both sides of the physicalist and dualist traditions.

2. Searle's Biological Naturalism - key features

As well as not abiding by categories of positions in philosophy of mind, seeming to choose aspects of positions at will to create a pick'n'mix theory, Searle does not accept many of the standard uses of terminology in philosophy of mind. With this in mind before I embark on the task of making sense of Biological Naturalism I will briefly summarise its main features. As it contains many interdependent concepts which Searle has his own terminology for, I'll briefly outline them here so that the reader always has the bigger picture in mind and can place discussions of the specifics of Searle's theory in a broader picture of Biological Naturalism as a whole.

² Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

³ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

a) Conceptual dualism

Underpinning Searle's Biological Naturalism is a denial of what he terms conceptual dualism.

He describes it like this;

'It is customary to think of dualism as coming in two flavours, substance dualism and property dualism; but to these I want to add a third, which I will call "conceptual dualism." This view consists in taking the dualistic concepts very seriously, that is, it consists in the view that in some important sense "physical" implies "nonmental" and "mental" implies "nonphysical.'" Both traditional dualism and materialism presuppose conceptual dualism, so defined. I introduce this definition to make it clear why it seems to me best to think of materialism as really a form of dualism. It is that form of dualism that begins by accepting the Cartesian categories. I believe that if you take those categories seriously – the categories of mental and physical, mind and body – as a consistent dualist, you will eventually be forced to materialism. Materialism is thus in a sense the finest flower of dualism.⁴

Searle therefore believes that both materialism and dualism are founded upon an acceptance of conceptual dualism; they both assume that mental features and physical features of the world are mutually exclusive and are therefore in need of being reconciled, or their interactions explained. In other words, Searle believes that within philosophy of mind,

'It is assumed that "mental" and "physical" name mutually exclusive ontological categories. If it is mental then it cannot be in that very respect physical. And if it is physical, then it cannot be in that very respect mental. Mental qua mental excludes physical qua physical'⁵

Searle finds this "conceptual dualism" too restrictive, for he wants to claim that experiences are both mental and physical, using the standard vocabulary, which seems contradictory. He puts it like this;

'The property dualist wants to say that consciousness is a mental and therefore not physical feature of the brain. I want to say consciousness is a mental and therefore biological and therefore physical feature of the brain. But because the traditional vocabulary was designed to contrast the mental and the physical, I cannot say what I want to say in the traditional vocabulary without sounding like I am saying something inconsistent.'⁶

⁴ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.26

⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.76

⁶ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.61

So Searle believes that conceptual dualism prevents him from saying that experiences are ordinary biological features of the brain, yet they also have a first-person ontology, which is another of his own terms, which I will now present.

b) First-person ontology

The dualistic aspect of Searle's Biological Naturalism can be seen in his doctrine of first-person ontology. First-person ontology is central to Searle's criticism of reductive theories in philosophy of mind;

'Much of the bankruptcy of most work in the philosophy of mind and a great deal of the sterility of academic psychology over the past fifty years, over the whole of my intellectual lifetime, have come from a persistent failure to recognize and come to terms with the fact that the ontology of the mental is an irreducibly first-person ontology'⁷

With his doctrine of first-person ontology Searle is referring to many of the features of experience which are highlighted in dualistic theories of mind such as an essentially qualitative nature and being linked to a particular point of view. Searle describes it thus;

'Because of the qualitative character of consciousness, conscious states exist only when they are experienced by a human or animal subject. They have a type of subjectivity that I call ontological subjectivity. Another way to make this same point is to say that consciousness has a first-person ontology.'⁸

This notion of first-person ontology is, according to Searle, the reason why experiences are ontologically irreducible, to which I will now turn.

c) Ontological irreducibility

Although, unlike the previous three concepts, ontological irreducibility is a well-recognised locution in philosophy of mind, however, Searle's meaning of it is not standard. Whilst the ontological irreducibility of experiences lies at the heart of dualistic theories of mind, Searle clearly states his belief that the notion of ontological irreducibility is 'the crucial distinction between my view and property dualism'.⁹ Searle describes this distinction thus;

⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.95

⁸ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, p.94

⁹ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.60

‘The dualist supposes that the irreducibility of consciousness already implies that consciousness is something over and above its neurobiological base. I deny that implication.’¹⁰

Searle asserts that experiences are ontologically irreducible, in that ‘a complete description of the third-person objective features of the brain would not be a description of its first-person subjective features.’¹¹ Although he adds that this is merely a ‘trivial consequence of our definitional practices’.¹² Searle’s claim of ontological irreducibility is made hand-in-hand with the claim that experiences are what he calls causally reducible to underlying brain states.

d) Causal reduction

Causation and reduction are widely used and discussed notions in philosophy, but Searle creates the notion of a specifically causal type of reduction, claiming that it is in this restricted sense that experiences *can* be seen as reducible. He describes causal reduction thus;

‘We can say that phenomena of type A are *causally reducible* to phenomena of type B, if and only if the behaviour of A’s is entirely causally explained by the behaviour of B’s, and A’s have no causal powers in addition to the powers of B’s’¹³

When applied to experiences, Searle talks of experiences having no causal powers in addition to those had by the neuronal states in our brains;

‘Causally speaking, there is nothing there, except the neurobiology, which has a higher level feature of consciousness. In a similar way there is nothing in the car engine except molecules, which have such higher level features as the solidity of the cylinder block, the shape of the piston, the firing of the spark plug, etc.’¹⁴

For Searle, Biological Naturalism is a position where a denial of conceptual dualism frees him to claim that experiences are biological features alongside other processes in our bodies like digestion. However, they also have a first-person ontology, in that they are ‘essentially subjective’¹⁵ but this poses no problem, Searle believes, because the denial of conceptual dualism breaks down the barrier for a subjective item to also be physical. The first-person ontology of experiences is the basis for his notion of the ontological irreducibility of experiences, which is held in conjunction with the belief that experiences are causally

¹⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* pp.88-89

¹¹ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” pp.60-61

¹² Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

¹³ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.83

¹⁴ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.60

¹⁵ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.20

reducible. All of these concepts are closely intertwined and involve some non-standard pairings of claims, and the unusual features of Searle's position have led to most philosophers being unable to make sense of Biological Naturalism. The different chapters of my dissertation will address the various obstacles to making sense of Searle's position, and aim to make sense of Searle's claims within Biological Naturalism. I will now summarise the chapters to come so that the reader will be aware of the direction of argument as they read.

3. Chapter summaries

Chapter 2 - Motivating the thesis

There are many apparent contradictions within Biological Naturalism such as experiences being both reducible *and* irreducible, being caused *by* the brain but also realised *in* the brain, and ontological irreducibility being a mere trivial consequence of how we define reduction, yet based on the substantive ontological claims of first-person ontology.

In chapter 2 I will survey the literature and categorise the criticisms put forth by Searle's commentators. These will cover both specific criticism, like Searle's use of seemingly inadequate examples to explain his ideas, and more general critique such as Searle not achieving the unique position within the options of philosophy of mind and actually being a version of a different position, such as property dualism or identity theory.

I will then draw out the main barriers that prevent Searle's critics from making sense of Biological Naturalism and use them as the basis of each of the subsequent chapters. This way I will deal with all the concerns that his critics have, and remove the barriers to making sense of Biological Naturalism.

Chapter 3 - Making sense of first-person ontology

In chapter 3 I will tackle the problems surrounding first-person ontology. It is not always entirely clear from what Searle says what he intends the label of first-person ontology to indicate, so I will look at the features that he associates with first-person ontology and the role it plays within Biological Naturalism. To analyse the notion of first-person ontology I then attempt to break down the possible features that Searle intends to convey with first-person ontology, such as a perspectival nature, an essential qualitative feel, and whether, or in what sense, experiences are private or have any form of special access.

I will conclude that when he refers to the first-person ontology of experiences, he is making the dual claim that experiences are essentially qualitative and subjective in nature, in that it feels a certain way to undergo an experience, and that experience is essentially restricted to a subject's first-person view of the world.

I will then explore whether first-person ontology is as unconventional a notion as Searle's terminology might suggest and find that Searle is expressing views that have been long held by anti-reductionist philosophers. Given Searle's other physicalist-style claims I point out how his concept of first-person ontology highlights a problematic tension within Biological Naturalism; first-person ontology is suggestive of dualism, but Searle's claims of causal reduction is suggestive of physicalism.

Chapter 4 - Making sense of levels of description and causal reduction

In chapter 4 I move onto Searle's concept of causal reduction and the claim that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain. By exploring Searle's use of levels of description and highlighting how Searle seems to be an extensionalist about properties, individuating them via differing causal powers, I will look at the problem of mental causation as a way of uncovering in more detail what Searle means by his claim of causal reduction.

I will conclude that Searle uses the notion of realisation in a fairly standard way, but has such an unusual view of causation in relation to experiences that it is tantamount to standard realisation. This resolves the worry about Searle claiming that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain. I find that by causal reduction, Searle is referring to the way in which a particular token brain state which is correlated to an experience undergone by a subject comes under two types; "experience" and "neuronal activity". The claim of causal reduction itself is that the brain state in question has particular causal powers and that the experiential way of picking out the token brain state is equally descriptive of those causal powers as the neuronal way of picking it out.

Chapter 5 - Is Searle a property dualist?

In chapter 5 I confront the criticism that Searle is a property dualist. By looking in depth at property dualism and the claim of irreducibility which is at its core, I show how this irreducibility amounts to the belief that experiences are something over and above the physical brain, thus ontologically separating physical properties from mental ones. I then analyse Searle's notion of irreducibility and his claim that it is merely a trivial consequence of

the way that we define and use the process of reduction. Given this belief, irreducibility for Searle becomes the mere inapplicability of reduction to experiences.

However, I go on to draw out the tension between Searle's trivial sense of irreducibility and his belief that experiences have a first-person ontology, which seems to coincide more with the substantive sense of irreducibility that the property dualist uses. I explore whether Searle can succeed in his seeming quest to render experiences irreducible, but not too irreducible. I finish with a discussion of whether Searle has sufficiently tackled the substantive problem at the heart of the mind-body problem; how first-personal subjective experiences can arise from essentially objective brains. I use the work of Howell and his insistence that certain states have to be instantiated to be fully grasped to explain Searle's approach to the mind-body problem. I highlight how Searle seems to opt for a brute assertion that some brain states just are subjective when instantiated by a subject.

Chapter 6 - Is Searle an identity theorist?

In chapter 6 I look at what I find to be the most compelling criticism of Searle, that his Biological Naturalism is tantamount to a form of identity theory. I spend some time looking in-depth at identity theory and argue that the standard format includes an inherently reductive aspect; a privileging of the physical over the mental. I develop the terminology of real-identity to mean a neutral identity claim without any accompanying reductive privileging, and show how this might lead to a real identity theory, which makes the claim of identity between token brain states and token experiences, but does not include any privileging of the physical over the mental.

Having established this new way of approaching identity theory, I assess whether Searle can be seen as an identity theorist. Concluding that he cannot be justly interpreted as a traditional reductive identity theorist, I make the argument that Biological Naturalism both can, and should, be seen as a form of real identity theory. I again draw on the work of Howell, and Searle's use of levels of description to explain my interpretation of Searle as a real identity theorist.

I will now move on to establishing the motivation for this thesis – showing how philosophers are very confused about exactly what Searle is claiming, and setting out the barriers within Searle's theory which make it difficult to make sense of Biological Naturalism.

Chapter 2 – Motivating the thesis

1. Introduction

In his book *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Searle is characteristically confident in his views and equally dismissive of his opponents leading Thomas Nagel to describe Searle as ‘a dragonslayer by temperament’¹ whose book is ‘trenchant, aggressive, and beautifully clear, in Searle’s best “What is all this nonsense?” style’.² The response to this book is hugely varied, and ranges from tentative agreement, to charging Searle with either closet token identity theory³ or property dualism⁴, to simply dismissing Biological Naturalism as incoherent⁵ or ‘infuriating’.⁶ Many criticise ‘his bull-in-the-china-shop routine’⁷ and find his assertive nature of presenting his ideas concerning;

‘Someone less self-confident might reason: "I must be missing something; these colleagues of mine are coming out too stupid for words!" but if this occurs to Searle, it does not prompt any serious consideration by him’⁸

What is clear is that most philosophers cannot make their way through Searle’s rhetoric and assuredly confident style to make sense of his seemingly self-contradictory claims, for example, that experiences are both reducible and irreducible. As Collins puts it, ‘he wants to have his cake and eat it too’.⁹

The cornerstone of Searle’s book is the ‘radical thesis, that consciousness is a physical property of the brain in spite of its subjectivity, and that it is irreducible to any *other* physical properties’.¹⁰ The claim is that materialism has left out the most important feature of consciousness – the subjective, qualitative nature of experiences – and that Searle wishes to ‘put back in what has been left out, but he wants to put it back into the brain itself’.¹¹ This

¹ Nagel T. “Searle: Why We Are Not Computers” p.96

² Nagel T. “Searle: Why We Are Not Computers” p.110

³ For example, see Kenyon T. “Searle Rediscovered What Was Not Lost”

⁴ For example, see Olafson F. “Brain Dualism”, Nagel T. “Searle: Why We Are Not Computers” or Palmer D. “Searle on consciousness: or how not to be a physicalist”

⁵ For example, see Dennett D. “Review of Searle”

⁶ Stoutland F. “Searle’s Consciousness” p.245

⁷ Dennett D. “Review of Searle” p.204

⁸ Dennett D. “Review of Searle” p.204

⁹ Collins C. “Searle on Consciousness and Dualism” p.27

¹⁰ Nagel T. “Searle: Why We Are Not Computers” p.103

¹¹ Olafson F. “Brain Dualism” p.256

results in him trying to offer ‘a hybrid of the two positions he ostensibly rejects’,¹² whereby Searle takes himself to be melding the best of materialism and dualism, whilst leaving out what, in his opinion, they each get wrong. However, most commentators either disagree entirely with Searle, charging him with being at either end of the materialism-dualism spectrum that he claims to bypass, or are merely exasperated by the process of trying to understand the substance of his theory. There is, therefore, confusion over ‘what kind of view is Searle advocating; a property identity theory or a property dualism?’¹³ and the critique that ‘Searle’s attempt to have it both ways is inconsistent’¹⁴ because he ‘cannot consistently maintain both his physicalist stance toward mental phenomena and his phenomenological characterization of those same phenomena’.¹⁵ Most philosophers considering Searle’s work would agree that ‘Searle has failed to show that consciousness can be both irreducibly subjective and a normal physical feature of the brain’.¹⁶

The confusion over Searle is evidenced by the range of interpretations of his work, from all over the materialism-dualism spectrum. How can it be that the same philosopher is interpreted by some as a reductive identity theorist and by others as a property dualist? How can his views cause such confusion in those reading them and give rise to all manner of claims of incoherence and inconsistency? In this chapter I will simply set out the main criticisms against Searle, categorising them in such a way as to highlight the areas that philosophers feel unable to make sense of. I will start with general theory-wide issues such as Searle’s claim that he has moved away from the traditional mental/physical divide in philosophy of mind, and the corresponding criticism that he has in fact merely replaced the mental/physical categories with those of subjective/objective. Searle is also criticised for misconstruing his opponents, whether that be characterising all materialist positions as eliminativist, and missing out any discussion of non-reductive physicalism, misrepresenting the process of reduction itself, or creating a straw man out of property dualism. I will then consider more specific critiques of Searle’s Biological Naturalism, such as concern over whether his causal reduction is in fact causal, a denial that Searle’s simultaneous causation either exists or should be seen as causation, and doubts over whether the causal reduction of experiences that Searle sees as non-problematic can actually be achieved. Finally, I will move to criticisms that Searle has not, as he claims, created a new position in philosophy of mind which transcends

¹² Olafson F. “Brain Dualism” p.255

¹³ Garrett B. “Non-Reductionism and John Searle’s The Rediscovery of the Mind” p.211

¹⁴ Palmer D. E. “Searle on Consciousness: or How not to Be a Physicalist” p.159

¹⁵ Palmer D. E. “Searle on Consciousness: or How not to Be a Physicalist” p.168

¹⁶ Palmer D. E. “Searle on Consciousness: or How not to Be a Physicalist” p.159

the usual options, but is actually either a property dualist or a materialist/identity theorist in disguise.

Ultimately, this chapter will set the scene for my thesis. By showing how confused commentators are by Searle's claims, I hope to motivate my project of trying to make sense of Biological Naturalism. I agree with Nagel that 'if this view could be clarified in a way that distinguished it from the alternatives, it would be a major addition to the possible answers to the mind-body problem',¹⁷ which I think justifies an investigation into whether it is possible to give a plausible and coherent reading of Biological Naturalism which can lay to rest the concerns I will present in this chapter.

2. Theory-wide criticism

Some criticism of Searle's work applies in general to his theory as a whole, or to the overall underpinnings of his theory. For example, Searle declares that he has transcended the mental vs. physical conceptual divide that he believes to be prevalent in philosophy of mind, yet his opponents charge him with replacing the categories of mental vs. physical with those of subjective/first-person vs. objective/third-personal. Another complaint against Searle is that he has misconstrued the positions of his opponents, with the result of either creating a straw man of his opponents that is overly easy to defeat, or drawing an apparent distinction between himself and rival positions when in fact no such distinction exists. Searle is criticised for either construing all materialists as eliminative materialists, and ignoring the contribution to the discussion of non-reductive materialism, or misconstruing the beliefs of property dualists so as to distance himself from that position, falsely so in the eyes of some of his critics. Finally, many commentators have complained that the examples Searle uses to convey his ideas are insufficiently robust, for example, the use of solidity as a parallel example to explain consciousness is denigrated on the basis that it is too dissimilar from consciousness to do the explanatory job Searle asks of it. I will now explore these critiques further.

a) Criticism 1: Searle replaces one terminological dichotomy with another

One of the foundations of Searle's theory of Biological Naturalism is his belief that the problems that beset dualism and materialism, as he sees them, stem from a misconception on the part of philosophers about what "mental" and "physical" mean. For Searle, philosophy of mind is plagued by a conceptual dualism, as he calls it, whereby our terminology reflects

¹⁷ Nagel T. "Searle: Why We Are Not Computers" p.105

conceptual categories which are ‘designed around a false opposition between the “physical” and the “mental”’¹⁸ such that,

“Mental” and “physical” name mutually exclusive ontological categories. If it is mental then it cannot be in that very respect physical. And if it is physical, then it cannot be in that very respect mental. Mental qua mental excludes physical qua physical’¹⁹

Searle sees Biological Naturalism as transcending the dichotomy between mental and physical that is characteristic of conceptual dualism, thus liberating him to claim that ‘there is no problem in recognizing that the mental qua mental is physical qua physical’.²⁰ Some philosophers have criticised Searle because in their eyes, ‘biological naturalism is enmeshed in the same philosophical tradition from which Searle claims to be departing’.²¹ In fact, many argue that despite seeing it is a big problem that philosophy of mind continues ‘to accept a traditional vocabulary that contrasts the mental and the physical, the mind and the body, the soul and the flesh, in a way that I think is confused and obsolete’,²² Searle simply replaces the mental/physical dichotomy with the subjective/objective one. I will discuss below why his opponents believe this to be the case.

A key tenet of Biological Naturalism is Searle’s claim that experiences have a first-person ontology, and that their essential subjectivity cannot be captured in third-personal objective terms. He contrasts subjective, qualitative experiences with objective third-personal features of the world;

‘The real “physical” world contains both entities with a third-person ontology (trees and mushrooms, for example) and entities with a first-person ontology (pains and colour experience, for example)’²³

Despite vehemently rejecting the mental/physical terminology of standard philosophy, Searle nevertheless maintains a distinction between the first-personal and third-personal, and between the subjective and objective. Such distinctions have been used by philosophers such as Nagel to argue the now familiar points about the irreducibility of subjective experiences to objective scientific features of the world, and that the first-personal cannot be captured by

¹⁸ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.25

¹⁹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.76

²⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.83

²¹ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.307

²² Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” pp.57-58

²³ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

the third-personal.²⁴ This shows that substantial metaphysical conclusions about experiences can be established without the need to refer to the categories of “mental” and “physical”. Searle echoes this by trying to avoid the use of “mental” or “physical” when explaining his ideas within Biological Naturalism. He says of the terms “mental” and “physical”,

‘Since my use of these terms runs dead counter to over three hundred years of philosophical tradition, it would probably be better to abandon this vocabulary altogether’²⁵

Searle’s central claims of Biological Naturalism, the dual claims of causal reduction and ontological irreducibility for experiences, are based on such a distinction of first-personal and third-personal – it is the subjective character of experiences that means that they are, in Searle’s eyes irreducible to objective third-personal phenomena:

‘For any conscious being, there is a what-it-is-like aspect to its existence. And this is left out of any objective account of consciousness because an objective account cannot explain the subjective character of consciousness’²⁶

These features of Searle’s theory have led his critics to point out the curiousness of lambasting the mental/physical dichotomous vocabulary and ways of thinking on one hand, and underpinning his own theory with the subjective/objective divide on the other. It seems fair that his critics ask Searle why retaining an apparent ontological split, but using different words to describe it, makes any difference to the overall issue or indeed overcomes the dichotomy he so strongly criticises. Thus Jacquette complains that ‘Searle denounces what he calls conceptual dualism while adopting what is essentially the same dichotomy between objective and subjective factors of consciousness in explaining his concept of causal reduction’.²⁷ Palmer feels much the same way;

‘Searle’s assurance that he has finally overcome the traditional paradigms in which the nature of consciousness has been explicated begins to strain under closer scrutiny’ because ‘Searle’s view of consciousness does not so easily bypass the traditional philosophical concerns that found the debate between materialism and dualism as he would have us believe’²⁸

²⁴ See Nagel T. “What is it like to be a bat?”

²⁵ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.55

²⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.60

²⁷ Jacquette D. “Searle’s Antireductionism” p.156

²⁸ Palmer D. E. “Searle on Consciousness: or How not to Be a Physicalist” p.160

Olafson complains that Searle's language is the mainstay of the very tradition he is aiming to transcend;

'the predicates – 'inner', 'subjective', etc. – that convey the character of what materialism is supposed to have left out have long been the stock-in-trade of the very dualists to whom Searle declares himself to be strongly opposed'²⁹

He views Searle as reproducing the same old dichotomy of traditional philosophy of mind. However, because of Searle's insistence on *biological* naturalism and causal reduction of experiences, Olafson feels that,

'What he thus appears to be doing is reproducing all the inside/outside contrasts of traditional dualism quite literally inside our heads; and 'brain dualism' does seem the right name for such a paradoxical undertaking'³⁰

Corcoran seems to feel similarly, holding the view that Searle's theory is a reaction against reductive theories of mind, and an attempt to reintroduce the subjective nature of experiences. As Corcoran sees it, 'in the absence of any immaterial mind there is just one place to relocate them [experiences], and that place is the brain'.³¹ Corcoran believes that this attempt to reintroduce an irreducibly subjective nature to experiences shows that Searle has reintroduced the dualistic dichotomy that he had originally aimed to bypass;

'It is important to see that although Searle himself rejects dualisms of both the property and substantial sorts his own biological view seems nevertheless to reproduce the same divisions of classical dualisms – subjective/objective and first-person/third-person'³²

This criticism of replacing one dichotomy of terminology for another, strikes at the heart of Searle's claim to have created a truly unique position in the spectrum of options in philosophy of mind. This is because it accuses him of simply being embedded in the traditionalist framework that he is trying to escape. I will now look at how Searle is accused by some of simply redefining "physical" to include subjective, a move which they see as side stepping the substantive philosophical questions.

²⁹ Olafson F. "Brain Dualism" p.256

³⁰ Olafson F. "Brain Dualism" p.259

³¹ Corcoran K. "The Trouble with Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.314

³² Corcoran K. "The Trouble with Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.314

b) Criticism 2: Searle simply redefines “physical” to include subjective

Searle repeatedly describes experiences as inherently subjective, yet ordinary biological features of the world; ‘mental events and processes are as much part of our biological natural history as digestion, mitosis, meiosis, or enzyme secretion’³³ and claims that,

‘One can accept the obvious facts of physics – that the world consists entirely of physical particles in fields of force – without denying that among the physical features of the world are biological phenomena such as inner qualitative states of consciousness’³⁴

This prompts Hutto to point out that ‘by continuing to use the language of physicalism in this way he [Searle] invites confusion’.³⁵ The charge of word play is taken up by Feser, who argues that,

‘If anything it is Searle who seems to be playing word games here, re-defining “physical” so that it includes not only the objective phenomena usually counted as physical, but also the uniquely and irreducibly subjective phenomena that philosophers have had such trouble fitting into that objective physical world’³⁶

The problem is one of Searle not addressing the substantive metaphysical issues at hand, and instead just starkly stating that biological physical features of the world can also be subjective. Nagel takes up this criticism and points to Searle’s emphasis on the difference between subjective and objective that Searle uses as justification for his claim that consciousness is not ontologically reducible, unlike most other features of the world. Nagel seems to find a tension in Searle’s position, for given this difference between conscious experiences and non-experiential features, he believes Searle is slipping in dualistic metaphysics into his theory but expressing it in materialistic language;

‘What is the metaphysical content of Searle’s claim that mental properties are physical, and his emphatic rejection of property dualism? He says, after all, that the ontological distinction between subjective and objective marks “different categories of empirical reality”. To say further that we are “left with a universe that contains an irreducibly subjective physical component as a component of physical reality” merely couches an essentially

³³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.1

³⁴ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.xii

³⁵ Hutto D. “An Ideal Solution To The Problems of Consciousness” p.331

³⁶ Feser E. *Why Searle Is a Property Dualist* p.5

dualistic claim in language that expresses a strong aversion to dualism³⁷

When trying to completely understand the metaphysical consequences of fitting irreducibly experiential and subjective features into an otherwise objective, physical world, it does not seem that using “physical”, to simply include such features of the world that are usually considered non-physical, provides the intelligibility that is required. Nagel again;

‘Perhaps we could adopt Searle’s use of the word “physical”, but the basic issue is more than verbal. It is the issue of how to construct an intelligible and complete scientific worldview once we deny the reducibility of the mental to the nonmental³⁸

I will now look at Searle’s critics’ complaint that he approaches opposing positions by inaccurately portraying their positions and beliefs.

c) Criticism 3: Searle misconstrues his opposition

In his attempt to bypass the traditional mental/physical framework I detailed above, Searle criticises both physicalism and dualism, usually seen as either end of a spectrum of positions available in philosophy of mind. Considering them both as under the spell of conceptual dualism, he disparages them equally, seeing both as fatally flawed because materialism ‘ends up saying falsely that there are no ontologically irreducible mental phenomena³⁹ and dualism ‘ends up saying falsely that these are something apart from the ordinary physical world we all live in, that they are something over and above their physical substrate’.⁴⁰ Many times in his writing Searle refers to what materialism and property dualism each have right, and each have wrong, and therefore believes he is positioning himself distinctly apart from either.

There is the occasional ally for the way Searle sets out the philosophical landscape, such as Dennett who states ‘I would say Searle has done a good job of identifying the enemy and its foundational assumptions’.⁴¹ However, the majority of commentators on Searle disagree with his take on the theories of his opponents. The problem with Searle’s strategy, according to his critics, is that he grossly misrepresents or misconstrues his opposition, thereby creating a false sense of distinctness from them. The reason for Searle surveying his opponents’ views is nicely expressed by Dennett, along with the problems of not having provided a fair assessment of the opposition he faces;

³⁷ Nagel T. “Searle: Why We Are Not Computers” p105

³⁸ Nagel T. “Searle: Why We Are Not Computers” p.105

³⁹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

⁴⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

⁴¹ Dennett D. “Review of Searle” p.194

‘If he can show that he is an acute and sympathetic interpreter of the processes of thought that have led to the impasse, we will at least be given grounds for supposing that he may indeed have uncovered an overlooked opportunity of major proportions. But the execution of this review is unfortunate, and his other discussions of alternative positions later in the book are equally unprepossessing. We enter a world of breathtaking oversimplification, everything black and white, with no shades of gray permitted.’⁴²

I will first tackle Searle’s supposed misrepresentation of materialism, then his alleged misunderstanding of property dualism.

Misrepresenting physicalism

Criticism of Searle’s handling of materialism is both general and specific. General complaints include the fact that in reviewing the current state of philosophy of mind, Searle completely misses out any discussion of any non-reductive physicalist positions. In *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Chapter 2, “The Recent History of Materialism”, Searle skips straight from reductive identity theories to functionalism and then to dualism, without even a hint of non-reductive approaches to the mind-body problem.

With specific reference to his handling of physicalism, Searle is criticised for blanketing all physicalist approaches as reductive or eliminative. For example, he states how he believes that, in reference to experiences, ‘it was the elimination or reduction of these mental features that materialism sought to achieve’.⁴³ In many places in his writings he refers to the desire of physicalist approaches to eliminate or reduce experiences to something else, such as when he describes how, in his opinion, a physicalist approach to the mind body problem ‘ends up saying, falsely, that irreducible states of consciousness do not exist.’⁴⁴ Kenyon is disparaging about Searle’s approach to physicalism and his tendency to describe it as ‘*reductionist, eliminativist*, and thus *anti-realist*’,⁴⁵ which is something he considers to be ‘not just wrong; it is a crashing misrepresentation of a familiar position’.⁴⁶ Northoff and Musholt agree with this line of critique, pointing out that Searle only seems to ever mean the eliminative kind whenever he refers to materialism;

‘What Searle means by materialism seems to refer only to the eliminative or reductive forms of materialism that do not accept that

⁴² Dennett D. “Review of Searle” p.202

⁴³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.40

⁴⁴ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.62

⁴⁵ Kenyon T. “Searle Rediscovered What Was Not Lost” p.128

⁴⁶ Kenyon T. “Searle Rediscovered What Was Not Lost” p.121

the first-person perspective has to be distinguished from the third-person perspective'⁴⁷

I will now turn to the ways in which Searle's understanding of property dualism has been attacked.

Misunderstanding property dualism

Searle passionately denies that he is a property dualist,⁴⁸ but his very characterisation of the position has caused concern for some philosophers who claim he misunderstands the position. Jacquette points out that

'Property dualists...by no means accept the doctrine that Searle expresses as entailing that 'physical' implies 'nonmental' and 'mental' implies 'nonphysical''⁴⁹

He is protesting against Searle's characterisation of the property dualist as seeing the mental as 'not part of the physical world',⁵⁰ and believes that Searle's take on property dualist not only misrepresents its terminology, but also misunderstands the driving force of the position:

'[Property dualists believe that] there are two mutually exclusive metaphysical categories that constitute all of empirical reality: they are physical phenomena and mental phenomena. Physical phenomena are essentially objective in the sense that they exist apart from any subjective experiences of humans or animals. Mental phenomena are subjective, in the sense that they exist only as experienced by human or animal agents'⁵¹

For Jacquette, the whole point of property dualism is to incorporate the mental into the physical realm;

'The whole point of property dualism is 'to put philosophy of mind in a position to conclude that physical entities like normally functioning brains and nervous systems can *also* be mental, or, that is to say, can *also* have mental *as well as* physical properties, and that mental entities, mind, capable of sensation, consciousness, and self-consciousness, can or even must *also* be physical in the sense of also possessing physical properties from which mental properties emerge or on which they supervene'⁵²

⁴⁷ Northoff G. & Mushold K. "How Can Searle Avoid Property Dualism? Epistemic-Ontological Inference and Autoepistemic Limitation" p.601

⁴⁸ A charge that I will consider in detail in chapter 5

⁴⁹ Jacquette D. "Searle's Antireductionism" p.145

⁵⁰ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.62

⁵¹ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.58

⁵² Jacquette D. "Searle's Antireductionism" p.145

In this way, Jacquette argues that Searle has misunderstood the fundamentals of property dualism, and has, in the process, put forward a position that in fact perfectly fits with property dualism, rather than being opposed to it. Given that property dualists would claim that whilst all things are physical with corresponding physical properties, some things also have mental properties, the criticism against Searle becomes evident. Searle claims that property dualists rely on an outdated adherence to conceptual dualism, which leaves it trying to deal with conceptual categories which contrast “mental” and “physical” as opposed to each other, indeed, as mutually exclusive, but in fact property dualists aim to show just the opposite, that physical things *can* have mental properties.

The next criticism I will explore centres around the examples that Searle provides in order to explain his theory, and whether they are suitable for the job he intends them to do.

d) Criticism 5: Searle uses inadequate examples

Searle has to try to balance the idea that experiences are both reducible and irreducible, and he does so by stipulating that they are causally reducible yet ontologically irreducible. He uses many examples to try to explain and justify what exactly he means by this, often citing solidity as a parallel example that can shed light on the nature of experiences. Searle’s critics complain that his use of solidity, or indeed other higher-level system features such as liquidity, do not, and indeed cannot, properly explain what Searle must mean in relation to the ontological irreducibility of experiences because those examples are not ones of ontological irreducibility. For example, Corcoran notes how ‘the emergent system-features of liquidity and solidity...with which Searle wants to compare consciousness, are relevantly *dissimilar* to consciousness’,⁵³ in that they are not examples of features which Searle claims are ontologically irreducible. Lamenting that ‘Searle has not provided any convincing examples of further irreducible categories’,⁵⁴ Feser describes the problem like this,

‘There is thus no mystery about how solidity can be a higher-order physical property of a system of water molecules. For, fully to describe the condition of water molecules at the temperature at which water freezes just is to describe them as solid. There is nothing more to solidity than that; it is identical to the configuration the molecules are in when the object they constitute is at freezing temperature. In any case, there is nothing about the nature of either

⁵³ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.313

⁵⁴ Feser E. *Why Searle Is a Property Dualist* p.3

water molecules or solidity – both of which are “third-person” – that excludes such an identification’⁵⁵

The criticisms centre around the fact that for the examples like solidity which Searle uses, it is intelligible and clear why an ontological reduction seamlessly follows from a causal one, but this is not the case for experiences, where Searle’s point is that their supposedly first-personal subjective ontology is incompatible with any reduction to a third-personal objective feature of the world. As Olafson puts it,

‘There is nothing ‘subjective’ about liquidity or solidity – nothing that would make them ‘someone’s’ liquidity or solidity or that would confine the observation of them to a single observer, as Searle says happens in the case of consciousness’⁵⁶

This means that in the relevant sense, solidity and liquidity are not useful for explaining the way in which experiences differ from other ontologically reducible features of the world. Providing an example of a feature other than consciousness which is also ontologically irreducible in Searle’s sense is ‘the kind of parallel case that Searle needs if the claims he makes about the ‘subjective ontology’ of consciousness are to seem less paradoxical’.⁵⁷

So, the examples Searle provides are for system level features which both causally and ontologically reduce to lower-level micro-structural features, and as such, it is claimed, they cannot be used to adequately spell out what Searle’s claim of ontological irreducibility for experiences amounts to. Searle therefore leaves underdeveloped the claim that consciousness is both like solidity in its causal reducibility, yet unlike it in its ontological irreducibility. Palmer puts it like this;

‘Searle’s claim that consciousness is an ordinary physical feature has not been substantially supported. Searle admits that consciousness is quite different from most physical properties, and has provided little by way of explanation of what sense this equivalence with other physical properties amounts to’⁵⁸

This point is made in another way by Feser who looks at how Searle deals with the potential charge of epiphenomenalism. In his article explaining why he does not consider himself to be a property dualist, Searle maintains that epiphenomenalism is not a criticism that plagues this theory;

⁵⁵ Feser E. *Why Searle Is a Property Dualist* p.1

⁵⁶ Olafson F. “Brain Dualism” p.260

⁵⁷ Olafson F. “Brain Dualism” p.260

⁵⁸ Palmer D. E. “Searle on Consciousness: or How not to Be a Physicalist” p.167

‘The problems about epiphenomenalism and the causal closure of the physical simply do not arise for me. Of course, the universe is causally closed, and we can call it ‘physical’ if we like; but that cannot mean ‘physical’ as opposed to ‘mental’; because, equally obviously, the mental is part of the causal structure of the universe in the same way that the solidity of pistons is part of the causal structure of the universe; even though the solidity is entirely accounted for by molecular behaviour, and consciousness is entirely accounted for by neuronal behaviour. The problems about epiphenomenalism and the causal closure of the physical can only arise if one uses the traditional terminology and take its implications seriously. I am trying to get us to abandon that terminology. But if consciousness has no causal powers in addition to its neurobiological base, then does that not imply epiphenomenalism? No. Compare: the solidity of the piston has no causal powers in addition to its molecular base, but this does not show that solidity is epiphenomenal (try making a piston out of butter or water).’⁵⁹

What Feser objects to is the same as other complainants about the examples – Searle uses the example of solidity, which is ontologically reducible to an underlying microstructure, to explain experiences, which are ontologically irreducible to brain microstructures, according to Searle. This is a relevant, even essential difference between the two examples, so Searle is not justified in using one to deal with problems that arise from the other. In the case of the quoted section above, Searle tries to explain away the charge of epiphenomenalism created by his concept of ontological irreducibility of experiences by referring to the solidity of a piston, but a piston does not have the very property of ontological irreducibility which has caused the problem in the first place. Feser puts it like this;

‘Consciousness, as Searle himself insists, is not identical to its base, nor ontologically reducible to it. The analogy with the piston is therefore useless. For it’s precisely this ontological irreducibility that threatens epiphenomenalism. The “microstructural base” of consciousness – the firing of neurons – would be just as it is, and in particular have just the causal powers it has, even in the absence of consciousness; so consciousness seems to add nothing to the causal story. Searle asks: “[W]hy would anyone suppose that causal reducibility implies epiphenomenalism?” (2002, p. 61) but the question is directed at a straw man, for no one does suppose this. What they do suppose is not that causal reducibility implies epiphenomenalism, but rather that ontological irreducibility implies it.’⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.61

⁶⁰ Feser E. *Why Searle Is a Property Dualist* p.5

Having looked at a number of problems charged against Searle's general approach to solving the mind-body problem, I will now consider criticisms that are more specific to particular aspects of Biological Naturalism.

3. Specific criticism

Concerns about the specifics of Searle's Biological Naturalism are varied. Some commentators criticise Searle's idea of a simultaneous form of causation, complaining that it is not a legitimate form of causation on which to base a notion of a supposedly "causal" reduction. Others are concerned that causal reductions are not actually achievable, as Searle makes out. Searle's critics have also voiced apprehension about overdetermination, which some see as an inescapable by-product of Biological Naturalism. Finally, some have wondered about Searle's claim that the ontological irreducibility of experiences is merely a trivial consequence of the way we define reduction, given that it is this very irreducibility that is supposed to substantively distance him from the materialist positions that he so dislikes. I will now explore each of these in turn.

a) Criticism 6: Searle's critics deny simultaneous causation and the causal nature of causal reduction

Searle's central claims of causal reduction yet without ontological irreducibility of experiences rest on an underlying view of causation that is not the Humean causation of distinct events ordered in time. Searle instead looks to what I have called a simultaneous form of causation. He puts it thus:

'If brain processes cause consciousness, then it seems to many people that there must be two different things, brain processes as causes and conscious states as effects, and this seems to imply dualism. This...derives in part from a flawed conception of causation. In our official theories of causation we typically suppose that all causal relations must be between discrete events ordered sequentially in time. For example, the shooting caused the death of the victim. Certainly, many cause-and-effect relations are like that, but by no means all. Look around you at the objects in your vicinity and think of the causal explanation of the fact that the table exerts pressure on the rug. This is explained by the force of gravity, but gravity is not an event. Or think of the solidity of the table. It is explained causally by the behaviour of the molecules of which the table is composed. But the solidity of the table is not an extra event; it is just a feature of the table. Such examples of non-event causation give us appropriate models for understanding the relation between my present state of consciousness and the underlying neurobiological processes that cause it. Lower-level processes in the

brain cause my present state of consciousness, but that state is not a separate entity from my brain; rather it is just a feature of my brain at the present time.’⁶¹

For Searle’s critics, the problem is not the examples that Searle gives, but the fact that he labels the examples “causal”; ‘the most glaring claim is that the relation between the molecular structure of a piston and its solidity is one of causation’.⁶² The entrenched view of causation, the default it seems for the critics making this point, is the view of causation where one distinct event follows another and there is a definite time-gap in between. As Kim puts it, ‘causation suggests “causal mechanism,” and a time gap between a cause and its effect’.⁶³ This is obviously in contrast to the simultaneous sort of relationship that Searle is spelling out in his own way of understanding causation in this case. This leads to hostility towards Searle for labelling as “causal” something which does not involve distinct entities or events ordered temporally. Honderich maintains this criticism towards Searle’s claim that not only is consciousness caused by the brain, but it is also a feature of the brain;

‘Causation, whatever else it is, is a dyadic relation. No account of it does or can say otherwise. It doesn't matter, of course, that Searle's effect is also said to be 'realized' in the cause, or within the stuff of the cause, or in any other secondary sense 'one' with the cause. The commonest cases we have of one thing realized in another are such that the realized thing (say temperature) is an effect of and therefore numerically different from the other thing (say a lighted match)’⁶⁴

Garrett agrees with the criticism that causation should involve separate entities that each have a distinct existence, and expresses the point like this;

‘The molecular structure does not cause the piston to be solid. If the relation between the particular molecular configuration (at a certain time), and the solidity of the piston (at the same time) is one of causation, then we are committed to saying that this particular molecular configuration is a distinct existent from the solidity of that configuration. But what sense could we make of talk of the piston’s solidity, apart from its molecular structure? After all, the solidity and the molecular structure appear to be spatially and temporally co-extensive. Such spatial and temporal overlap is the mark of a

⁶¹ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* pp.7-8

⁶² Garrett B. “Non-Reductionism and John Searle’s *The Rediscovery of the Mind*” p.212

⁶³ Kim J. “Mental Causation in Searle’s *Biological Naturalism*” p.194

⁶⁴ Honderich T. *Mind the Guff – John Searle’s Thinking on Consciousness and Free Will Examined*

relation of constitution, not of causation especially if you think that causal relations cannot hold synchronically'⁶⁵

Kenyon has similar concerns but focuses on whether Searle's choice of "causal" terminology to describe a relation such as solidity or liquidity would be better replaced with the language of identity. Regarding the boiling of water, he says;

'Are we inclined to see the internal pressure's *being* equal to the external pressure – rather than its *becoming* equal – as a cause of the water's boiling? Not at all. Rather, we are inclined to see this as just another way of saying that the water is boiling'⁶⁶

So for Kenyon, 'for a causal relation to obtain between two events we require at a minimum that the two be distinct events. The relation of identity and the relation of causation are mutually exclusive'.⁶⁷ This criticism then is that Searle's view of causation as in some way simultaneous should not count as causation at all, and Kim wonders why Searle has gone to the effort of labelling such a relation "causal";

'His explicit insistence on causal readings of these terms indicates that he is serious about the claim that micro-macro property relations are really causal, not something else. It would be interesting to know why Searle thinks the causal relation is particularly well suited for his purposes'⁶⁸

I will now turn to criticism most prominently voiced by Kim over whether Searle's Biological Naturalism can overcome the problems related to mental causation.

b) Criticism 7: Biological Naturalism cannot deal with the problem of mental causation

The topic of mental causation centres on the problem of trying to maintain the causal efficacy of mental states, where our experiences cause things to happen, whether that be other experiences to occur (mental-mental causation) or other physical states, typically neuronal states (mental-physical, also known as downward causation). If this can be achieved, it avoids rendering our mental states epiphenomenal. Any reductive approach to the mind-body problem solves the need to account for a specifically mental form of causation by reducing a purportedly mental *and* physical cause down to merely the physical cause.

⁶⁵ Garrett B. "Non-Reductionism and John Searle's The Rediscovery of the Mind" p.212

⁶⁶ Kenyon T. "Searle Rediscovered What Was Not Lost" p.123

⁶⁷ Kenyon T. "Searle Rediscovered What Was Not Lost" p.123

⁶⁸ Kim J. "Mental Causation in Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.194

Searle believes in the causal efficacy of the mental; he says, 'I decide consciously to raise my arm [raises arm] and the damn thing goes up...it goes up whenever I damn well want it to'⁶⁹. Yet he also makes clear his belief in the causality of brain activity via his concept of causal reduction, clearly stating that it is brains and brain activity which cause consciousness; 'mental phenomena are caused by neurophysiological processes in the brain'.⁷⁰ This might sound like a reductive strategy, but the problem is that some argue that reductionist approaches to the mind-body problem do not seriously deal with the way that it very much seems as if our experiences have causal powers;

'Reductionism, when applied to the mental, appears, at least to some, to have the unfortunate consequence of killing the patient in the process of curing him: in its attempt to explain mental causation, it all but banishes the very mentality it was out to save'⁷¹

Such an elimination of the mental out of the picture, especially when the point is to explain specifically mental causes, is the antithesis of what Searle is trying to achieve in Biological Naturalism, where his focus is always to maintain the importance and relevance of experiences, as experiential features of the world.

Kim turns from his many explorations into mental causation and overdetermination to focus on Searle and believes that Biological Naturalism suffers from overdetermination because of the dual claims that any mental state is caused by brain activity, coupled with Searle's determination to include the causal efficacy of mental states;

'Consider a mental event, an instantiation of some mental property, M. This event, on Searle's account, is caused by an instantiation of a certain biological property, B. Let us assume that M has causal powers, powers to cause other properties to be instantiated. We can distinguish two cases: (i) the property it can cause to be instantiated is itself a mental property; (ii) the property is a physical property. (ii) is of course mental-to-physical causation (called "downward causation" in connection with emergentism); (i) may be called "same-level causation". Searle, one may presume, wants both. Let us first consider the possibility of (i): an instance of M causes another mental property, M*, to be instantiated. We must remember, though, that on Searle's account, this instance of M*, like the M-instance, is also caused by some underlying biological phenomenon, an instance of some biological property, B*. It looks as though the instance of M* in question has *two distinct sufficient*

⁶⁹ Searle J. "Our shared condition – consciousness", 3m, 58s

⁷⁰ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.1

⁷¹ Kim J. "Mental Causation in Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.194

causes, a mental phenomenon (M) and a biological phenomenon (B*) – it is causally overdetermined. This of course quickly generalizes: all cases of mental-to-mental causation involve the overdetermination of the effect. This is a peculiar picture, indeed. And, given the fact that every mental event has a sufficient cause in biological processes, one wonders about the significance, or necessity, of appealing to its mental cause.’⁷²

Kim is unsatisfied with Searle’s response to overdetermination because he takes Searle to be making a simple assertion that experiences just are *biological* features of the brain. This is unsatisfying to Kim because such a claim could just as easily rest on a supervenience relation as it could an identity relation, both of which might conflict with his notion of ontologically irreducible brain states;

‘Searle cannot get off so easily: we should keep in mind that his claim that mental phenomena are biological features of the brain only amounts to the claim that mental phenomena are “causally supervenient” on brain phenomena. We should remember as well Searle’s claims about “subjective ontology,” irreducible subjectivity and intentionality, and all the rest.’⁷³

So the criticism is that Searle’s combination of causal reduction and ontological irreducibility for experiences, coupled with causal efficacy of mental states leads to an inherent overdetermination in Biological Naturalism, which Searle does not adequately address. Ontological irreducibility is a fundamental claim of Searle’s theory, as the above discussion has shown. I will now look at a criticism concerning Searle’s related belief that such irreducibility of experiences is merely a trivial consequence of the way we use the process of reduction.

c) Criticism 8: Concerns about Searle’s claim that the ontological irreducibility of experiences is trivial

Searle takes what seems to many to be a strange line on the status of the irreducibility of experiences. Believing that this thesis sets him apart from standard identity theorists and reductive physicalists, it might seem natural to many that Searle’s irreducibility claim is both an important and substantial part of his theory. Yet Searle describes this irreducibility as a mere by-product of the way that reduction is used in philosophy, or as he puts it, a ‘trivial consequence of our definitional practices’.⁷⁴

⁷² Kim J. “Mental Causation in Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.193

⁷³ Kim J. “Mental Causation in Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.194

⁷⁴ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

This puzzling aspect of Searle's Biological Naturalism is ironic for Hodgson, who sees Searle as downgrading his central claim of ontological irreducibility by also claiming it is merely a trivial matter;

'A certain irony in Searle's assertion of triviality: the main difference between his position and that of the orthodox thinkers he attacks lies in the assertion of the irreducibility of consciousness; yet he makes virtue of contending that this difference is but a trivial matter!'⁷⁵

Tucked away in an endnote at the back of his book, *The Conscious Mind*, Chalmers also criticises Searle's handling of the status of his irreducibility claim;

'Searle argues that consciousness is irreducible, but that this has no deep consequences. He says that phenomena such as heat are reducible only because we redefine them to eliminate the phenomenal aspect ... but that this sort of redefinition is trivially inapplicable to consciousness, which consists entirely in its subjective aspect. This seems correct ... phenomena such as heat are reductively explainable only modulo conscious experience. But he goes on to say that "this shows that the irreducibility of consciousness is a trivial consequence of the pragmatics of our definitional practices" (p.122). This seems to get things backward. Rather, the practices are consequences of the irreducibility of consciousness: if we did not factor out the experience of heat, we could not reduce heat at all! Thus irreducibility is a *source*, not a consequence of our practices. It is hard to see how any of this trivializes the irreducibility of consciousness.'⁷⁶

Chalmers is claiming that it is not the case that consciousness is ontologically irreducible because of the way we define reduction, but that reduction does not apply to consciousness *because* it is already known to be ontologically irreducible. In other words, Chalmers thinks Searle has the logic of the triviality claim the wrong way around, and the way Searle has construed it diminishes any metaphysical force the claim carried. This is similar to Collins who feels that because of his *triviality of irreducibility* claim, 'Searle insists that irreducibility doesn't matter'.⁷⁷ Corcoran also criticises Searle's triviality claim for diminishing the importance of the irreducibility;

⁷⁵ Hodgson D. "Why Searle Has Not Rediscovered The Mind" p.267

⁷⁶ Chalmers D. *The Conscious Mind*, p.371, endnote 2

⁷⁷ Collins C. "Searle on Consciousness and Dualism" p.21

‘At the end of the day the irreducibility of consciousness has no metaphysical bite, since it is “a trivial consequence of the pragmatics of our definitional practices” and not anything special in “the pattern of facts in the real world.”⁷⁸ But why, then make so much of the claim that consciousness is “irreducible”? The claim loses all its punch as a claim about our lexical practices’⁷⁹

Dennett is a staunch critic of irreducibility claims regarding experiences, and yet he is not worried by Searle’s notion of first person ontology or his irreducibility claim, precisely because of the triviality clause, which means that, for Dennett, ‘the vaunted “essential” and “irreducible” subjectivity of consciousness dissolves under analysis’.⁸⁰

The thrust of this criticism about Searle’s triviality claim is that if he is going to make a strong ontological claim about the status of experiences as irreducibly subjective features of the world, he should not simultaneously try to play down the consequences that such a claim entails, by labelling the ontological claim as trivial. As Chalmers points out, ‘irreducibility has its consequences. Consistency requires that one face them directly’.⁸¹

Having assessed some specific criticisms against the particulars of Searle’s Biological Naturalism, I will now turn to a wider perspective of comment regarding where to place Searle on the spectrum of options available in philosophy of mind. Searle has been assessed as best interpreted as holding various positions from property dualism to full-blown identity theory, and it is to these concerns that I now turn.

4. Concerns about categorisation

Searle freely admits that his views on philosophy of mind and his theory of Biological Naturalism have variously been described as a wild array of other positions;

‘The view of the relation between mind and body that I have been putting forward is sometimes called “reductionist,” sometimes “antireductionist.” It is often called “emergentism,” and is generally regarded as a form of “supervenience.”’⁸²

⁷⁸ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.122 and p.124

⁷⁹ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.315

⁸⁰ Dennett D. “Review of Searle” p.196

⁸¹ Chalmers D. ““Consciousness and the Philosophers’: An Exchange”

⁸² Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.111

‘Oddly enough, my views have been confidently characterized by some commentators as “materialist,” by some others, with equal confidence, as “dualist.”’⁸³

Corcoran summarises the problems involved in trying to categorise Searle well;

‘Whereas Searle’s discussion of “first-person ontology” and the “subjective ontology of consciousness” seems to be suggestive of dualism, his claims about consciousness being physical and therefore spatial is suggestive of materialistic monism’⁸⁴

Searle sees showing what is wrong with current philosophy of mind and carving out a new and unique position on the mind-body problem as one of his fundamental purposes. Charging him with putting forward one of the standard positions on offer therefore threatens the heart of Searle’s project.

I will look at the two most prominent charges, which lie at either end of the reductive materialist-dualistic spectrum – that he holds property dualism or identity theory.

a) Criticism 9: The charge of being a property dualist

Searle’s Biological Naturalism is often charged with being dualistic, in particular with being a version of property dualism, despite Searle’s protestations to the contrary. This is generally because of Searle’s claim that experiences have what he calls a first-person ontology, which Searle believes means they are ontologically irreducible to any objective, third-personal, physical features of the world.⁸⁵ Collins is puzzled by the fact that Searle advocates certain views which are usually the cornerstones of dualistic theories, but at the same time rejects dualism itself;

‘Traditionally, in contrast to most materialists, many philosophers who emphasize the importance of consciousness also embrace dualism. Their reasons usually involve the *subjective* character of consciousness: they argue that anything that is essentially subjective cannot also be part of the objective, physical world. Searle vehemently rejects this position’⁸⁶

Some critics have detected a generalised dualism within his work, such as Olafson who complains that ‘what is proposed in this book is not a ‘rediscovery of the mind’ unless by that

⁸³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Chapter 1, footnote 11, p.249

⁸⁴ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.316

⁸⁵ I explore what Searle means when he claims that experiences have a first-person ontology in chapter 3 and what his idea of ontological irreducibility amounts to in chapter 5.

⁸⁶ Collins C. “Searle on Consciousness and Dualism” p.16

is meant an updated version of dualism',⁸⁷ or Palmer who believes that 'by any ordinary definition of dualism, Searle's theory is dualistic'.⁸⁸ Others have specifically charged Searle with property dualism, such as when Nagel declares 'I don't think it's possible to distinguish his antireductionist solution from property dualism',⁸⁹ and Chalmers concludes that 'to be consistent, he too ought to be a property dualist'.⁹⁰

The force of these accusations often comes from drawing parallels between what the property dualist believes and features of Biological Naturalism, with many believing that 'the actual substance of Searle's position and property dualism turn out to be identical'.⁹¹ One aspect of Biological Naturalism which many take Searle to use as a tool to distinguish himself from the property dualist is his idea of causal reducibility of experiences to brain processes, and his claim that the brain causes consciousness. Searle is often interpreted as using this feature of his theory to emphasise that consciousness is inextricably entwined with brain activity in a way that the dualist does not. However, some critics see this as a parallel to property dualism rather than a point of departure:

'By calling consciousness "causally reducible" to brain processes, all Searle means is that brain processes cause consciousness. But this is exactly what the property dualist believes, as Searle later acknowledges (p. 62)! So the property dualist too believes, in Searle's sense, that consciousness is "causally reducible."' ⁹²

Kim agrees, arguing that in answering whether experiences are reducible to features of the brain, 'Searle's answer, like the property dualist's, is a forceful no. But it is precisely this negative answer that defines property dualism'.⁹³

As well as causal reducibility as an intended point of difference between Biological Naturalism and property dualism, Searle sees his claim of the ontological irreducibility of experiences as showing a difference between the two theories. Searle realises that the ontological irreducibility claim can, at least on the face of it, seem a point of agreement between him and the property dualist, and this prompts him to write the article "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist". In that article he sets out, as he sees it, the points of agreement and disagreement

⁸⁷ Olafson F. "Brain Dualism" p.265

⁸⁸ Palmer D. E. "Searle on Consciousness: or How not to Be a Physicalist" p.167

⁸⁹ Nagel T. "Searle: Why We Are Not Computers" p.96

⁹⁰ Chalmers D. "*Consciousness and the Philosophers': An Exchange*"

⁹¹ Feser E. *Why Searle Is a Property Dualist* p.4

⁹² Feser E. *Why Searle Is a Property Dualist* p.4

⁹³ Kim J. "Mental Causation in Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.192

that he has with the property dualist. The most important point of diversion for Searle is the exact way that “irreducible” is used, and what it is taken to imply. For him, the property dualist takes irreducibility to mean that consciousness is a separate, autonomous feature over and above the brain, a consequence that he does not believe is implied by Biological Naturalism:

‘The property dualist means that *in addition* to all the neurobiological features of the brain, there is an extra, distinct, nonphysical feature of the brain; whereas I mean that consciousness is a state the brain can be in, in the way that liquidity and solidity are states that water can be in’⁹⁴

The italicisation of “*in addition*” highlights Searle’s belief that whereas he sees consciousness as a particular way the brain can be, as a feature of a functioning brain, the property dualist sees consciousness as something over and above the brain, even if strongly connected to it. Others are not so convinced by this distinction, claiming that despite using different language and ways of expressing his ideas, Searle is in fact in agreement with the property dualist, with Jacquette criticising Searle’s *Rediscovery of the Mind* for defending ‘in different but clearly equivalent words...the thesis of property dualism’⁹⁵ and concluding that ‘Searle’s analysis does not amount to a rejection of property dualism’.⁹⁶ Feser agrees, claiming that between Biological Naturalism and property dualism, ‘the words may be different, but the metaphysical pictures are identical.’⁹⁷ Others are confused by Searle’s denial that his irreducibility claim does not imply property dualism, because they do not accept that Searle and the property dualist are using “ontologically irreducible” in any meaningfully different ways;

‘I am just not sure how to take Searle’s claim that consciousness is a property that is ‘ontologically distinct’ from other physical properties and yet maintain that his theory ‘is emphatically not a form of dualism’.⁹⁸ Searle uses the term ‘ontological’, like most of us, to refer to different categories of reality...A dualist, whether of the substance or property version, maintains that there are two distinct and unreducible categories of reality. It thus seems to follow trivially that Searle’s view is dualistic’⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.61

⁹⁵ Jacquette D. “Searle’s Antireductionism” p.162

⁹⁶ Jacquette D. “Searle’s Antireductionism” p.148

⁹⁷ Feser E. *Why Searle Is a Property Dualist* p.5

⁹⁸ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.28

⁹⁹ Palmer D. E. “Searle on Consciousness: or How not to Be a Physicalist” p.165

Corcoran takes a slightly different view arguing that Searle is a dualist, but not of the property dualist sort, because Searle simply does not see any properties as solely mental, leaving Searle as a property monist and property dualism in particular out of the picture,

‘What exonerates Searle from all charges of being a property dualist is *not* the claim that the categories of “mental” and “physical” sometimes overlap, for a property dualist might countenance not only mixed mental-physical phenomena but also features that do not land comfortably under either one or the other of these categories, e.g. features of the world such as points scored in football games, invitations to parties and denials of tenure. What exonerates Searle is the fact that for him there appear to be *no* non-physical properties i.e., the mental, although genuine and irreducible, is for all of that, a natural, *physical* phenomenon. So Searle’s biological naturalism is *not* a version of property dualism, on the plausible assumption that, at a minimum, a property dualist insists that some properties (i.e., mental properties) are distinct from physical properties. If, as Searle claims, mental properties are at some level of description physical, then Searle is, despite all his rhetoric to the contrary, a kind of property monist!’¹⁰⁰

I think Corcoran’s solution to his rejection of ‘property dualist’ as the appropriate terminology to categorise Searle’s Biological Naturalism highlights how philosophers are very confused about how to categorise and interpret Searle’s position. In Corcoran’s case, it is not that he does not see Searle as dualistic at all, just that property dualism in particular isn’t appropriate;

‘What is offered in *Rediscovery* and elsewhere is a cross pollinated view of the two theories Searle so vociferously rejects – monism and property dualism, a view for which the term “biological property dualism” might be a more fitting description.’¹⁰¹

Searle tries to walk the line between a monistic, physicalist view of the world, and seeing experiences as ontologically irreducible to objective, third-personal neuronal activity in the brain. Despite writing articles trying specifically to distance himself from property dualism, many of Searle’s critics are unconvinced, believing that ‘Searle’s biological naturalism is insufficiently distinct from property dualism to warrant a different label’¹⁰² and that ‘Searle’s ‘biological naturalism’ appears at every turn to be only a familiar version of property dualism in disguise’.¹⁰³ Nagel recognises Searle’s desire to reject dualism and its non-physical take on consciousness, but feels Searle has not escaped the dualistic features he was trying to avoid,

¹⁰⁰ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” pp.311-312

¹⁰¹ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.312

¹⁰² Jacqueline D. “Searle’s Antireductionism” p.148

¹⁰³ Jacqueline D. “Searle’s Antireductionism” p.144

remarking of Searle that 'he is absolutely right about the fear of dualism (indeed, I believe he himself is not immune to its effects)'.¹⁰⁴ So, whether it is because the points of departure that Searle gives between his theory and property dualism are unconvincing, or simply because Biological Naturalism and property dualism are, in fact, the same view, albeit expressed differently, many critics of Searle interpret him as being some kind of property dualist. I will now move to the other end of the reductive spectrum and set out the way that some commentators charge Searle with being nothing but an identity theorist.

b) Criticism 10: The charge of being an identity theorist

Whilst Searle's insistence on the ontological irreducibility of experiences was the source of many commentators viewing him as a property dualist, his parallel claim of the causal reducibility of experiences is the focus of critics who charge him with being an identity theorist. Causal reducibility is the idea that,

'Consciousness does not exist in a separate realm and it does not have any causal powers in addition to those of its neuronal base any more than solidity has any extra causal powers in addition to its molecular base.'¹⁰⁵

Some cannot understand why Searle does not simply embrace identity theory, given his other commitments. For example, because conceptual dualism is, according to Searle, supposed to be abandoned as unfit for the job of describing how experiences are related to the brain, then mental should not imply non-physical, thereby freeing us up to accept a plain and simple identity theory. However, Searle rejects any talk of identity and instead insists on talk of causally emergent higher-level features and irreducibility in relation to conscious experiences. Garrett seems to be frustrated by Searle's inability to deal with the inevitable conclusions of his own theory;

'What Searle owes us here is an answer to the query, Why do we need to understand consciousness as an emergent property given the falsity of conceptual dualism? The tradition Searle rejects has motivations for such inclinations towards property dualism; the problem of multiple realizability and Kripke's modal objections, being the most prominent. But it is hard to understand why Searle speaks in the language of irreducibility, if the tradition is so confused.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Nagel T. "Searle: Why We Are Not Computers" p.103

¹⁰⁵ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.62

¹⁰⁶ Garrett B. "Non-Reductionism and John Searle's The Rediscovery of the Mind" p.210

Searle has a strong need to distance himself from dualism, which some see as pushing him towards a position which insists that regarding causal powers, there are just the causal powers of our neurophysiology and that experiences are not something above and beyond brain activity. Although Searle claims ontological irreducibility for experiences, he tempers the claim by drawing parallels between experiences and other higher-level features such as solidity and liquidity, thus trying to dispel any notion of mystery which might surround the irreducibility of experiences.¹⁰⁷ When these are combined, some critics find Searle's views to be tantamount to a form of token identity theory, viewing Searle as offering

‘confused and unsupported claims about supervenience and causality, and, when interpreted most charitably, [his view] is fundamentally indistinguishable from a prevalent account of token identity augmented by supervenience’¹⁰⁸

Collins' criticism of Searle derives from his belief that the force and intelligibility of causal reduction comes from it actually being a claim of token identity. Referring to Searle's favoured example of solidity, Collins is clear that a causal reduction means that 'solidity *just is* the molecular structure. Solidity is identical with the molecules in lattice structures'.¹⁰⁹ Collins is also clear in his acceptance of a causal reduction for experiences;

‘There is absolutely nothing mysterious about how we might apply the bottom-up model to give an exhaustive neurophysiological account of the causal powers of consciousness.’¹¹⁰

Given that he accepts the idea of causal reduction for experiences, Collins sees this as entailing a claim of identity, which is why he views Searle as an identity theorist. He feels Searle alters and trivializes what philosophers ordinarily mean by 'reduction'¹¹¹ in an attempt to appear non-reductivist but concludes that Searle fails in this endeavour; 'Searle's position *is* reductionist in the ordinary, non-trivial sense'.¹¹²

Corcoran agrees with Collins' interpretation that Searle's causal reduction implies identity though seems to see Searle more as a type identity theorist. He characterises Searle's notion of causal reduction as claiming that 'the mental *causally* supervenes on and so is wholly

¹⁰⁷ Searle also insists on the triviality of his irreducibility claim, which some view as similarly tempering the metaphysical bite of any ontological irreducibility of experiences.

¹⁰⁸ Kenyon T. "Searle Rediscovered What Was Not Lost" p.117

¹⁰⁹ Collins C. "Searle on Consciousness and Dualism" p.31

¹¹⁰ Collins C. "Searle on Consciousness and Dualism" p.29

¹¹¹ Collins C. "Searle on Consciousness and Dualism" p.15

¹¹² Collins C. "Searle on Consciousness and Dualism" p.15

explainable in terms of lower level neurophysiological goings-on in the brain'.¹¹³ He thus describes Searle as wrongly denying 'that higher-level features of the brain (i.e., mental properties) are *reducible* to or *identical* with the lower-level properties on which they supervene'.¹¹⁴ Corcoran then interprets Searle's causal reduction as a form of reductive type identity claim with consciousness being nothing but neuronal activity in the brain. Given that this is what the mind-brain identity theory claims, it explains why he interprets Searle as nothing but an identity theorist.

Searle has been interpreted by his critics from both ends of the spectrum of options in philosophy of mind, as an identity theorist and as a property dualist. This amounts to a criticism of his claim to have transcended the usual positional pigeon holes and created a view which is different from the usual options available. This concludes my overview of criticisms of Searle, and I will now try to distil out of these different points the common areas of concern regarding Biological Naturalism, which are the source of confusion and even bewilderment for other philosophers approaching Searle's work. These problems will then set the scene for the rest of my dissertation, wherein I will aim to tackle each in turn in an effort to make sense of Biological Naturalism.

5. The main barriers to making sense of Searle's Biological Naturalism

Out of the many wide-ranging criticisms of Searle's work I will now extract the main overall concerns about his theory of Biological Naturalism. Corcoran is not alone in his belief that 'there are, at the very least, *prima facie* difficulties with Searle's biological naturalism'.¹¹⁵ Underpinning the main barriers to understanding Searle's theory is the fact that some of his key tenets seem to belong to both the physicalist and the dualist approaches to the mind-body problem. Hodgson brings out the tension within Searle's theory when he highlights how Searle shows physicalistic tendencies by claiming things like 'consciousness cannot cause things that cannot be explained by the causal behaviour of neurons',¹¹⁶ yet Searle also sounds decidedly dualistic in his discussion of irreducibility; 'consciousness is irreducible in that it is 'not eliminable in favour of anything else'.^{117,118}

¹¹³ Corcoran K. "The Trouble with Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.309

¹¹⁴ Corcoran K. "The Trouble with Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.309

¹¹⁵ Corcoran K. "The Trouble with Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.310

¹¹⁶ Hodgson D. "Why Searle Has Not Rediscovered The Mind" p.266

¹¹⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.3

I will assess the barriers to understanding Searle's Biological Naturalism by extracting the main stumbling blocks out of the various criticisms charged against him which prevent people from finding a coherent reading of Searle's work. This will become the focus of the remainder of this dissertation, which will take the form of drawing the barriers out, clarifying what it is that is problematic and seeing if it is possible to diffuse the tensions which seem inherent in Searle's position, thereby constructing a coherent reading of Biological Naturalism.

In this section I will set out which features of Searle's theory create either an internal tension, or are otherwise a barrier for other people to understand Searle's position in Biological Naturalism.

a) Ontological irreducibility and first-person ontology, but the irreducibility is trivial

Ontological irreducibility is a cornerstone of dualistic theories of mind. Experiences are deemed as separate from physical properties of the world; they have a different and distinct essence which means they are not capturable in purely scientific or objective terms. To make such a claim is to make a bold statement about the reality of the world we live in, to declare that there are some features of the world which science, the dominant way in which we investigate the world around us, cannot fully probe. Searle includes a claim of ontological irreducibility in Biological Naturalism, but tempers it with his description of the irreducibility as a mere trivial consequence of the way we apply the process of reduction.

The tension here is between making a grand statement about the fundamental nature of reality, one that gives utmost importance to the essentially subjective and phenomenal nature of experiences, and brushing aside the importance of the very same claim by rendering it a mere consequence of how we happen to have come to define and use the term "reduction". As I discussed above, this seems a complete contradiction to some philosophers, having the effect of either watering down the claim of irreducibility itself and leaving Searle firmly in the materialist camp, or simply leaving this part of Searle's theory in a state of incoherence.

I will tackle this barrier to making sense of Biological Naturalism in chapter 3, when I deal with Searle's idea of the first-person ontology of experiences.

¹¹⁸ Hodgson D. "Why Searle Has Not Rediscovered The Mind" p.266

b) Causal reduction, and at the same time, ontological irreducibility

Searle sees his claim of the causal reducibility of experiences as a way of distancing himself from dualistic theories. He seems to suggest that causal reducibility of experiences bind them inextricably to brain activity, as they can be fully accounted for, at least causally, by neurophysiological goings on. As Palmer puts it, Searle believes that experiences are 'causally reducible and this, he thinks, is sufficient for a thoroughgoing physicalist'.¹¹⁹ This seems to reflect the impetus for materialist and reductive theories of mind; keeping out any talk of mysterious, non-physical properties or substances and giving experiences the status of just another physical feature of the world, capturable by scientific investigation.

Searle sees his claim of ontological irreducibility as a way of distancing himself from reductive materialist theories of mind, which he sees as eliminative of the subjectivity of experiences. Ontological irreducibility is, for Searle, a way of emphasising the unique nature of experiences, the way in which their subjective phenomenal character seems to elude capture in purely physical or scientific terms, and is indicative of the idea that something so essentially subjective cannot be part of a seemingly entirely objective physical reality.

These approaches to experiences are usually considered as opposing views, the first held by materialists, reductionists and identity theorists, the second held by dualists of either the property dualist or substance dualist persuasion. The problem for Searle arises because he wants to hold both claims simultaneously. He is clear that he believes that 'in the case of consciousness we can make a causal reduction but we cannot make an ontological reduction'.¹²⁰ This instantly renders his views confusing to philosophers who automatically see these two strands of his theory as conflicting, even mutually exclusive views. From the traditional assumptions and perspective in philosophy of mind these are opposing claims, one reductive, one anti-reductive and one materialist, one dualist. One challenge in trying to make sense of Biological Naturalism is to see whether, and how, these dual claims of reduction and irreducibility can be made to rest easy together. This will be explored in chapter 4, when I look in more detail at Searle's notion of causal reduction, and chapter 5 where I focus on his particular style of irreducibility.

¹¹⁹ Palmer D. E. "Searle on Consciousness: or How not to Be a Physicalist" p.162

¹²⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.83

c) Experiences are caused by, *and* realised in, the brain

The claim that experiences are caused by the brain usually conveys a picture where the two are distinct and separate; the brain causes experiences, and those experiences are metaphysically distinct from the brain. This is underpinned by a view of causation where two distinct events are connected and ordered through time. So, if one phenomenon *causes* another, there might seem to be a necessary distance between the two, a separation of mental and physical in a way that Searle seems so at pains to deny.

Realisation is a metaphysical relation that is distinct from causation or identity and is usually taken to mean the claim that a particular is fulfilling a certain type. In other words, a specific token is an instantiation of a type, at a specific time, and types of entities are multiply realisable by different tokens. Such a situation does not involve two separate phenomena in the way that causal claims might be seen to, nor the idea that one is nothing but the other as identity would. In relation to philosophy of mind, realisation is often used by physicalist philosophers to justify their status as physicalist, in other words, particular configurations of brain activity are taken to be instances of the type “experience”, and thus not separated from the brain. Instead, as Searle says, ‘thoughts are not weightless and ethereal. When you have a thought, brain activity is actually going on’¹²¹ and that ‘the consciousness of the brain is not something over and above the neuronal phenomena, but rather a state that the neuronal system is in’.¹²² Searle uses his realisation claim to try to avoid the threat of property dualism, which would still be open if he simply claimed that experiences were caused by the brain. The realisation claim therefore moulds his theory into a physicalist shape by closing off the door for experiences to be somehow separate or different from the brain itself. Searle says:

‘Nothing is more common in nature than for surface features of a phenomenon to be both caused by and realised in a micro-structure, and those are exactly the relationships that are exhibited by the relation of mind to brain.’¹²³

These simultaneous claims of experiences as apparently separate from the brain, or merely a feature of the brain are the source of another tension and barrier to making sense of Biological Naturalism. I will tackle this issue in chapter 4, when I consider Searle’s notions of causal reducibility and levels of description.

¹²¹ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.25

¹²² Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.60

¹²³ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* pp.21-22

d) Mental causation, but experiences have no causal powers over and above those of the neuronal activity in the brain

Mental causation involves the question of whether experiences can cause things to happen or, as Kim puts it, whether mental properties are causal properties, adding that ever since Descartes' work, 'mental causation has been the acid test that any would-be account of the mind-body relation has been required to pass'¹²⁴. In other words, any satisfactory solution to the mind-body problem should be able to account for mental causation. Searle leaves little doubt that he wants to create a theory that includes mental causation; he sees experiences as causally efficacious,

'Because conscious states are real features of the real world, they function causally. My conscious thirst causes me to drink water for example.'¹²⁵

Searle clearly sees some events as having experiences as their causes. The possible problem is how this can be accounted for given Searle's other belief that causally speaking, there is nothing going on above and beyond the neuronal activity in our brains;

'[Experiences have] absolutely no life of their own, independent of the neurobiology. Causally speaking, they are not something "over and above" neurobiological processes.'¹²⁶

Searle wants to make such a claim to distance himself from dualism, and the mystery that he sees property dualism as implying, with experiences having powers of their own above and beyond the brain. However, by tethering experiences so closely to brain activity, Searle risks seeming as if he is claiming that the brain is doing all the causal work on its own with no need for any input from experiences. This means, as Honderich points out, that 'epiphenomenalism threatens'.¹²⁷ Searle's reply is linked to his view of the world as relating to different levels of description for any particular system, what has been described by some as "levelism"; which means, for Searle at least, that the same event can be causally described either at one level of description, for example the higher-level of experiences, or at a different level, for example the lower-level description of neuronal activity. In this way he simply does not see concerns about epiphenomenalism, or for that matter overdetermination or concerns about the causal closure of the physical world, as applying to Biological Naturalism. However, for many the tension remains between arguing that experiences causally reduce to brain activity, and that

¹²⁴ Kim J. "Mental Causation in Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.192

¹²⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.79

¹²⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.79

¹²⁷ Honderich T. *Mind the Guff – John Searle's Thinking on Consciousness and Free Will Examined*

they have ‘no causal powers in addition to [their] neurobiological base’¹²⁸ whilst also holding onto mental causation and seeing experiences as able to cause things to happen not because of any link to neurobiological features of the brain, but because they are causally efficacious in their own right. This tension will be explored in chapter 4 where I look at Searle’s view of levels of descriptions and his response to the problems of mental causation.

6. Conclusion

At the very start of *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Searle is characteristically forthright in declaring his solution to the mind-body problem,

‘This solution has been available to any educated person since serious work began on the brain nearly a century ago, and, in a sense, we all know it to be true. Here it is: Mental phenomena are caused by neurophysiological processes in the brain and are themselves features of the brain...Mental events and processes are as much part of our biological natural history as digestion, mitosis, meiosis, or enzyme secretion’¹²⁹

This style of philosophy is unusual and although I find it personally quite refreshing, many have found it irritating and seem taken aback by his bold manner of expression. Many, or even most, commentators on Searle find it hard to make sense of his claims in Biological Naturalism, finding internal tensions within the theory and finding the seemingly self-contradictory claims, such as experiences being both reducible and irreducible, as anything but transparent.

There are very few points in the literature where commentators find agreement with Searle, and even where they occur it is usually on general issues rather than the specifics of Biological Naturalism. For example, when Nagel generally agrees with Searle’s belief in the importance of the subjective nature of experiences;

‘Subjective points of view are themselves parts of the real world, and if they and their properties are to be described adequately, their ontologically subjective character – the subjectivity of their nature – must be acknowledged’¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.61

¹²⁹ Searle J. *Rediscovery of the Mind* p.1

¹³⁰ Nagel T. “Searle: Why We Are Not Computers” p.104

The criticism of Searle's theory is wide ranging and attacks both his general approach as well as the specifics of his theory. Chalmers, for example, complains that Searle does not actually achieve any progress on the mind-body problem,

‘Searle's all-purpose critique: "the brain causes consciousness". Although this mantra (repeated at least ten times) is apparently intended as a source of great wisdom, it settles almost nothing that is at issue...Searle's claim is simply a statement of the problem, not a solution’¹³¹

Regarding the basis of Searle's claim of ontological irreducibility, his notion of first-person ontology, Dennett refers to ‘the metaphysical extravagance (at best just peculiarity or at worse incoherence) of "subjective ontology.”’¹³²

Biological Naturalism has been interpreted in the literature as anything from a version of identity theory to property dualism. One might wonder how a theory of mind could be understood in such divergent ways, given that they are normally seen as theories at opposite ends of the reductive/non-reductive spectrum. I think there are a number of key tenets within Biological naturalism which give rise to this confusion, based on seeming contradictions. Each of the following chapters of this dissertation will be based on trying to appease the tensions I have highlighted above in this section. Chapter 3 will look at Searle's claim that experiences have a first-person ontology, which is the source of their claimed ontological irreducibility. Chapter 4 will focus on realisation versus cause in relation to experiences and brain activity and mental causation in conjunction with causal reduction. Chapter 5 will explore the problems of the claimed reducibility and irreducibility of experiences, and the triviality (claimed by Searle) or importance (alleged by commentators) of that irreducibility. I will thus be exploring the barriers to making sense of Biological Naturalism as a coherent and contradiction-free theory, and set out ways in which we should view what Searle is claiming in order to best understand his intentions. I will conclude that Searle should be interpreted as a real identity theorist, a position which I argue for in chapter 6.

¹³¹ Chalmers D. “Consciousness and the Philosophers’: An Exchange”

¹³² Dennett D. “Review of Searle” p.196

Chapter 3 – Making sense of first-person ontology

1. Introduction

First-person ontology is a part of Searle's Biological Naturalism which is the foundation for his belief in the ontological irreducibility of experiences to brain states. Searle makes many assertions about first-person ontology and how important it is, but does not expand on the idea in great detail, including exactly what the idea is supposed to include and entail. Consequently, many have found first-person ontology to be a major barrier to making sense of Biological Naturalism as a whole. Commentators on Searle have also criticised his claim that the irreducibility of experiences, which is a consequence of their first-person ontology, is merely a trivial consequence of our definitional practices. Some philosophers interpret this triviality as meaning the first-person ontology of experiences is not important, which seems at odds with the substantive status of any claim about the essential nature of experiences.

In order to try and make sense of Searle's first-person ontology, I will first look at how Searle himself defines first-person ontology and what its role is within Biological Naturalism. I will then look at Searle's categorisation of subjective, objective, epistemological and ontological items and explore how ontological subjectivity, or first-person ontology, can be better understood through the concepts of subjectivity, qualitative feel, perspectivity and privacy. By unpacking the ideas and exploring the features of first-person ontology I hope to gain a deeper understanding of what it is and what its consequences are regarding the relationship between experiences and the brain. I will conclude that by claiming experiences have a first-person ontology, Searle is highlighting the way that experiences have both a perspectival nature and a qualitative feel for the subject.

In the final section I will assess first-person ontology. I will look at whether it is as unique a notion as the terminology might suggest, concluding that Searle is actually expressing some common views about experiences, albeit by using new terminology. I will also conclude that first-person ontology is problematic for Searle because it introduces a tension between his desire to hold experiences as essentially subjective and qualitative, and his commitments to a roughly materialist view of the world. That is something that I will explore in later chapters.

2. How Searle explains first-person ontology and its role in Biological Naturalism

In this section I will introduce Searle's notion of first-person ontology. I will list the features that Searle attributes to first-person ontology in his writing, namely subjectivity and qualitative feel, look at the role that first-person ontology plays within his theory of Biological Naturalism, and briefly touch on how his critics have reacted to first-person ontology. My aim in this section is to set the scene for a more detailed look at what first-person ontology actually amounts to, which I will turn to in the subsequent sections.

a) Features that Searle associates with first-person ontology

First person-ontology is focused on subjectivity: Searle's notion of first-person ontology has, at its core, the concept of subjectivity. He is definite in his belief that "subjective" refers to an ontological category, not to an epistemic mode,¹ though what Searle is trying to convey with this claim is less obvious. By looking more closely at what subjectivity amounts to for Searle, I hope to shed light on the specific form of ontological subjectivity which Searle sees as the basis of first-person ontology and uncover how this is supposed to contrast with what he deems ontologically objective phenomena. It is not immediately clear from Searle's writings exactly what he means by subjectivity, but I think there are a number of inter-related concepts which together build up a picture of what Searle means when he uses the term. I will outline them below, and expand on them in the following sections.

Subjectivity as more than merely belonging to a subject: By its very name, the subjectivity of an experience refers to the subject undergoing the experience. However, although Searle states that 'every conscious state is always *someone's* conscious state',² the idea of merely belonging to a subject is not sufficient to characterise what is meant by subjectivity, because there are a multitude of things which can belong to a subject which would not be classed as subjective. So I need to look to other features for a fuller explanation of what Searle means by subjectivity.

Subjectivity is tied up with points of view and access: Where a phenomenon does not have a first-person ontology, in Searle's framework, it is equally graspable by any person encountering it. In contrast, with the claim that experiences have a first-person ontology, Searle seems to be saying that experiences can only be fully grasped from the first-personal perspective, or point of view. Searle says 'the world itself has no point of view, but my access

¹ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.94

² Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* pp.94-95

to the world through my conscious states is always perspectival, always from my point of view'.³ I believe these features are key to understanding what Searle means when he uses the term "subjective".

First-person ontology also involves the qualitative character of experiences: Searle clearly states that 'the essence of consciousness is that it consists in inner qualitative, subjective mental processes'.⁴ He believes that the qualitative, phenomenal feel of an experience is both an essential aspect of experiences and an integral part of first-person ontology. This echoes many other philosophers who argue for the primacy of the qualitative nature of experiences, as Nagel does with his discussion of "what it is like" to have an experience for the subject having it.

Having sketched out subjectivity and qualitative feel as the two main features of first-person ontology and hinted at some of the related concepts that will help to further explain them, I will now turn to the role that first-person ontology plays in Biological Naturalism. I hope that consideration of the job first-person ontology is supposed to do will shed light on what Searle means when he uses the term.

b) The role of first-person ontology in Biological Naturalism

For Searle, first-person ontology is central to understanding the problems of philosophy of mind: The fundamental role of first-person ontology within Biological Naturalism is explained by the fact that Searle clearly thinks that much of the trouble with modern philosophy of mind can be put down to a denial, purposefully or otherwise, of what he calls the first-person ontology of experiences;

'Much of the bankruptcy of most work in the philosophy of mind and a great deal of the sterility of academic psychology over the past fifty years, over the whole of my intellectual lifetime, have come from a persistent failure to recognize and come to terms with the fact that the ontology of the mental is an irreducibly first-person ontology'⁵

First-person ontology is fundamental to Biological Naturalism: First-person ontology is a basic building block of the claims of Biological Naturalism. Searle uses similar phrasings over different books and articles he has written to express what first-person ontology is. These

³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.95

⁴ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* p.204

⁵ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.95

include experiences existing only as experienced by a subject and experiences being essentially subjective and qualitative in their nature;

‘Consciousness has a first-person ontology; that is, it only exists *as experienced* by some human or animal, and therefore, it cannot be reduced to something that has a third-person ontology, something that exists independently of experiences. It is as simple as that.’⁶

‘Because mental phenomena are essentially connected with consciousness, and because consciousness is essentially subjective, it follows that the ontology of the mental is essentially a first-person ontology.’⁷

‘Because of the qualitative character of consciousness, conscious states exist only when they are experienced by a human or animal subject. They have a type of subjectivity that I call ontological subjectivity. Another way to make this same point is to say that consciousness has a first-person ontology.’⁸

Within Biological Naturalism, Searle’s notion of first-person ontology plays the role of justifying a denial of any appearance/reality distinction: First-person ontology involves the idea of only existing *as experienced* by a subject, which has the consequence for Searle of preventing a distinction between appearance and reality when it comes to experiences. A difference between appearance and reality can be seen in a phenomenon such as a rainbow – it appears to be a coloured stripe across the sky but in reality there is just normal sunlight variously refracted through water droplets in the atmosphere. For experiences however, the appearance is that I am in pain, and the reality is that if it feels to me that I am in pain, then I am in pain. Searle believes that the appearance is the reality and there is no distinguishing between the two. Or as he puts it: ‘if it seems to me that I’m conscious, I *am* conscious.’⁹ The idea of a distinction between appearance and reality is that there might be a better or fuller perspective to take up on a phenomenon that reveals more of its true nature, for example, the scientific perspective on a rainbow might be seen to expose its true nature. However, for experiences, their existing in a first-person way, as experienced by a subject, means that for Searle, there is no “better perspective” to take up on them; the first-person perspective is what reveals their essence.

⁶ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.60

⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.20

⁸ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, p.94

⁹ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.99

First-person ontology plays a fundamental role in Searle's claim that experiences are ontologically irreducible: For Searle, a corollary of the first-person ontology of experiences is that their essence and essential nature is, as he puts it, first-personal. Searle uses this to justify his claim of ontological irreducibility, by drawing a distinction between ontologically objective and ontologically subjective features of the world, and at the same time insisting that one cannot reduce to the other; 'you cannot reduce the first person ontology to the third person facts'.¹⁰ This is, he believes, at the heart of the fundamental errors which he diagnoses philosophers of mind as making;

'The characteristic mistake in the study of consciousness is to ignore its essential subjectivity and to try to treat it as if it were an objective third person phenomenon.'¹¹

The role that first person ontology plays in Searle's claim of ontological irreducibility will be discussed further below in section 5. I will now turn to what Searle's commentators think of his notion of first-person ontology.

c) Searle's critics' view of first-person ontology

How other philosophers view first-person ontology: Commentators who have considered Searle's first-person ontology mostly feel it pushes his Biological Naturalism into the realm of dualism. For example, Nagel says of Searle 'I don't think it's possible to distinguish his antireductionist solution from property dualism'.¹² This is because dualists generally propose some form of ontological irreducibility of experiences as the linchpin of their thesis, and Searle sees his first-person ontology as the basis for his claim of ontological irreducibility of experiences; he states that 'the first person ontology of mental reality makes it impossible to carry out the ontological reduction'.¹³ So, by proposing that experiences are ontologically irreducible because of their first-person ontology, Searle appears to his critics to put himself firmly in the property dualist's camp. In this chapter I hope to develop an interpretation of first-person ontology which does not necessarily imply property dualism. In chapter 5 I will argue that, despite his critics' charges, Searle should not be seen as a property dualist. Despite his belief that experiences have a first-person ontology, I will argue that Searle and the property dualist mean different things by irreducible, and that Biological Naturalism is not a form of property dualism.

¹⁰ Searle J. "Consciousness, the Brain and the Connection Principle: A Reply" p.227

¹¹ Searle J. *The Problem of Consciousness*

¹² Nagel T. "Searle: Why We Are Not Computers" p.96

¹³ Searle J. "Mental Causation, Conscious and Unconscious: A Reply to Anthonie Meijers" p.172

What Searle's critics say about first-person ontology: Searle's critics also see his notion of first-person ontology echoing the claims made by other anti-reductionist or dualist philosophers. For example, in comparing his views to Searle's, Nagel insists that,

‘Subjective points of view are themselves parts of the real world, and if they and their properties are to be described adequately, their ontologically subjective character – the subjectivity of their nature – must be acknowledged’¹⁴

This seems to parallel the claims Searle makes about ontological subjectivity, which I will discuss further in sections 3 and 4 below. In chapter 5 I will assess whether the ontological irreducibility of Searle and anti-reductionists should really be seen as the same, arguing that they are in fact using irreducibility to mean different things.

Having provided a brief overview of the features and role of Searle's first-person ontology, I will take a closer look at the individual aspects of the notion, which I hope will help to make sense of what Searle is trying to claim through his idea of first-person ontology. In the next section I will address Searle's claim that conscious experience has a subjective ontology, which he labels first-person ontology. In section 4 I will consider each of the features of first-person ontology in turn, looking at subjectivity, perspectivalness, privacy and access of experiences and qualitative feel. My aim is to elucidate what first-person ontology actually amounts to by pulling apart and exploring the related concepts that Searle uses to describe first-person ontology.

3. Ontological subjectivity as the basis of first-person ontology

Although he mentions first-person ontology a lot, it is very difficult to find, in any of Searle's writing, a detailed and clear description of exactly what first-person ontology is supposed to cover, include or amount to. In the next four sections I will try to get to grips with Searle's notion of first-person ontology. First, in this section, I will look at Searle's fourfold distinction between subjective or objective and ontological or epistemological, because he sees the specific category of subjective ontology as helping to explain what first-person ontology is. In the next section I will try to make sense of Searle's first-person ontology by breaking it down into its constituent concepts and seeing what Searle means by each feature and what he believes it is conveying. In light of this discussion I will then revisit the fourfold distinction to show how first-person ontology contrasts with third person ontology, and in section 5 I will

¹⁴ Nagel T. "Searle: Why We Are Not Computers" p.104

pull all my investigations together to summarise what first-person ontology is, and what Searle believes it is conveying. This will have implications later in my dissertation, specifically chapter 5, where I assess whether Searle should be seen as a property dualist, in part because of his claims that experiences have a first-person ontology.

Subjectivity as a cornerstone of first-person ontology: Searle puts great emphasis on subjectivity in relation to the essence of experiences and what first-person ontology is;

Experiences, like 'pain, for example, are subjective in that their existence is dependent on being felt by a subject. They have a first-person or subjective ontology'¹⁵

'Subjectivity necessarily involves the what-it-feels-like aspect of conscious states'¹⁶

'Consciousness consists of qualitative, subjective states of feeling or sentience or awareness'¹⁷

'The facts are that biological processes produce conscious mental phenomena, and these are irreducibly subjective'¹⁸

'An objective account [of consciousness] cannot explain the subjective character of consciousness'¹⁹

Subjective ontology: Searle does not merely emphasise subjectivity, but specifically a subjective ontology, or ontological version of subjectivity. He says that experiences,

'have a type of subjectivity that I call ontological subjectivity. Another way to make this same point is to say that consciousness has a first-person ontology'²⁰

So if I am to make sense of first-person ontology I need to unpack the idea of a subjective ontology.

¹⁵ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* p.114

¹⁶ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.132

¹⁷ Searle J. "The Mystery of Consciousness Continues"

¹⁸ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.98

¹⁹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.60

²⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, p.94

A four-way divide: A divide between subjective and objective ontology is not a standard categorisation in the literature of philosophy of mind. Searle makes a four-way distinction between objective and subjective, ontological and epistemological, such that any particular phenomenon could be one of the following:

- Epistemologically objective
- Epistemologically subjective
- Ontologically objective
- Ontologically subjective

I will tabulate these options to highlight the differences between them:

	Epistemological A distinction between the ways in which we can know things	Ontological A distinction between the ways that things exist
Objective	<p style="text-align: center;">A</p> <p>A statement is <u>epistemologically objective</u> if you can know its truth (or falsity) without any reference to the thoughts, feelings, emotions, attitudes or opinions of any particular people (subjects).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">e.g. Emily is 172cm tall</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">B</p> <p>Something is <u>ontologically objective</u> when it exists independently of any particular subject</p> <p style="text-align: center;">e.g. aeroplanes, icebergs, cups of coffee</p>
Subjective	<p style="text-align: center;">C</p> <p>A statement is <u>epistemologically subjective</u> if you can only know its truth (or falsity) by referring to the thoughts, feelings, emotions, attitudes or opinions of particular people (subjects).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">e.g. A rainbow lorikeet is prettier than an eastern rosella parrot</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">D</p> <p>Something is <u>ontologically subjective</u> when it only exists <i>as experienced</i> by a subject</p> <p style="text-align: center;">e.g. the smell of coffee, the intense feeling of jealousy, the itchiness of an itch</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This is the quadrant Searle sees as containing first-person ontology</p>

For the category of subjective ontology, the question that naturally arises is what exactly is subjective about the ontology of experiences, or put differently, what is non-objective about the phenomena that Searle puts in this quadrant? A related question is what do you gain from stipulating that experiences are ontologically subjective, in other words, what is gained from claiming that experiences have a first-person ontology? I will answer these questions by investigating in more detail what concepts are involved in first-person ontology and how they work together to achieve this supposed status of subjective ontology.

4. Exploring first-person ontology

In the previous section I looked at the basis of first-person ontology and the way that Searle categorises epistemology and ontology into either objective or subjective. In this section I will delve deeper into first-person ontology and try to make sense of the notion by breaking it down into its possible constituent parts, and seeing what features come together to create Searle's idea of subjective ontology, that something has a first-person ontology. Searle states that first-person ontology is the realm of the fourth quadrant in my previous table, that is to say phenomena with a first-person ontology are ontologically subjective, I will first look in more detail at subjectivity and try to ascertain exactly what Searle means by using this term to describe experiences. Noting that Searle must mean more than simply belonging to a subject, I will consider the possible perspectivalness of experiences, whether there is any notion of privacy of experiences in play or whether different types of access to experiences can explain what Searle means by first-person ontology. I will conclude that these concepts all work together to create a notion of first-person ontology that amounts to the claim that experiences are essentially qualitative, meaning they have a phenomenal feel when undergone, and subjective, meaning they are only able to be fully characterised by the first-person point of view.

a) Subjectivity is integral to first-person ontology

"Subjectivity" is a slippery term and Searle recognises its referent's uniqueness, stating that subjectivity is 'unlike anything else in biology, and in a sense it is one of the most amazing features of nature'.²¹ When used in philosophy of mind "subjectivity" often denotes a focus on the subject and a claim that experiences involve a subject essentially. With such a focus on the subject having experiences, I therefore need to look at other concepts which might unpack

²¹ Searle J. *The Problem of Consciousness*

the notion of subjectivity and shed light on what Searle is trying to express when applying this notion to experiences. I will start with the idea that an experience's subjectivity could mean that it belongs to a subject.

Belonging to – not enough to fully explain first-person ontology's subjectivity

Searle states many times that experiences only exist when experienced by a subject, and he links this to an explanation of what subjective ontology means; 'conscious states are ontologically subjective, in the sense that they exist only as experienced by a human or animal subject'.²² So, experiences always belong to the subject undergoing them, hence Searle's claim that 'every conscious state is always *someone's* conscious state'.²³ However, there are obviously many other things, apart from experiences which can belong to me, a subject; my big toe belongs to me, in that it is on my foot, and part of my body, and no-one else's – it is exclusively mine. But I could have my toe amputated, or perhaps grow a duplicate of my toe in a laboratory and that would mean it was the same toe, just not belonging or attached to me anymore, in other words no part of me as a subject. It does not seem like experiences can be cut off from the subject to which they belong in the same way as a toe can be amputated; experiences only make sense in relation to the experiencer having them. This view of experiences is more like a bruise than a toe, for you cannot chop off a bruise without chopping off the thing that it is bruising, just as you cannot chop out an experience without chopping out the thing doing the experiencing i.e. a subject's brain. This therefore challenges the view that experiences are special in this regard. So, the subjectivity involved in first-person ontology is something more than the fact that experiences belong to the subject having them.

Perspectivalness

In Searle's own words: I will start exploring what Searle means by referring to the perspectival nature of experiences by looking at what he says about it;

'Consciousness has a first-person ontology. It exists only as experienced by a human or animal subject and in that sense it exists only from a first-person point of view'²⁴

'The world itself has no point of view, but my access to the world through my conscious states is always perspectival, always from my point of view'²⁵

²² Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.94

²³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* pp.94-95

²⁴ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.94

²⁵ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.95

Perspectivalness meaning from a particular point of view: These quotes suggest that Searle thinks that the perspectivalness of experiences is to do with being from a certain point of view, specifically, the point of view of the subject undergoing the experience. The question then becomes what is meant by point of view. Perspectivalness is often used in relation to a point of view, for example, a camera on a hill overlooking a city can take a photograph or video of the entire city; it has a perspective or point of view on the city, it sees it from a particular angle. Or someone might be looking at a hologram from the left and see a different picture to what I see as I view it from the right; one object, experienced from two different perspectives by two different subjects. What does this actually mean when it comes to experiences? It seems to me there might be two options, first, a point of view could be seen in a straightforward sense to mean a subject's perspective on the world, including features such as spatiotemporal location and the subject's makeup, such as the fact they have eyes capable of producing visual images. The second way to interpret point of view might be the idea that it makes no sense to think of another perspective on my experience, because it exists as given to me. This would imply that experiences are perspectival and that the only relevant perspective is the one of the experiencing subject.

Contrasting objective and subjective features of the world: One of Searle's complaints about modern philosophy of mind is the assumption that the whole of reality must be objective, meaning that features of the world are only deemed to be real if they are equally perceivable, and accessible to all subjects simultaneously, and their existence does not depend in any way on there being subjects or observers to experience them. Contrary to this, Searle says,

‘The real “physical” world contains both entities with a third-person ontology (trees and mushrooms, for example) and entities with a first-person ontology (pains and colour experience, for example).’²⁶

The first set of features he sees as having a third-person ontology belong in quadrant B in my table above, meaning Searle sees them as ontologically objective features. The second set of features, namely experiences, are in quadrant D of what Searle calls subjective ontology. Searle therefore includes in his list of “ordinary” features of the world, subjective features with what he calls a first-person ontology, meaning that their existence does depend on the subjects or observers experiencing them. In chapters 5 and 6 I introduce the idea that certain brain states are just experiential when undergone by a subject, and that the need to have them instantiated in a subject in order to be experientially grasped underlies Searle's notion of

²⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

experiences existing only as experienced, or being essentially first-personal. This explains why Searle also maintains that,

‘The characteristic mistake in the study of consciousness is to ignore its essential subjectivity and to try to treat it as if it were an objective third person phenomenon’²⁷

Perspectivalness refers to the way experiences are necessarily experienced from the subject’s point of view: I think this is expressing an interpretation of “point of view” as the second option give above; that my experiences only exist as given to me, as I experience them from my point of view. Searle says, ‘the world itself has no point of view, but my access to the world through my conscious states is always perspectival, always from my point of view’.²⁸ Because experiences are, for Searle, always perspectival, in that they are experienced from the subject’s point of view, it makes them, in a way, restricted to within that subject. This means that Searle believes that one cannot treat experiences like other non-subjective, non-perspectival features of reality where we would normally just picture how they fit in to our view on the world, hence leaving them seeming separated and fundamentally different. Searle’s treatment of the problem is to stop worrying that we cannot fit subjective, perspectival experiences into a view on the world which can accommodate all the other features and instead simply acknowledge the facts, which he sees as being ‘that biological processes produce conscious mental phenomena, and these are irreducibly subjective’.²⁹

From perspectivity to privacy: The perspectival nature of experiences is, for Searle, indicative of an essentially subjective, or subject-involving, aspect of reality that should not be reduced out of the picture, as he sees it. This is closely linked to the idea of whether experiences are somehow private and available only to the experiencer in some way, that is to say, whether the experiencer has a form of privileged access to their experiences which cannot be achieved by objective means. It is to this question that I now turn.

Privacy and special access

In Searle’s own words: Searle says this about access to experiences

‘In consequence of its subjectivity, the pain is not equally accessible to any observer. Its existence, we might say, is a first-person existence. For it to be a pain, it must be *somebody’s* pain; and this in a much stronger sense than the sense in which a leg must be

²⁷ Searle J. *The Problem of Consciousness*

²⁸ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.95

²⁹ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, p.98

somebody's leg, for example. Leg transplants are possible; in that sense, pain transplants are not. And what is true of pains is true of conscious states generally. Every conscious state is always *someone's* conscious state.³⁰

And

'I can feel my pains, and you can't. I see the world from my point of view; you see it from your point of view.'³¹

These two quotes demonstrate the way in which Searle believes experiences are private or can only be accessed in particular ways, namely via the first-person viewpoint of having an experience. In other words, I cannot have your perceptual states and I therefore cannot have your access to the world, which they provide. To explore this further I will return to the table above to highlight the difference between objective and subjective.

Getting clear about what Searle means by objective: I think it is important to be clear what Searle means when using the terms objective and subjective, because it is illuminating for the way in which he sees experiences as somewhat private. For Searle, objective items' existence is independent of any particular subject's feelings, perceptions, thoughts, opinions or experiences. The existence of a subjective item is dependent on a particular subject's feelings, perceptions, thoughts, opinions or experiences. The example of an epistemologically objective statement I gave in quadrant A is "Emily is 172cm tall". For Searle this is objective, epistemologically speaking, in the sense that the truth of the statement "Emily is 172cm tall" is knowable whether anybody had ever met her or not, whether anyone had ever compared her height to theirs, whether someone thought her particularly short or tall. Emily just *is* 172cm tall. The other quadrant in the table above involving objectivity is ontological objectivity in quadrant B. For Searle, this refers to items which exist independently of any particular subject, meaning that they would exist even if there were no subjects to view, interact or appreciate them. Searle's point is that it is of no consequence to the existence of a cup of coffee whether someone thinks that it smells appetising or is too hot for them to drink. Their thoughts, opinions, feelings and attitudes have no bearing on whether they exist or not. Quadrant B will include all physical items in the world, like aeroplanes, crystals, cups of coffee or icebergs. I will now look at how the way Searle considers items to be objective elucidates his take on what subjective means.

³⁰ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* pp.94-95

³¹ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.16

Contrasting Searle's meaning of objective with his meaning of subjective: Objective, for Searle, denotes observer, or subject-independent features of the world, whether epistemological statements or ontological items. In other words, an objective phenomenon 'is not dependent on any stance, attitudes, or opinions of observers'.³² In contrast, subjective features are basically the opposite of objective ones. So whereas the truth or falsity of an epistemologically objective statement is, according to Searle, independent of any thoughts, feelings, attitudes or experiences of subjects, the truth or falsity of what Searle denotes as an epistemologically subjective statement is entirely dependent on such features of subjects. In quadrant C I gave the example of the statement "a rainbow lorikeet is prettier than an eastern rosella parrot". There is nothing that can be said, independent of a subject's personal opinions that can definitively deem such a statement true or false. Its truth or falsity is entirely in the hands of the subject stating it. Searle takes this subject-dependent nature of epistemological statements and translates it across to ontological items. The corresponding claim is that rather than the truth or falsity of statements resting on the experiences and beliefs of subjects, the actual existence of certain items is entirely dependent on a subject. This is expressed by Searle through his claims that experiences only exist as experienced and that pain is always somebody's pain. Experiences then are really the only inhabitants of quadrant D, and one therefore wonders what it is about them that means they are so heavily dependent, as in not independent from, the subject undergoing them.

Shouldn't Searle's view of experiences as biological features of the brain mean they are in quadrant B? Insisting that 'consciousness does not exist in a separate realm'³³ and that 'there is nothing in your brain except neurons (together with glial cells, blood flow and all the rest of it) and sometimes a big chunk of the thalamocortical system is conscious',³⁴ it might seem strange that Searle thinks experiences are dependent on the subject having them at all. For if 'consciousness is just a brain process...a qualitative, subjective, first-person process going on in the nervous system'³⁵ then why would consciousness not be objective in the way that the process of digestion is? The key to answering this question is appreciating the implications that normally accompany an objective view of the world. If all features of the world are deemed to be objective, then they should be equally accessible to all observers, given that by Searle's definition they are independent of any observer. For Searle, experiences differ from

³² Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, p.94

³³ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.62

³⁴ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" pp.60-61

³⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.87

other biological, and therefore objective features, because they resist external access from subjects who are not the one undergoing the experience.

Searle is not alone in believing that experiences resist objective access: Nagel has written extensively on the idea that experiences are necessarily a way the subject is accessing the world from their own point of view, rather than being able to be accessed independently in any objective way. For example, Nagel states,

‘Subjective points of view are themselves parts of the real world, and if they and their properties are to be described adequately, their ontologically subjective character – the subjectivity of their nature – must be acknowledged’³⁶

For Nagel, this is because, ‘every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view’,³⁷ highlighted by his discussion of how it would be impossible for him to know ‘what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat’ because he is restricted to ‘the resources of my own mind’.³⁸ That is to say, each kind of experience is a point of view on the world and to know what that point of view is like, for example which qualitative feelings it involves, one has to inhabit that point of view, or at least another point of view very similar to it. I think that such ideas can be seen in Searle’s claim that experiences only exist as experienced, which I believe is indicative of how Searle sees experiences as restricted to the subject undergoing them in this sense. Searle’s claim that experiences are firmly in quadrant D, the ontologically subjective quadrant, I think is an expression of his belief that experiences are partly private, in as much as being restricted to the first-person point of view of the subject having them.

Searle seems to find even particular experiences only accessible from the individual subject’s point of view: Nagel claims that types of experiencers (bats, wasps, humans) are restricted to their own point of view, which is why he is unable to know what it is like to be a bat. Searle seems to see experiences as restricted to even an individual’s point of view. So although I and my friend may both be able to experience the same type of experience, maybe the very peculiar taste of a durian fruit, Searle sees our individual experiences as restricted in relation to one another, hence the claim that ‘I can feel my pains, and you can’t’. I see the world from

³⁶ Nagel T. “Searle: Why We Are Not Computers” p.104

³⁷ Nagel T. “What is it like to be a bat?” p437

³⁸ Nagel T. “What is it like to be a bat?” p439

my point of view; you see it from your point of view'.³⁹ This has the consequence that, for Searle, in relation to a particular pain,

'No description of the third-person, objective, physiological facts would convey the subjective, first-person character of the pain'⁴⁰

In this subsection I have looked at what Searle's use of the term "subjective" amounts to and concluded that it is the related ideas of restricting the way that a phenomenon's essential features can be grasped to the first-person point of view, which makes experiences in some way private or have a limited sort of access. I will now look at what I believe to be the other feature of first-person ontology; the qualitative feel of experiences.

b) Qualitative feel is integral to first-person ontology

Searle's view of the qualitative nature of experiences: Searle sees experiences as having an essentially qualitative aspect to them;

'Any account of the mind that leaves out these qualitative experiences is inadequate'⁴¹

'Conscious experiences have a qualitative aspect. There is a qualitative feel to drinking beer, which is quite different from the qualitative feel of listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony'⁴²

Phenomenal feel is an essential part of what an experience is: The redness of a rose, the softness of velvet and the smell of freshly cut grass are classic examples that are often given to explain what we mean by qualitative character, phenomenal qualities or the felt aspects of experiences. In other words, 'to say that something is qualitative is to say that there is an answer to the question: 'What is it like?''⁴³ The qualitative nature of experiences is well known in philosophy of mind and made famous by Nagel's article "What is it like to be a bat?" where he finds the phenomenal character of experiences to be fundamental to what experiences are; 'fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism – something it is like *for* the organism'.⁴⁴ In this way, phenomenal feel is an essential part of what an experience is, and is therefore also a central aspect of Searle's notion of first-person ontology, which he sees as expressing the true nature of experiences.

³⁹ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.16

⁴⁰ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.117

⁴¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.61

⁴² Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.59

⁴³ Coleman S. "Mind Under Matter" p.95

⁴⁴ Nagel T. "What is it like to be a bat?" p.436

Explaining Searle's use of qualitative feel: The importance of experiences being experienced by an experiencer returns at this point when using qualitative what-it-is-likeness to make sense of first-person ontology. For Searle, the forces exerted on a braking car are assumed not to be qualitative because the car is not a conscious subject undergoing an experience from its own point of view. So in this scenario, the car is not seen as having a first-person ontology because it is assumed that it does not have a point of view on the world, nor is there something it is like for the car to feel the forces exerted upon it. However, the feeling of despair is qualitative in the sense that there is a certain "what it is like" for any conscious creature as they are experiencing it, that is to say that when someone is in despair they see the world in a certain way, from a certain point of view which is unique to them. So despair would be seen by Searle as having a first-person ontology because it feels a certain way to undergo despair, and any subject doing so would be doing it from their own personal point of view.

Using qualitative character to make sense of first-person ontology: In this way, Searle joins together qualitative feel and the perspectival point of view aspect of experiences together when he stipulates that something has a first-person ontology. Indeed, Searle clearly states that subjectivity, which I explored in the subsection above, and qualitative feel 'together imply "first-personal"'.⁴⁵ So, Searle views the qualitative feel of experiences and their subjective nature as bound together by jointly implying that the phenomenon in question has a first-person ontology.

In this section I have analysed first-person ontology by breaking it down into its constituent concepts of subjectivity and qualitative feel, and further explored subjectivity in terms of perspectivalness, privacy and types of access. In the next section I will consolidate these concepts and summarise what Searle's claim of first-person ontology actually amounts to, and assess whether it easily fits alongside the other claims of Biological Naturalism.

⁴⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.81

5. Assessing first-person ontology

In this section I will first set out what I believe first-person ontology to amount to, namely the two-part claim of the subjectivity and qualitative nature of experiences. I will then assess the notion itself. I will look at whether first-person ontology is really as eccentric as some of Searle's critics see fit to suggest, and I will conclude that it really only expresses views that are presented in a more conventional way by other philosophers. I will then look at how first-person ontology fits into Searle's theory of Biological Naturalism and whether it can be made sense of in light of Searle's other commitments. I will conclude that first-person ontology creates a difficulty for Searle by introducing a tension between his desire to hold experiences as essentially subjective and qualitative, and his commitments to a roughly materialist view of the world.

a) Making sense of first-person ontology

No difficulty understanding first-person ontology: With all the problems philosophers have making sense of Searle's work I have begun assessing the various aspects of Biological Naturalism by looking at his notion of first-person ontology. I do not find there to be any difficulty in understanding Searle's first-person ontology, although I have had to look closely at his writing and interpret what he says in order to reach a position where I feel I can clearly state his intentions.

First-person ontology is in the realm of subjective ontology, in quadrant D: In section 3 I tabulated the fourfold distinction Searle makes between ontology and epistemology, subjectivity and objectivity. I find it clear that Searle strongly believes in keeping epistemological issues separated from ontological ones. With his notion of first-person ontology he goes to some length to ensure his readers know that he is making a claim about the ontology of experiences, about their essence, their nature, rather than about how we can come to know about them. For example, he insists that "'subjective" refers to an ontological category, not to an epistemic mode'.⁴⁶ In other words he means his discussion of first-person ontology to refer to quadrant D as opposed to quadrant B in my table, rather than making any comment about the epistemological quadrants A and C. He states that 'we can have an epistemically objective science of a domain that is ontologically subjective',⁴⁷ again showing his desire to separate studying experiences, and coming to know things about them, from their essential natures.

⁴⁶ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.94

⁴⁷ Searle J. *The Problem of Consciousness*

First-person ontology's dual notions: So, with his notion of first-person ontology, I think Searle is trying to explain what he sees as the essential nature of experiences. From my discussion in the previous sections I think first-person ontology amounts to a claim by Searle that experiences have two main essential features:

1. A perspectival nature whereby they are restricted to being experienced from within the point of view of the subject undergoing them
2. A what-it-is-like, phenomenal feel

Having set out the two features of first-person ontology, I will move onto ascertaining whether it is really so unusual a notion as is usually made out in the critical literature.

b) Is first-person ontology really an unconventional notion?

First-person ontology baffles Searle's readers: Many of Searle's commentators seem baffled by first-person ontology and seem to find it difficult to understand what Searle means when he uses the term. For example, Dennett refers to 'the metaphysical extravagance (at best just peculiarity or at worse incoherence) of "subjective ontology"'.⁴⁸ However, I think that with close reference to Searle's writing, it becomes clear that first-person ontology is a relatively uncontroversial view about the essential features of experiences, albeit wrapped up in some idiosyncratic terminology.

First-person ontology is nothing new: If I am right about the characterisation I gave first-person ontology above, then Searle is not making any astonishingly novel claims by insisting that experiences have a first person ontology. The fact that experiences have a perspectival nature which restricts the ability to fully grasp them to the first-person point of view is a point well explored by Nagel in his article "What is it like to be a bat?" Nagel sees experiencers as limited to grasping only experiences from points of view that are similar enough to their own. Hence the belief that experiences have an essentially first-personal, perspectival nature.⁴⁹ The second aspect of first-person ontology, the fact that experiences have a phenomenal feel or qualitative aspect when experienced by a subject, is a claim that has already created a plethora of philosophical comment and criticism, namely through Jackson's thought experiment about Mary the colour scientist who, so the argument goes, learns something new on her release into the world of colour when she sees a red rose for the first time. She is

⁴⁸ Dennett D. "Review of Searle" p.196

⁴⁹ For Nagel, this meant restricted not to individuals, but to subjects, or perhaps species, with sensing apparatus and a point of view similar enough to your own.

supposed to learn a new fact about the world, in other words, knowing what it is like to see red. Jackson was trying to show that experiences have an essentially phenomenal character which evades capture in physical terms.

Searle is not alone in his views about the essential nature of experiences: The fact that many other philosophers have made similar points to Searle in seminal papers in philosophy of mind shows that Searle's views are not as extravagant as some of his critics suggest. I will now look at how first-person ontology might suggest to Searle's readers that he should be interpreted as a dualist. I will then look at how Searle also claims to make monistic or broadly materialist claims within biological naturalism, concluding that first-person ontology creates a tension within Biological Naturalism that would need to be resolved if we are to fully make sense of Biological Naturalism.

c) First-person ontology might suggest a dualistic interpretation of Searle

At first glance, first-person ontology might suggest a dualistic aspect to Biological Naturalism: Many people might initially see Searle's first-person ontology as implying dualism of some sort as it seems to advocate the primacy of the subjective point of view and of treating experiences as irreducibly fundamental parts of reality. Philosophers might consider first-person ontology to put the subject at the centre of the picture with Searle's inclusion of the perspectival nature of experiences. They might also consider first-person ontology's focus on the qualitative character of experiences, or Searle's insistence that experiences only exist as and when experienced by a subject to emphasise the world as it is for the subject. Collins points out that,

'Traditionally, in contrast to most materialists, many philosophers who emphasize the importance of consciousness also embrace dualism. Their reasons usually involve the *subjective* character of consciousness'⁵⁰

Dualists would also accept the separation of quadrants B and D in my fourfold table above, separating mental, subjective items off from objective physical ones. This implies that not all features of the world are objective, which is something Searle also agrees with, for he says, 'the real world, the world described by physics and chemistry and biology, contains an ineliminably subjective element'.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Collins C. "Searle on Consciousness and Dualism" p.16

⁵¹ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.95

A convincing case for dualism can be made if you exclusively consider Searle's notion of first-person ontology: Certain claims Searle makes do appear to commit him to a dualistic interpretation of his work, particularly given that he points to the ontological irreducibility of experiences, based on what he sees as their first-person ontology, as a cornerstone of Biological Naturalism. I will now turn to the other end of the monism-dualism spectrum in philosophy of mind and show that Searle also makes claims which could be interpreted as monistic or broadly materialist.

d) Searle makes monistic or materialistic claims too

Searle wants to see experiences as ordinary biological features of the world: Searle is adamant that if we should view experiences as anything, it should be as normal biological features of the world, just like all the others we see going on in our bodies;

‘Consciousness, in short, is a biological feature of human and certain animal brains. It is caused by neurobiological processes and is as much a part of the natural biological order as any other biological features such as photosynthesis, digestion, or mitosis’⁵²

Causal reduction and Searle's monistic intuitions: In addition to his notion of first-person ontology, which is the basis for his claim that experiences are ontologically irreducible, Searle also claims that experiences are causally reducible. I will look at what this amounts to in more detail in the next chapter, but briefly, it is the idea of ascertaining which lower-level features “cause”, in Searle's particular sense, the higher-level feature of conscious experiences. Searle is clear in his monistic beliefs, stating that he sees the universe as ‘entirely made up of physical particles that exist in fields of force and are often organized into systems’.⁵³ To most people, this suggests that Searle believes that all real features of the world fit into quadrant B in my table, that they are ontologically objective, given that they are physical. In fact, despite his idea that experiences have a first-person ontology, Searle is adamant about the ontological status of experiences not being something to do with dualism;

‘What is the ontology, what is the form of existence, of these conscious processes? ... Does the claim that there is a causal relation between brain and consciousness commit us to a dualism of ‘physical’ things and ‘mental’ things? The answer is a definite no’⁵⁴

⁵² Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.90

⁵³ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

⁵⁴ Searle J. *The Problem of Consciousness*

Searle could easily be read as endorsing an anti-dualistic stance: So it seems that Searle views experiences as ‘natural processes’ in the brain, and holds that ‘there is no metaphysical gulf’⁵⁵ between mental features and physical features of the world. In this way, if Searle’s overall theory and aims are taken into account, including his insistence that experiences can be causally reduced, even if not ontologically reduced, and that when an experiencer has an experience, there is nothing more going on metaphysically than some particular activity in their brain, I think the dualistic interpretation of what first-person ontology amounts to becomes much less convincing, and an interpretation of materialism or monism becomes more plausible. In chapter 5 I will assess whether these two features of Searle’s Biological Naturalism, first-person ontology and causal reduction, can be legitimately held together. I will now look at the tension caused by these two features of Searle’s Biological Naturalism.

e) So, when seen in light of the wider claims of Biological Naturalism, first-person ontology highlights a problematic tension

Experiences as irreducible but not too irreducible: Searle’s take on consciousness and experiences is grounded in an intuition of materialism. However, he rejects mainstream physicalism as a whole theory on the grounds that ‘it ends up saying falsely that there are no ontologically irreducible mental phenomena’.⁵⁶ This is exactly what first-person ontology aims to show and justify – that experiences are irreducibly subjective and qualitative features of reality – but not for the purely dualistic purposes that some might first consider Searle to be endorsing. In fact, he also discards dualism because he believes that ‘it ends up saying falsely that these [experiences] are something apart from the ordinary physical world we all live in, that they are something over and above their physical substrate’.⁵⁷ It is almost as if Searle wants experiences to have the status of being irreducible, but not too irreducible.

First-person ontology is in tension with reductive desires: Materialists and monists typically deny that mental features of the world are anything over and above physical features, which can lead to a desire to reduce mental experiences to other, physical features. In other words, there is a desire to reduce the items in quadrant D to those in quadrant B, given that quadrant B is considered unproblematically compatible with a physical view of the world. However, stating that ‘conscious states, with their subjective, first-person ontology, are real phenomena

⁵⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.81

⁵⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

⁵⁷ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

in the real world',⁵⁸ Searle is implying that they should not be reduced in favour of other features, whether causal, functional or otherwise.

Searle's denial of conceptual dualism and accepting subjective features as "physical": What Searle wants to claim is that experiences are subjective, as in perspectival in nature, and qualitative, that is to say they have what he calls a first-person ontology. However, he also holds that this does not, as almost everyone else in philosophy seems to assume, mean that they are not part of the ordinary "physical" world. This is because he denies what he calls conceptual dualism, or the way in which he thinks traditional philosophy pits mental against physical and defines physical so as to include mental from the start. He says of traditional approaches to mind and brain that

'it is assumed that "mental" and "physical" name mutually exclusive ontological categories. If it is mental then it cannot be in that very respect physical. And if it is physical, then it cannot be in that very respect mental. Mental qua mental excludes physical qua physical'⁵⁹

So Searle is trying to simultaneously claim that experiences are reducible to brain processes, albeit in his restricted "causal" sense of reduction, and that they are also irreducible in his "ontological" sense. Searle sees no conflict with these two statements, but according to the usual terminology in philosophy, this is akin to trying to have your cake and eat it; to say that experiences are both reducible and irreducible, both essentially mental and essentially physical at the same time.

First-person ontology as a contradiction of monistic metaphysics: It is understandable why first-person ontology is seen as a dualistic type of claim for it renders experiences somewhat "special" in their unique way of first-person point of view access, and that these certain configurations of activity in the brain feel a certain way for a subject when instantiated in them. This seems at odds with Searle's idea of a monistic world of physical entities. However, Searle vehemently denies that there is any contradiction in his dual claims of causal reducibility and ontological irreducibility. He says,

'I deny that the ontological irreducibility of consciousness implies that consciousness is something 'over and above', something distinct from, its neurobiological base. No, causally speaking, there is nothing there, except the neurobiology, which has a higher level feature of consciousness. In a similar way there is nothing in the car engine

⁵⁸ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.79

⁵⁹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.76

except molecules, which have such higher level features as the solidity of the cylinder block, the shape of the piston, the firing of the spark plug, etc. 'Consciousness' does not name a distinct, separate phenomenon, something over and above its neurobiological base, rather it names a state that the neurobiological system can be in. Just as the shape of the piston and the solidity of the cylinder block are not something over and above the molecular phenomena, but are rather states of the system of molecules, so the consciousness of the brain is not something over and above the neuronal phenomena, but rather a state that the neuronal system is in'⁶⁰

Corcoran sums up the tension between first-person ontology and views on the physical world when he says

'Whereas Searle's discussion of "first-person ontology" and the "subjective ontology of consciousness" seems to be suggestive of dualism, his claims about consciousness being physical and therefore spatial is suggestive of materialistic monism'⁶¹

I will take a closer look at this tension in chapter 5, when I assess whether Searle should be interpreted as a property dualist. In the next chapter, I will analyse the seemingly conflicting aspects that Searle wants to include in his ontology. This will include an exploration of his idea of levels of description, as well as his claim that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain. I will use a discussion of the problem of mental causation to further explicate Searle's position. I will conclude that the tensions which seem to plague Searle's position at first glance dissolve once it is made clear that Biological Naturalism seems to be some form of token identity theory.

⁶⁰ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.60

⁶¹ Corcoran K. "The Trouble with Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.316

Chapter 4 – Making sense of levels of description and causal reduction

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I tried to make sense of Searle's claim that experiences have a first-person ontology, which I believe means simply that experiences have a what-it-is-like qualitative feel, and a perspectival nature. In this chapter I will look at the ontological view of the world that Searle sets out in order to then fit experiences into it. He makes the claim that experiences are causally reducible to neurological processes happening in a subject's brain. It is not immediately clear exactly what this amounts to as it is not standard practice to qualify reduction as specifically causal. By looking at the various aspects of Searle's characterisation of ontology and its component parts, such as properties, I will try to uncover what Searle means when he claims that experiences have different levels of description, and that they are causally reducible to lower level processes going on in the brain. Before looking at each aspect of Searle's ontology individually, I will start by clearly setting out the features he seems to want to include, in relation to experiences. I hope that this will help to shape the forthcoming exploration of his ideas and keep the links between his different claims clear.

The idea of different levels of description permeates Searle's work, so I will begin in section 3 by looking at exactly what he means by this, as he often expresses his ideas by referring to different levels of description. For example,

'We can describe my arm going up at the level of the conscious intention-in-action to raise my arm, and the corresponding bodily movement, or we can describe it at the level of neuron firings and synapses and the secretion of acetylcholine at the axon endplates of my motor neurons, just as we can describe the operation of the car engine at the level of piston cylinders and spark plugs firing, or we can describe it at the level of the oxidization of hydrocarbon molecules and the action of metal alloys.'¹

It is hard to talk about different levels of description of a system or phenomenon without running into the question of whether the different descriptions, or levels of description, relate to different properties. I strongly believe that this question cannot be answered satisfactorily

¹ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* pp.6-7

until it is clear what is meant by “property” and how one property is being individuated with respect to another. Therefore, in section 4 I will explore the difference between differentiating between properties extensionally and intensionally, and show how Searle’s differing levels of description do not imply different properties, given his extensionalist view of property identity criteria.

Being clear that the neuronal description and experiential description of any particular brain state do not, at least for Searle, imply different mental and physical properties, I can approach the questions relating to mental causation with clarity. In section 5 I will set out how the problems that surround maintaining the causal efficacy of the mental can be diagnosed as relating to competing properties, mental and physical, and the view that this results in competing mental and physical causal powers and all the questions about overdetermination and epiphenomenalism which abound in the literature on mental causation. I will show how Searle’s denial that there are neither different properties nor different causal powers at work at each level of description dispenses with the problem of mental causation that beset other approaches to the mind-body problem.²

I will then tackle the seeming problem of Searle’s claim that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain in section 6. One way to make sense of this claim requires an acceptance of Searle’s broadening of the meaning of cause, which is wider than the standard sense of a relation between distinct existences over time. An alternative is to see his simultaneous style of causation as tantamount to realization itself, thus also dispelling the tension. At this point I will be in a position to demonstrate in section 7 that by “causal reduction” Searle means an asymmetrical dependency relation between experiences and the brain where if the neuronal state is instantiated, the experiential state is also present. This amounts to the claim of the neuronal level being logically sufficient for the experiential. Searle’s causal reduction also refers to his belief that the causal powers of the higher level are not anything over and above the causal powers of the lower level because Searle considers there to only be one causal sequence differently described.

I will begin by setting out the features of an ontological picture in which Searle sits his theory of Biological Naturalism.

² This position suggests that Searle might be best interpreted as an token identity theorist of some sort. I will address this consequence in chapter 6 where I look at whether Searle should be seen as an identity theorist.

2. A seemingly conflicting wish list

An ontological wish list: Having set out how he believes experiences have a first-person ontology, Searle needs to create an ontological picture of the world which they can fit into. He does so by considering what experiences are, how they relate to the brain, whether they cause things to happen and indeed what causes them in the first place. Although he does not explicitly set it out like this, it seems that Searle has the following wish list of features to fulfil when creating a picture of how the mind relates to the brain:

1. A view where there are different levels of description for any particular item or event
2. Experiences are just a state the brain can be in
3. Experiences are causally efficacious
4. Experiences do not have any causal powers above and beyond those of their neuronal base
5. Experiences are caused by lower level neuronal processes
6. Experiences are realised in the brain as a higher level system feature

Conflicting requirements: The problem is that some of these conditions, at least on the face of it, appear to be incompatible. For example, how can the desire for experiences to be causally efficacious be reconciled with the claim that they do not have any causal powers above and beyond those of the neuronal base? General approaches in philosophy of mind would suggest that in order to uphold some form of mental causation for experiences, they need to have their own, specifically mental effects, or else be rendered epiphenomenal. There is also tension in Searle's claim that experiences are both caused *by* lower level neuronal processes in the brain, and also realised *in* the brain as a higher level system feature. At first glance that pair of claims seems to suggest that for a given neuronal feature, it both causes the experience and is what the experience is realised in, which seems contradictory. There is also the issue that causation is usually meant as a relation that holds between distinct existences, but realisation is more of an overlapping relation of instantiation, where a certain type of phenomenon is thought to be realised, or instantiated, in a particular token instance. Searle claims both a relation of causation and realisation for experiences, which immediately provokes the question of whether or not neuronal activity in the brain, and the experiences subjects undergo, are distinct existences, or not.

I will now explore each of the features of Searle's wish list to ascertain what each requirement amounts to, in Searle's eyes, and whether there is, in fact, an insurmountable conflict between the different elements. In the process of doing this the central importance of a view of the world based on different levels of description, and the meaning of Searle's claim that experiences are causally reducible will become clear, namely that experiences do not have their own separate causal powers independent of, and over and above, those of the neuronal activity in the brain.

3. Levels of description

Any real, concrete happening will have an infinite number of potential descriptions. How these descriptions are organised, or relate to each other, has bearing on your view of the world. Searle makes great use of differing descriptions of a single phenomenon in his explanation of how he sees experiences relating to the brain and the wider physical world. I will first look at how his use of levels of description might at first seem to be like different metaphysical levels, given some of the ways he expresses his ideas. I will then challenge that initial interpretation before going on to look at whether different levels of description necessarily mean that there are different properties in play in section 4.

a) Levels of description - different metaphysical levels?

Searle relies heavily on talk of different levels of description: Throughout his work Searle often uses the terminology of "levels of description" which he applies to different ways of looking at the same phenomenon or system. For example, he says,

'Any complex system can be described in different ways. Thus, for example, a car engine can be characterized in terms of its molecular structure, in terms of its gross physical shape, in terms of its component parts, etc.'³

Levels of description are often used to refer to a vertically layered, metaphysical picture:

Talking about levels of description is usually applied to ontological approaches where differing vertical layers are metaphysically dependent on each other – each one supervenient upon or realised by the one directly below it. The way that Searle expresses his views about levels of description can make it appear that he advocates this vertically layered metaphysical picture.⁴

³ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.49

⁴ I will show in the next sub-section how I believe this to be a poor interpretation of Searle's meaning.

A picture where the levels are more and more micro: Searle insists that the ‘same system can have different levels...within a single unified causal system’,⁵ and he can seem to suggest that each layer is explainable by the level directly below it, such that eventually the true explanations of things can be captured in terms of the physical micro features of phenomena,

‘Essential to the explanatory apparatus of atomic theory is not only the idea that big systems are made up of little systems, but that many features of the big ones can be *causally explained* by the behaviour of the little ones. This conception of explanation gives us the possibility, indeed the requirement, that many sorts of macrophenomena be explicable in terms of microphenomena. And this in turn has the consequence that there will be different levels of explanation of the same phenomenon’⁶

A vertically layered metaphysical picture implies metaphysically distinct levels: Such a vertically layered metaphysical view implies that there are entities or properties that are specific to each level. A related point is that if you believe causal powers to work through properties, then there will be causal powers which are specific to, and indeed restricted to, each level. This view suggests that levels of description are somehow distinct and metaphysically separated from each other, each with their own properties. This prompts questions about how the levels are related to each other and in which level causation really occurs. I do not believe this is the best interpretation of what Searle means when he talks of levels of description, which I will now try to show.

b) Non-hierarchical levels of description

The different levels of description are not metaphysically distinct existences: I think the key to understanding Searle’s approach to levels of description is to emphasise how he does not believe the levels to be hierarchically ordered, because he emphasises they’re not in competition and not even distinct in a metaphysical way. Although Searle admits that when you believe that systems can be described in different ways,

‘It is tempting to describe this variability of descriptive possibilities in terms of the metaphor of “levels,” and this terminology has become generally accepted. We think of the microlevel of molecules as a lower level of description than the level of gross physical structure of physical components, which are higher levels of descriptions.’⁷

⁵ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.7

⁶ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.87

⁷ Searle J. *Mind* p.49

Searle denies the different levels are metaphysically distinct: Although Searle's talk of "levels" is the accepted terminology, it implies the vertically layered picture of metaphysically dependent levels. However, Searle asserts that the 'same system can have different levels of description which are not competing or distinct'.⁸ Relating to causation, Searle also denies that the levels are separate causal structures, stating that his use of levels of description relate to 'a single causal structure described at different levels.'⁹

Searle accepts levels of description but not the usual metaphysical picture which accompanies such parlance: Let me be clear what I think Searle is claiming here. He most definitely talks about levels of description, stating that 'because mental states are features of the brain, they have two levels of description – a higher level in mental terms, and a lower level in physiological terms.'¹⁰ However he denies the metaphysical picture that usually accompanies such a belief, namely that the levels involve distinct existences, and are in need of having their relation to each other spelled out; 'same system can have different levels of description which are not competing or distinct'.¹¹ This means that for Searle, 'the fact that the brain has different levels of description is no more mysterious than that any other physical system has different levels of description'¹² and consciousness is rendered a 'system-level, biological feature in much the same way that digestion, or growth, or the secretion of bile are system level, biological features'.¹³ Perhaps the next question that most people will want answering is "what entitles Searle to reject the metaphysical consequences that most people connect with levels of description?" I think the answer lies in Searle's beliefs about how to individuate different properties. In the next section I will explore the extensionalist and intensionalist approaches to property individuation and show how this relates to Searle's view of levels of description. I will also demonstrate how Searle's view of a single token brain state, that can come under, and be picked out by, two different types, is linked to his notion of different levels of description.

⁸ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.7

⁹ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* pp.6-7

¹⁰ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.26

¹¹ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.7

¹² Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.7

¹³ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.80

4. The importance of how to individuate properties

In this section I will be drawing a distinction between using different levels to illustrate a metaphysically vertically layered view of reality, where the different levels have their own properties and causal powers, and different levels of descriptions simply referring to different descriptions of a particular happening or occurrence in the brain with a single set of causal powers. Searle's position is the latter option, and I believe the difference between the two can be teased out by looking at the underlying criteria used to individuate properties.

a) Different ways to individuate properties

Property identity criteria are something to be decided and stipulated: I take it as uncontroversial that any concrete happening will have an infinite number of potential descriptions. This plethora of descriptions will fall under different levels of description, such as atomic, molecular, chemical, biological, social or economic. Whether the different levels of description mean that there are different properties relating to each level depends on how you individuate one property from another. There are a number of options and your choice or adherence to a particular approach to properties will have metaphysical consequences regarding the levels of description and whether they contain their own in-level properties and causal powers.

Intensionalist vs. extensionalist property individuation criteria: I wholeheartedly agree with Howell when he states that 'it is crucial that we be clear on whether or not properties are individuated intensionally or extensionally'.¹⁴ Deciding when you have different properties or not, you could have property individuation, or you might say a property identity criterion, which is either extensional or intensional. Extensional property individuation involves 'mind-independent individuation conditions for properties'¹⁵ and an example would be the belief that if there are two different properties there must be two different sets of causal powers. Alternatively, intensional property individuation means that 'properties are individuated in part by the way we can think about them'¹⁶ and an example of this would be the claim that every different predicate or description of an item corresponds to a different property.

Does deciding what properties there are depend on our concepts or descriptions? The main point is that intensional criteria for deciding how many properties exist are dependent, at least to some degree, on how we think about properties. In other words, properties are

¹⁴ Howell R. "The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism" p.323

¹⁵ Howell R. "The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism" p.323

¹⁶ Howell R. "The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism" p.323

'metaphysically individuated by conceptual abilities'¹⁷ and if we can conceptualise it differently, or apply a different concept to it, then that indicates that a given property is really different in the world. Extensional criteria are the converse, in that the criterion for individuating properties is independent of our conceptual or epistemological convictions. On this view then, properties are out there in the world, irrespective of our ability to describe or conceptualise them.

Searle individuates properties extensionally: Although he is not explicit about his views in this area, it seems Searle uses an extensionalist criterion of property individuation. In particular, Searle seems to use differing causal powers to differentiate different properties. For example, he says,

'If two things in the real empirical world have an independent existence they must have different causal powers'¹⁸

This makes Searle an extensionalist when it comes to individuating between properties, specifically individuating them via differing causal powers.¹⁹ I consider this to be a plausible view which is held by others in the philosophical literature.²⁰ Individuating properties by their differing causal powers allows for an uncomplicated metaphysical picture where it is possible to have a single property with different descriptions of the property. This is contrary to a picture based on intensionalist individuation, for any different description could result in a different property. This is the beginning of an explanation for Searle's view that regarding experiences; there is a single occurrence going on in a subject's brain which has two equal descriptions, at different levels; the neuronal and the experiential. In the next section I will expand on this idea further.

b) The consequences of different property individuation procedures
Are there different properties at each level of description? When you talk of levels of description there will be questions that arise about properties. Your choice or belief about how to individuate properties has a big impact on the metaphysical picture that ensues. If you opt for the intensional individuation of properties, any two descriptions of a phenomenon

¹⁷ Howell R. "The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism" p.323

¹⁸ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.89

¹⁹ This is a necessary condition for individuating properties. For a sufficient condition, Searle's quote would have to be read right to left, that two things with different causal powers are different properties. I do not think Searle would find this problematic.

²⁰ See Shoemaker S. "Causality and Properties" for an example of someone else who holds this view.

may correspond to two different properties.²¹ To stress the point, the number of ways that we have to describe a phenomenon, or perhaps the number of concepts we have that relate to it, dictate how many properties we consider that phenomenon to possess. On an extensional view, the number of properties a phenomenon has is independent of our considerations about it and on the example I am using, is dictated by the different causal powers of the phenomenon itself. This means that it has the properties it does, independently of the number of ways that we have to describe it or conceptualise it.

The intensionally individuated properties view: When describing the kind of layered view of reality that he believes Searle to be endorsing, Kim states that,

‘it is usually supposed that for each level there exists a set of properties characteristic of the entities at that level. For example, transparency and inflammability are associated with the molecular level; biological properties make their appearance at the level of cells and multicellular organisms; and so on’²²

In the picture Kim presents each level of description refers to different properties, so the chemical level of description results in chemical properties of a particular phenomenon, and the biological level of description results in biological properties. Given that with this view the way we think about the different levels, for example how many there are and what features they include, dictates what properties the phenomenon has, it seems to me that Kim must be presenting a picture using intensionalist property individuation, meaning that what makes a property is, at least in part, based on how we arrange the descriptions of a phenomenon into different levels.

Extensional property individuation allows for single properties with multiple descriptions of them: Searle seems to prefer the extensional version of property individuation, specifically, individuating via differing causal powers, so he might claim that, contrary to the intensionalist view, it makes more sense to say that the different descriptions of a system do not invoke different properties of that system. This is exactly what can be found in Searle’s writing, where he states,

‘We can describe my arm going up at the level of the conscious intention-in-action to raise my arm, and the corresponding bodily

²¹ For ease of explanation I will assume a version of intensionalist property individuation that equates differing descriptions of a phenomenon with differing properties, and an extensionalist version of property individuation that equates differing properties to differing causal powers.

²² Kim J. “Mental Causation in Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.190

movement, or we can describe it at the level of neuron firings and synapses and the secretion of acetylcholine at the axon endplates of my motor neurons, just as we can describe the operation of the car engine at the level of piston cylinders and spark plugs firing, or we can describe it at the level of the oxidization of hydrocarbon molecules and the action of metal alloys. In both the case of the brain and the case of the car engine, these are not separate causal structures; it is a single causal structure described at different levels.²³

‘Once you see that the same system can have different levels of description which are not competing or distinct, but rather different levels within a single unified causal system, the fact that the brain has different levels of description is no more mysterious than that any other physical system has different levels of description.’²⁴

Properties are a way that something can be, and a brain can be in a particular state at a particular time. For Searle the brain is in a particular state in virtue of instantiating a certain property at a time, and the brain state consists in that instantiation. As he says,

‘The consciousness of the brain is not something over and above the neuronal phenomena, but rather a state that the neuronal system is in.’²⁵

So for Searle, brains can be in certain states, some of which will be able to be picked out or described experientially as well as neuronally. Crucially though, this does not, for Searle, mean that there are separate mental and physical properties, there is just a single property of the brain, described in different ways. That is to say, although he believes in different levels of description for brain states, he does not view experiences as mental properties of the brain state, as the intensionalist about property individuation might. Rather, an experience is a particular token brain state, which when instantiated comes under two types; “experience” and “neuronal activity”. The experiential is one way of picking out the brain state in question. This is Searle essentially disagreeing with the assumption inherent in the intensionalist metaphysical picture demonstrated above. That is, that there being two different ways of describing, or two different concepts of, a token brain state ‘entails nothing at all about how many properties there are’.²⁶

²³ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* pp.6-7

²⁴ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.7

²⁵ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.60

²⁶ Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.323

Dealing with one and two on Searle's ontological wish list: In summary, I believe that Searle individuates properties extensionally via their differing causal powers meaning that there being different causal powers is what fixes how many properties there are. This means that it is possible to have a single brain feature with more than one way of describing it, that is, a token brain state that can be brought under more than one type, namely experiential and neuronal. This is what Searle proposes in all his writings regarding the relation of experiences to the brain. This discussion has been a way of understanding and reconciling points one and two on Searle's ontological wish list, that is, that there are different levels of description for any token particular, and that experiences are just a state the brain can be in. I will now turn to examining the consequences of this view regarding causal powers. This will help me explain, in section 5, how Searle wishes to maintain both features three and four on his wish list, namely that experiences are causally efficacious, whilst at the same time they do not have any causal powers above and beyond those of their neuronal base.

5. Mental Causation

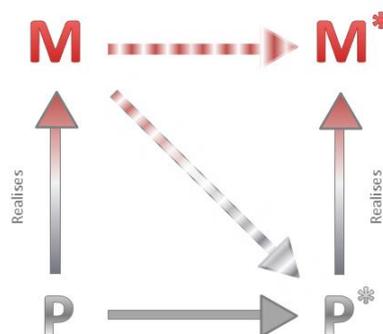
In this section I will look at points three and four on Searle's list of ontological requirements; that experiences are causally efficacious yet they do not have any causal powers above and beyond those of their neuronal base. These two features are directly related to the large literature about mental causation in philosophy of mind. Given a broadly physicalist view of the world, the problem of mental causation involves maintaining the causal efficacy of the mental so as to satisfy our intuitions that our experiences can cause things to happen. For example, it is my belief that it will rain soon that makes me reach for an umbrella when I leave the house. I will try to make sense of Searle's claim that the problem of mental causation simply does not apply to his theory of Biological Naturalism. Because he opts for a form of token identity, Searle bypasses such concerns, for they simply cannot apply to his ontological picture of a single property and single causal sequence described and picked out in differing ways. I will begin by setting out what the problem of mental causation is and will proceed to argue that Searle is right to claim that the problem of mental causation and any related 'problems about epiphenomenalism and the causal closure of the physical simply do not arise for me'.²⁷

²⁷ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.61

a) The problem about mental causation

Setting up the problem of mental causation: The problem of mental causation arose because physicalists wanted to claim that mental properties do not reduce to physical ones, yet are still physical. Kim generated the puzzle of mental causation for them on the assumption that mental properties are causally efficacious. Therefore, discussions about mental causation all ultimately centre around maintaining the causal efficacy of the mental, given a physicalistic world view²⁸. It is a consequence of a broadly physicalist view of the world that physical properties are causally efficacious and have the powers to cause physical effects. Our intuitions about our experiences also tell us that they are causally efficacious. Mental-mental causation is relatively uncontroversial, such as my feeling of thirst causing my desire to seek out a drink. The type of causation which prompts philosophers to pause and think is mental-physical causation.

Mental-physical causation: Mental-physical causation causes problems for physicalistic views of the world because when mental properties and physical properties are considered to be distinct, they compete with each other to be the one through which the causation takes place. This assumes that causal powers work through particular properties of items. Suppose there is a physical event, P, a neurological happening in my brain, which causes a physical effect, P*, a different neurological happening in my brain. Let us say that M is a mental state which is realised, or supervenes upon the physical, neurological state P, and M* is a mental state which is realised, or supervenes upon, the physical, neurological state P*. The problem of mental causation here is how M can be said to cause M*, or P*, give that M* is realised by P*. P causes P* which suffices for M*, by hypothesis of physicalism. However, what is left for M to do, especially if it is insisted that M is not identical to P? Kim expressed such concerns in diagrammatic form like this,



²⁸ Note that this is a view which accepts as fundamental the causal closure of the physical where every physical effect has a sufficient physical cause. This rules out the possibility of a solution to mental causation being that there is *only* a mental cause, leaving the two options I describe.

Because the mental and physical properties are distinct and potentially have their own causal powers working through them, they compete for which one is the cause of P*, for as the problem is set up, there seems to be two causes of P* - P and M.

Overdetermination: Fundamental to many definitions of physicalism is that every physical effect has a sufficient physical cause. This is effectively the claim that P is a sufficient cause of P*. Remember, however, that the problem of mental causation is finding a way to include the causal efficacy of the mental in a physicalistic world view, which would require M having causal powers of its own. This leaves the situation where P* seems to have two sufficient causes – M and P. Any situation where an effect has more than one sufficient cause, and the causes are distinct, is a case of overdetermination. In the problem of mental causation, the point is that a physical effect seems to have both a mental sufficient cause (M) and a physical sufficient cause (P). This allows a way in for dualistic theories, for they could claim that whilst every physical effect does have a physical cause, some physical effects also have mental causes. This is why the causal argument for physicalism²⁹ includes a clause ruling out overdetermination. This is so as to rule out a situation where an accepted sufficient physical cause for a particular physical effect, is also accompanied by an independent sufficient non-physical mental cause for the same effect.

Epiphenomenalism: To some, although not all, overdetermination is an unpalatable result of thinking about mental causation, and having specifically mental causes seems to let dualism get a foot in the door, for there is then a dualism of causes – mental and physical. An alternative option for reconciling the apparent double sufficient cause for P* is to deny that the mental property has its own causal powers. In effect, this erases the higher level of specifically mental causes, thus leaving the uncontroversial physical-physical cause of P to P*, leaving M causally impotent, or epiphenomenal. By stipulating that the causal powers are working through the physical properties, there is no causal job for the mental properties to do.

Having set up the problem of mental causation, I will now turn to the ontological commitments that underpin the framework in which the problem of mental causation sits.

²⁹ See Papineau D. *Thinking About Consciousness*, Chapter 1

b) The ontological commitments which underpin the problem of mental causation

Questions that arise from thinking about mental causation: The tension inherent in Kim's diagrammatic formulation of mental causation leads to questions being asked like "Where is the causation really happening – at the lower level of neurons or the higher level of experiences?"³⁰ Such a question requires that there is a possibility of different properties at the mental and physical levels so that different causal powers can work through the different mental and physical properties.

The landscape of mental causation: The problem of mental causation requires separate properties at the mental and physical level, so that different causal powers can work through these different properties. If reduction or identity is assumed between property instances, then there is no room for different mental and physical causal powers to work through any differing mental and physical properties. This will be central to understanding Searle's answer to the problem of mental causation. I will now look at how Searle's view of different levels of description within Biological Naturalism compares to the differing levels implied by the problem of mental causation. I will also look at how Searle's view of experiences as brain states picked out by different terms, allows him to avoid the problem of mental causation.

c) How Searle's view deals with the problem of mental causation

In Searle's own words: I think it might be useful to first quote Searle at length as he works through the way he believes Biological Naturalism responds to the problem of mental causation. I will then explain the features in light of the issues I have previously discussed in this chapter.

'We cannot make sense of the idea of mental causation. There are four propositions that taken together are inconsistent.

1. The mind-body distinction: the mental and the physical form distinct realms
2. The causal closure of the physical: the physical realm is causally closed in the sense that nothing nonphysical can enter into it and act as a cause

³⁰ Note that this question includes an inherent clause against overdetermination thereby forcing the causation to be happening at either one or the other level.

3. The causal exclusion principle: where the physical causes are sufficient for an event, there cannot be any other types of causes of that event.
4. Causal efficacy of the mental: mental states really do function causally.

These four together are inconsistent...In general, as we have seen over and over, when you have one of these impossible philosophical problems it usually turns out that you were making a false assumption. I believe that is the case in the present instance. The mistake is expressed in proposition 1, the traditional mind-body distinction...this mistake arises from supposing that if there is a level of description of brain processes at which they contain real and irreducible sequences of conscious states, and there is another level of description of brain processes at which they are purely biological phenomena, and the states of consciousness are not ontologically reducible to the neurobiological phenomena, then these two levels must be separate existences...The way out of this dilemma is to remind ourselves...[that] the reality and irreducibility of consciousness do not imply that it is some separate type of entity or property "over and above" the brain system in which it is physically realized. The consciousness in the brain is not [a] separate entity or property; it is just *the state that the brain is in*³¹

A single causal event described at different levels: Searle's reliance on levels of description is really highlighted in his approach to mental causation. Rather than adopting the standard view of distinct mental and physical properties which each provide distinct causal powers, Searle's metaphysical picture is one of a single causal event, a causal sequence, which has at least two descriptions; neurological and experiential. It is important to be clear that for any causal event Searle does not consider there to be both mental and physical properties and mental and physical causes in play. As he puts it,

'there are not two independent phenomena, the conscious effort and the unconscious neuron firings. There is just the brain system, which has one level of description where neuron firings are occurring and another level of description, the level of the system, where the system is conscious and indeed consciously trying to raise its arm'³²

It is a standard belief that causal powers work through properties, such as a ball rolling because of its property of being round. Searle considers an experience to be a 'state that the brain is in'³³ which means that there is a single property in play for any possible causation to work through. Searle's view therefore involves just a single set of causal powers, a single

³¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* pp.145-146

³² Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.,147

³³ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.146

causal event, that can be described both experientially at a higher level of description, or neurologically at a lower level of description. This is the essence of his response to the problem of mental causation.

On Searle's view it makes no sense to ask which level the causation is really happening at: The problem of mental causation is about which level a particular instance of causation is really happening at. For example, is there causation at the mental level? If not, the mental becomes epiphenomenal. Is there causation at the mental *and* the physical level? If this is so, then we have a case of overdetermination. Is there *only* causation at the mental level? If so, then causal closure of the physical is violated. However, such questions cannot be applied to Searle's view of a single property with corresponding causal powers and different descriptions. This is because the question would have to be translated as "at which level of description is the causal power really happening?" and it seems unmotivated to say that the causation has to be at one level of description or another. Any concrete happening in reality has an infinite possible number of descriptions, so if someone wants to know which level the causation is *really* happening at, they must first give a reason why it should only be thought to be properly described at one level of description. Let me reiterate that Searle's picture is one of a single causal event with different levels of description, not different levels of events, so it does not really make sense to ask which description is the one where the causation really happens.³⁴ I am now in a position to explain why the problem of mental causation does not apply to the approach to properties and causes presented in Biological Naturalism.

Biological Naturalism deals with the problem of epiphenomenalism at its core: Searle is allowing for causal powers at the higher experiential level, but believes that descriptions of these causal powers are simply re-describing the causal powers of the brain state, which can also be equally described at the neuronal level. To be clear, it is not that there are separate causal powers which happen to be the same in scope at the mental and the physical levels, it's that there is just one set of causal powers, differently described. Epiphenomenalism is a situation where the higher level mental properties do not have any causal powers; they are rendered powerless because the causation is thought to really be happening at the lower, physical level. First, as I have already set out above, there is only one token property (with different descriptions) in Searle's view of experiences and the brain, so there are not even

³⁴ Searle's view, as I have construed it assumes some kind of identity between mental and physical. I will address this more fully in chapter 6 when I consider whether Searle should be seen as an identity theorist.

separate mental properties capable of having (or not having) any causal powers of their own. In this way it is not the case that Searle posits mental properties but denies they have any causal consequences, he does not even get as far as separate mental properties. Second, for Searle, the mental or experiential description does not describe something powerless as such, in the way that epiphenomenalism suggests. The lack of causal power for mental properties comes from the causation really happening at the lower level. I showed above how that question cannot apply within the framework of properties and causal powers that Searle holds. Therefore, I think Biological Naturalism deals with the problem of epiphenomenalism before it even gets going because the causal powers that work through the brain state property are equally captured at the experiential or the neuronal level. The mental is therefore not left causally impotent; it has just as many causal powers as the neuronal level, in the sense that the two levels of description are describing the single, same causal sequence. Any claim that in Searle's view the mental is rendered epiphenomenal should acknowledge that this also means the neuronal is just as epiphenomenal.

Worries about overdetermination do not apply to Biological Naturalism: In a similar way, concerns about overdetermination cannot apply to the picture of properties and causal powers put forth in Biological Naturalism. As overdetermination in relation to mental causation is the situation where a particular effect has, simultaneously, both a physical and a distinct mental sufficient cause, this again cannot apply to Searle because he posits only a single property and single corresponding causal sequence. There is a duality of descriptions but not a duality of causes, so there simply cannot be any concern about overdetermination. As Searle puts it,

'The relation of consciousness to brain processes is like the relation of the solidity of the piston to the molecular behaviour of the metal alloys, or the liquidity of a body of water to the molecular behaviour of the H₂O molecules, or the explosion in the car cylinder to the oxidization of the individual hydrocarbon molecules. In every case the higher-level causes, at the level of the entire system, are not something in addition to the causes at the microlevel of the components of the system. Rather, the causes at the level of the entire system are entirely accounted for, entirely causally reducible to, the causation of the microelements. That is true of brain processes as it is of car engines, or of water circulating in washing machines. When I say that my conscious decision to raise my arm caused my arm to go up, I am not saying that some cause occurred *in addition* to the behaviour of the neurons when they fire and produce all sorts of other neurobiological consequences, rather I am simply describing the whole neurobiological system at the level of the

entire system and not at the level of particular microelements...there are not two independent descriptions of two independent sets of causes, but rather they are descriptions at two different levels of one complete system'³⁵

Concluding remarks about mental causation: In this section about mental causation I have looked at the issues surrounding points three and four on Searle's ontological wish list; that experiences are causally efficacious, but that experiences have no causal powers above and beyond those of their neuronal base. These two demands can seem initially contradictory, for surely to cause things to happen, what is usually considered to be a mental property needs to have its own causal powers? However, I have shown in this section how Searle's ontological approach and extensional method for individuating properties means that the concerns surrounding mental causation, the threat of epiphenomenalism and the issue of overdetermination, are rebutted by Biological Naturalism at the most fundamental level. I will now turn to the final pair of features on Searle's ontological wish list; that experiences are both caused *by* and realised *in* the brain and will again show how despite first appearances, these are compatible beliefs.

6. Searle's claim that experiences are caused by and realised in the brain

Searle claims that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain;

'Consciousness is a biological phenomenon like any other. It consists of inner qualitative subjective states of perceiving, feeling and thinking. Its essential feature is unified, qualitative subjectivity. Conscious states are caused by neurobiological processes in the brain, and they are realised in the structure of the brain. To say this is analogous to saying that digestive processes are caused by chemical processes in the stomach and the rest of the digestive tract, and that these processes are realised in the stomach and the digestive tract.'³⁶

To many of Searle's readers his joint claims of causation and realisation regarding experiences seem, at least on the face of it, to be mutually exclusive. Causation is usually considered to involve two distinct entities related in sequence over time, whereas realisation is a form of instantiation relation where a particular token instantiates a type at a certain time. This

³⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* pp.146-147

³⁶ Searle J. *Consciousness* p.14

means that realisation rules out the kind of entity distinction that causation requires, hence why it might seem odd to claim, as Searle does, that ‘mental features are caused by, and realised in neurophysiological phenomena’.³⁷

In this section I will show that Searle does not use causation in the standard way but in a wider sense to include what he refers to as ‘non-event causation’.³⁸ This wider sense of causation does not conflict with his claim of realisation because it does not involve the same distinct entities required for the standard meaning of causation. I will begin by looking at what Searle actually means when he claims there is a relation of causation between experiences and the brain, followed by a review of what he means by realised, which I believe to be a fairly standard construal of the notion. In the final section I will draw the two previous sections together to show that Searle’s caused-by and realised-in claims are compatible.

a) Searle’s use of “cause”

Causation as discrete existences ordered sequentially: Causation between two events is usually seen as requiring ‘at a minimum that the two be distinct events.’³⁹ Hume’s investigations into causation reveal such an assumption when he says that;

‘After the constant conjunction of two objects, heat and flame, for instance, weight and solidity, we are determined by custom alone to expect the one from the appearance of the other’⁴⁰

Such a view of causation should allow for the cause and the effect to exist separately. For example, if a particular causal event is a hammer breaking a window, it is possible to imagine a hammer without any windows, and a broken window that has never been touched by a hammer. This applies to tokens of events as well as types; you could have had either without the other. Thus with this construal of causation, the cause and the effect are distinct entities, sequenced over time. This is the uncontroversial meaning of a causal relation.

Simultaneous causation: When Searle refers to experiences being “caused” by neurological happenings in the brain, he is referring not to the standard format of causation but a type of simultaneous causation, where cause and effect happen at the same time. As he puts it,

³⁷ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.93

³⁸ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* p.7

³⁹ Kenyon T. “Searle Rediscovered What Was Not Lost” p.123

⁴⁰ Hume D. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Section V, part 1, p.43

‘The causal order of nature is often not a matter of discrete events sequential in time, but of microphenomena causally explaining macrofeatures of systems’⁴¹

This is very different to the one-after-another setup of standard causation where effects follow after causes. For Searle though, such simultaneous causation is commonplace in the world around us. Take the example of a cat curled up in some long grass – there is an indentation in the grass caused by the cat’s body flattening the blades. It does not only appear once the cat has stood up again, but is in fact present as the cat is sitting on the grass. The indentation and the cat sitting in the grass are happening at the same time, but few would deny that the cat sitting in the grass is the cause of the indentation. Searle expresses it thus:

‘In lots of cases of causation the cause is simultaneous with the effect. Look at the objects around you and notice that they are exerting pressure on the floor of the room you are in.’⁴²

Examples of simultaneous causation might be the strong intermolecular bonds between molecules of a substance simultaneously causing its feature of solidity, or the arrangement of molecules in such a way as to let light easily travel through causing a material’s transparency.

Searle denies some of the assumptions inherent in the standard use of “causal”: Searle uses “cause” in a wider sense than merely the one-after-another sequencing of distinct existences. He tries to use the relation of causation to explain the relation between a brain state neuronally described and that same brain state psychologically or experientially described. Given the ontological framework within which he positions his theory of Biological Naturalism, which I outlined in the section above, the standard use of causation would be an odd thing for Searle to use. This is because the standard use of causation involves discrete existences, and Searle is best interpreted as believing in a single brain state property with different descriptions, rather than different mental and physical properties. This does not mesh well with a causal claim between neuronal activity and mental experiences based on the standard construal of causation, because for Searle these are not the distinct existences required by standard causation. Searle seems to acknowledge that his view of causation might be different from what people normally expect with a causal relation, for he refers to a specific

⁴¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.86

⁴² Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.86

sort of 'non-event causation'⁴³ and tries to justify his approach by claiming that it is not unprecedented;

'There are many examples in nature where a higher level feature of a system is caused by lower level elements of that system, even though the feature is a feature of the system made up of those elements. Think of the liquidity of water or the transparency of glass or the solidity of a table, for example.'⁴⁴

Searle should acknowledge that he is not accepting the assumptions that most people require for causation, and that his use of "causal" to describe the relation between a brain state described at a lower neuronal level and a brain state described at a higher experiential level, is not the standard construal.

Summarising Searle's position: To be clear, when Searle says that experiences are caused by the brain, he does not mean that there is a brain state which causes a separate entity that is an experience, as the standard view of causation would imply. What Searle means is a more simultaneous style of causation, where an experience is a state the brain can be in at a certain time;

'If brain processes cause consciousness, then it seems to many people that there must be two different things, brain processes as causes and conscious states as effects, and this seems to imply dualism. This...derives in part from a flawed conception of causation. In our official theories of causation we typically suppose that all causal relations must be between discrete events ordered sequentially in time. For example, the shooting caused the death of the victim. Certainly, many cause-and-effect relations are like that, but by no means all. Look around you at the objects in your vicinity and think of the causal explanation of the fact that the table exerts pressure on the rug. This is explained by the force of gravity, but gravity is not an event. Or think of the solidity of the table. It is explained causally by the behaviour of the molecules of which the table is composed. But the solidity of the table is not an extra event; it is just a feature of the table. Such examples of non-event causation give us appropriate models for understanding the relation between my present state of consciousness and the underlying neurobiological processes that cause it. Lower-level processes in the brain cause my present state of consciousness, but that state is not a separate entity from my brain; rather it is just a feature of my brain at the present time.'⁴⁵

⁴³ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* p.7

⁴⁴ Searle J. *The Problem of Consciousness*

⁴⁵ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* pp.7-8

A legitimate question might be what philosophical work Searle's inclusion of a causal relation, as well as realisation, is doing. Searle's simultaneous style of causation could be seen as very similar to standard realisation, which I will explore in the next subsection. Having tried to make sense of Searle's claim that experiences are caused by the brain, number five in his ontological wish-list, I will turn to number six, that experiences are realised in the brain.

b) Searle's use of "realised"

In Searle's own words:

'Conscious states are realized in the brain as features of the brain system, and thus exist at a level higher than that of neurons and synapses.'⁴⁶

'My brain processes both cause and realize my present pain in exactly the same way that the molecular behaviour of the molecules of an object both cause and realize its solidity'⁴⁷

'Consciousness and other sorts of mental phenomena are caused by neurobiological processes in the brain, and they are realized in the structure of the brain'⁴⁸

Realisation as a form of instantiation relationship: Realisation is a kind of instantiation relationship; it is an instantiation *of* a type *by* a token. For example, the type "pain" can be instantiated, or realised, in my token c-fibre stimulation. Realisation is more like an overlapping relation where a token is said to be a certain type, rather than of two separate existences ordered sequentially. Where with causation it is possible to imagine the cause and effect separately, with realisation it is not possible to do this in the same way. This is because, if A, a higher level feature, is realised by B, a lower level feature, then whenever B occurs, A is *always* instantiated by metaphysical necessity.

Relating realisation to Searle's view of levels of description: A realisation claim regarding experiences and brain states can be thought of as a particular token brain state, instantiating two different "types". In other words, one and the same brain state instances the types "neuronal activity" and "pain experience". This mirrors Searle's view regarding levels of description which I set out above, namely that a particular token state, happening or occurrence in my brain has two non-equivalent descriptions, a lower level neuronal

⁴⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.79

⁴⁷ Searle J. "Mental Causation, Conscious and Unconscious: A Reply to Antonie Meijers" p.172

⁴⁸ Searle J. *Consciousness* p.11

description and a higher level experiential description. In this way, I think Searle uses realisation in a fairly uncontroversial way.

Having established that Searle uses realisation in a standard way I will now try to reconcile it with his non-standard use of causation, thereby dissolving any feeling of tension between the two claims.

c) Experiences are caused *by* and realised *in* the brain?

In Searle's own words: Let me start by recapping what Searle says in his own words,

'Many causal forces are continuous through time. Gravity, for example. The causal explanation of why this table exerts pressure on the floor is the force of gravity, but gravity does not consist of a sequence of discrete events. And lots of causal relations are bottom up and simultaneous with the effect. For example, the causal explanation of why this table supports objects is in terms of the behavior of the microparticles, but the causal explanation of why the table supports objects is not given by first specifying one event, the molecular movements, and then a later event, the support of the object. Rather the two are simultaneous. Similarly the causal explanation of why my brain is in its present state of consciousness is in terms of, let us suppose, massive rates of synchronized neuron firings at synapses. But this does not require that, first, the brain behave in a certain way and then, later, consciousness exists, rather the conscious states are realized simultaneously with the neuron firings.'⁴⁹

Caused by and realised in seem to be contradictory claims: The original problem with these joint claims is that when both terms are used in the standard way, they seem contradictory, because causation requires distinct entities sequenced through time, but realisation is about the overlapping of types and tokens for a single entity at any one given time. Nevertheless, Searle is clear that regarding experiences, he believes;

'The surface feature is both *caused by* the behaviour of micro-elements, and at the same time is *realised in* the system that is made up of the micro elements'⁵⁰

Reconciling Searle's causal and realisation claims: The solution to resolving the tension between the causal and realisation claims lies in understanding Searle's non-standard formation of causation. Because Searle purports a form of token identity, he ends up positing a single brain property which has, among others, mental and neuronal levels of description.

⁴⁹ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* pp.14-15

⁵⁰ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.21

This bars him from using causation in the standard way if he wants to claim that experiences are caused by the brain, because that would require experiences to be a separate entity distinct from the brain, rather than a mere description of a brain state because experiences cannot be caused by the same brain feature which realises them. Searle therefore widens the notion of causation when he claims that experiences are caused by the brain, to mean a simultaneous dependency relation which is not sequenced over time, but instead one where cause and effect are concurrent. Although Searle tries to persuade his reader that there are many examples of this sort of “causation” in the natural world, such as gravity holding objects to the floor, he should really openly admit that when he claims experiences are caused by the brain he does not mean what most people mean by “caused”.

Searle’s causation as tantamount to realisation: There are times when Searle even comes close to admitting that his notion of causation is tantamount to realisation:

‘Similarly the causal explanation of why my brain is in its present state of consciousness is in terms of, let us suppose, massive rates of synchronized neuron firings at synapses. But this does not require that, first, the brain behave in a certain way and then, later, consciousness exists, rather the conscious states are realized simultaneously with the neuron firings.’⁵¹

In other words, Searle’s claim that experiences are “caused by” brain states could be seen as a claim of realisation, and the statement that ‘mental features are caused by, and realised in neurophysiological phenomena’⁵² would become a tautology tantamount to “mental features are realised in and realised in neurophysiological phenomena”. I believe this to be the source of confusion and why many of his critics find it difficult to make sense of his claim that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain, and if Searle’s notion of causation is seen in the light of realisation, the apparent tension in Searle’s position can be resolved.

I will now consolidate all the previous areas I have discussed to make sense of Searle’s claim that experiences are what he calls causally reducible.

⁵¹ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* pp.14-15

⁵² Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.93

7. Causal reduction

a) How Searle describes causal reduction

In Searle's own words: I am now in a position to consider what Searle means by his claim that experiences are causally reducible to neuronal processes going on in the brain. I believe that a clear understanding of causal reduction can be achieved by drawing on all the sections discussed in this chapter; levels of description, the way you choose to individuate properties, Searle's response to the problem of mental causation and his particular meaning of simultaneous style causation. First, however, I will present what Searle says about causal reduction, in his own words:

'A relation between any two types of things that can have causal powers, where the existence and a fortiori the causal powers of the reduced entity are shown to be entirely explainable in terms of the causal powers of the reducing phenomenon'⁵³

'We can say that phenomena of type A are *causally reducible* to phenomena of type B, if and only if the behaviour of A's is entirely causally explained by the behaviour of B's, and A's have no causal powers in addition to the powers of B's'⁵⁴

'Causally speaking, there is nothing there, except the neurobiology, which has a higher level feature of consciousness. In a similar way there is nothing in the car engine except molecules, which have such higher level features as the solidity of the cylinder block, the shape of the piston, the firing of the spark plug, etc.'⁵⁵

b) Explaining Searle's claim that experiences are causally reducible

I think that Searle's claim that experiences are causally reducible to neurological processes in the brain, is best interpreted as the claim that there are no causal powers of an experience that are over and above the causal powers of the brain state that the experience-based description picks out. This means that for any causal event there are different levels of description, two of which are the mental and physical descriptions in our case. However, this does not mean that there are two properties through which different causal powers can work – there remains just a single set of powers working through the single brain state.

Let me try to be very clear here; although Searle says that there are no causal powers over and above those of the neuronal base, he does not mean, despite how it might sound, that

⁵³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.114

⁵⁴ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.83

⁵⁵ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.60

the causation really happens at the lower level. Instead, he means that there is only one causal event going on, differently described. In other words,

Searle does *not* mean “experiences have no causal powers above and beyond those of **where the real causation happens, i.e. at the physical level**”

Searle *does* mean “experiences have no causal powers above and beyond those of **the brain state which has an equally valid physical description**”

Inherent in Searle’s claim is a certain directionality of causation – the experiential has no causal powers above the neurological goings on in the brain – not the other way around. In the next section I will explain this directionality of causal reduction.

c) Explaining the directionality of causal reduction

Highlighting the directionality of Searle’s causal reduction: When Searle expresses his idea of causal reduction, it is always in a way that is directional from experiences to neurological brain processes. Therefore, the following question might arise:

Why not say that the physical has no causal powers above and beyond the mental level? Why is there an in-built directionality in causal reduction?

Neuroscience has provided familiar and uncontroversial explanations at the neuronal level: Searle always likes to start by trying ‘to describe the facts.’⁵⁶ We already know from our empirical investigations into neuroscience that the neuronal activity in our brains can cause other neuronal activity (and onwards along the causal chain through to different physical effects in other parts of our bodies). I think this is one reason why Searle phrases his denial of multiple sets of causal powers as “experiences have no causal powers beyond those of the neuronal base” rather than “the neuronal activity in our brain has no causal powers beyond those of the experience”.

Directionality due to the difference between higher-level and lower-level descriptions: Another reason for the directionality of causal reduction is that if you accept Searle’s point about consciousness being a system-level feature, and the neurons being the more basic building blocks of the system, then there is an obvious sense in which conscious experiences arise out of the lower level base. Realisation just is a directional relationship.

⁵⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.87

The possibility of neuronal processes having causal powers that experiences do not: Another reason it is experiences that reduce to neuronal processes and not the other way around is because nothing rules out neurons having other causal powers, as well as the ones describable at the level of experiences. The claim is that the mental has no causal powers that the physical doesn't also have, which is different to the other way round. In a Venn diagram, the circle of causal powers for the physical is (potentially) bigger than the one for experiences, which resides fully inside the physical one, not the other way around.

Summarising causal reduction: Searle's notion of causal reduction is a product of his belief that brain states have different levels of descriptions – neuronal and experiential. The single brain state property, as opposed to separate mental and physical properties, relates to a single causal sequence, again, differently described at different levels. Causal reduction amounts to the claim that the experiential description of the brain state and the neuronal level description of the brain state will both reference the same set of causal powers. In this way Searle's claim that experiences causally reduce to neuronal processes amounts to the claim that there is one set of causal powers, differently described.

I will conclude this chapter by revisiting Searle's ontological wish list which I set out at the start of the chapter. I hope to show that although it might have first seemed to include numerous contradictions or claims which are mutually exclusive, given my interpretation of Searle, they become not only compatible, but supportive of each other.

8. Conclusion

Dissolving the tensions: I will now revisit the wish list of Searle's ontological view, and show how the different features are no longer incompatible in light of my discussion of Searle's notions in the previous sections.

Searle wants an ontological picture which incorporates the following ideas:

1. A view where there are always different levels of description for any particular item or event
2. Experiences are just a state the brain can be in
3. Experiences are causally efficacious
4. Experiences do not have any causal powers above and beyond those of their neuronal base
5. Experiences are caused by lower level neuronal processes
6. Experiences are realised in the brain as a higher level system feature

Summarising Searle's whole approach: I will recapitulate Searle's whole approach to levels of description, properties, mental causation and experiences to make his position clear. I would describe his approach like this:

There is a certain occurrence that happens in my brain. This token, particular happening falls under two different types at the same time –“being a particular configuration of neuronal activity” and “being a feeling of pain” for example. So the one brain state is both a specific pattern of neurological activity *and* a feeling or experience, hence the claim that experiences are just a state the brain can be in at a particular time. There are two descriptions, at different levels, which correspond to this picture – there is a neuronal description of the brain state, and an experiential or phenomenological description of the brain state. Because Searle supports an extensional criterion for individuating properties, namely the having of different causal powers, these two different descriptions of the brain state do not imply two different token properties, a mental property and a physical property because what counts as a property is not dependent on how we conceptualise or describe them. This results in a much simpler picture when the desire to ascribe causal efficacy to mental happenings is approached, for there is simply one property, with one set of causal powers in play, albeit differently described by non-equivalent descriptions. This means that the occurrence in my brain, which is both a pattern of neuronal activity and an experience, has causal powers, but there is only one set of causal powers in play, only one sequence of causal events. This means that there is no problem of overdetermination because there are not even two sets of causal powers to worry about, and there is no threat that experiences are epiphenomenal because the psychological description is just as valid a description of the causal sequence of events as the neuronal description.

Revisiting Searle's wish list of ontological features: To ensure that the position Searle is putting forward is completely clear, I will revisit Searle's wish list and interpret what each means in light of the issues I have explored in this chapter:

1. A view where there are always different levels of description for any particular item or event.
 - Any concrete happening in reality will have an infinite number of descriptions of it.
2. Experiences are just a state the brain can be in
 - For any token happening in my brain that occurs when I have an experience, it should be considered as both a pattern of neuronal activity *and* an experience.
3. Experiences are causally efficacious.
 - There is only one set of causal powers and they can be described at the experiential level in terms of my arm moving because it hurt, or at the neuronal level in terms of my muscles contracted because the c-fibres were activated.
4. Experiences do not have any causal powers above and beyond those of their neuronal base.
 - There is just one set of causal powers, with multiple descriptions, two of which are "neuronal" and "experiential" - it makes no sense to talk of multiple causal powers when there is just one causal sequence in play
5. Experiences are caused by lower level neuronal processes.
 - There is a dependency relation between experiences and the brain state that they pick out experientially; if the brain state occurs, that is sufficient for the subject to undergo an experience and for the experiential description to pick out the brain state.
6. Experiences are realised in the brain as a higher level system feature
 - My particular token brain state can come under different types – in fact it comes under both the type "pattern of neuronal activity" and "pain", the latter being the higher level system feature.

Dissolving any apparent contradiction in Searle's claims: In this chapter I hope to have shown how many of Searle's claims, despite seeming initially incompatible, are in fact able to be interpreted as different features of Searle's overall approach to levels of description and properties. I do not believe Searle's claims that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain are problematic, because when his particular form of causation is analysed in detail it basically amounts to realisation, and there is no tension between twice claiming that experiences are realised by the brain. Nor do I think that there is any tension in Searle's approach surrounding the problem of mental causation, which is dealt with before it can even become established, because Searle's acceptance of some form of token identity rules out two competing causal powers.

Alongside Searle's claim that experiences are causally reducible to neurological processes in the brain, he maintains that experiences are nonetheless ontologically irreducible. This dual claim of reducibility and irreducibility is a great barrier to making sense of Searle because it looks at first glance to be contradictory. In the next chapter I will look more closely at Searle's notion of ontological irreducibility. By comparing it to the ontological irreducibility of the property dualist I will be able to assess the claims made by some of Searle's critics that Biological Naturalism is a form of property dualism. I will conclude that because they mean different things when they use the term "irreducible", Searle is not making the same claims as a property dualist, and Biological Naturalism should therefore not be seen as a form of property dualism.

Chapter 5 –

Is Searle a property dualist?

1. Introduction

Searle's Biological Naturalism is often interpreted by others as a form of property dualism. I believe this is because Searle's claim that experiences are ontologically irreducible to brain processes, due to their first-person ontology, seems to mirror the irreducibility claims of the property dualist. I have split this chapter into two halves; the first will investigate whether Searle should be seen as a property dualist. I will first explore property dualism in section 2 and look at its main features. I think it is important to have a clear idea of what property dualism is if I am to assess whether it is the best interpretation of Biological Naturalism. I believe that the central thesis of property dualism should be considered to be an ontological separation and divide between mental and physical features of the world. I will look at the sorts of arguments which persuade property dualists that there is what Searle describes as a 'metaphysical gulf'¹ between subjective, mental phenomena and objective, physical phenomena. I will explore Kripke's argument against identity theory and Nagel's work on whether we can ever know what it is like to be a bat to reveal an anti-reductionist foundation of property dualism, and Jackson's knowledge argument for property dualism and Levine's explanatory gap, which aims to show that experiences cannot be explained in purely physical terms. All of these arguments fuel the property dualist's view of mental phenomena as over and above physical phenomena.

In section 3, I will motivate the view that Searle should be interpreted as a property dualist, so as to fairly assess the claim. I will look at both the views of his critics, and the way he expresses his own ideas, such as his claim that experiences have a first-person ontology, and the way his vocabulary choice sometimes suggests a fundamental separation between mental and physical features.

Given that mental properties are seen as something over and above the brain by property dualists, which renders them irreducible to those brain properties, in section 4 I will look at Searle's notion of reduction, and hence irreducibility. This will prepare the ground for section

¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.81

5, where I compare and contrast Searle's notion of irreducibility with that of the property dualist, concluding that they do not mean the same thing when they each use the terminology of "irreducible". I believe that whilst the property dualist is using "irreducible" in the standard sense of mental phenomena being over and above brain phenomena, Searle means his irreducibility claim in a merely "inapplicable" sense whereby reduction just cannot apply to experiences, because of the way he believes we define and use reduction. I believe that the drastic difference in meaning between Searle's "irreducible" and the property dualist's "irreducible" is sufficient to reject any reading of Searle as a property dualist.

In the second half of the chapter I will look at a tension which remains in Searle's position; his desire to downplay irreducibility to a merely inapplicable sort, yet maintain that experiences have a first-person ontology. In section 6 I will consider the consequences of Searle's trivial variety of irreducibility, and whether he can achieve his seeming desire to render experiences irreducible but not too irreducible. I look at Searle's denial of what he calls "conceptual dualism", a metaphysical framework in which he views mental and physical as mutually exclusive, and conclude that Searle's position regarding the triviality of irreducibility can only be reconciled with his claim that experiences have a first-person ontology if his underlying denial of conceptual dualism is also accepted. In section 7 I will look at the underlying substantive problem of trying to fit first-personal features into an otherwise third-personal objective world. I will look at the work of Howell and show how his subjective physicalism shows great semblance to Searle's Biological Naturalism. I will explore the importance of Howell's claim that certain brain states have to be instantiated in order to be fully grasped, try to show how this mirrors Searle's claim that experiences are a state the brain can be in, and conclude that the tension between first-personal experiences and third-personal brain states is diminished by understanding Howell's requirement for instantiation.

2. Property dualism

Before assessing whether Searle's Biological Naturalism should be best understood as a form of property dualism I think it is important to be clear about exactly what property dualism covers and what tenets you must hold in order to come under the umbrella of property dualist. I will first look at the central idea of property dualism; that conscious experience is fundamentally different from the brain in that experiences are over and above, or irreducible to, any physical feature of the brain. In order to tease out the reasons why property dualists view experiences as irreducible, I will look at Kripke's argument against identity theory and Nagel's work surrounding the inherent subjectivity of conscious experience. Having motivated

the property dualist's claim that experiences are irreducible, I will look at how this claim is tied up with being unable to explain experiences in purely physical terms by looking at Jackson's knowledge argument and briefly, Levine's explanatory gap. Overall, this section aims to set out the reasons behind a property dualist view, and highlight that the key feature of the position is seeing mental properties as metaphysically distinct from physical features. Once this characterisation of property dualism is in place, I can then turn to looking at whether Searle's claims mirror those of the property dualist, which I will do in the forthcoming sections.

a) Mental phenomena are over and above, or irreducible to, physical phenomena

Mental phenomena as fundamentally distinct from physical phenomena: Viewing mental and physical properties as fundamentally distinct and ontologically separate is not a new idea in philosophy of mind. Descartes, for example, drew a distinction between his essence, which he thought consisted solely in the fact that 'I am a thinking thing...I am a thinking, non-extended thing', and his body, which was 'merely an extended, non-thinking thing'.² This expresses the metaphysical divide inherent in property dualism between mental and physical, which echoes Descartes' non-extended and extended, soul and body. It is not always clear to me whether property dualists are persuaded by anti-reductionist arguments because they believe in a fundamental difference between mental and physical,³ or whether being persuaded by such anti-physicalist arguments leads them towards their property dualism. Either way, at the heart of property dualism is the belief that the mental is somehow something over and above the physical, that is to say, 'the dualist takes the mental and the physical realms to be ontologically separate'.⁴ Of course, given that I am referring to a dualism of properties, I should point out that the contention is that mental and physical properties are ontologically separate, but that they both are properties of physical existents. In other words,

'All concrete particulars in this world are physical, but certain complex structures and configurations of physical particles can, and sometimes do, exhibit properties that are not reducible to "lower-level" physical properties.'⁵

² Descartes, R. "Sixth Meditation" in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p.62

³ See Papineau's discussion about the Intuition of Distinctness in his *Thinking About Consciousness*. In particular, Chapter 6, pp.161-171

⁴ Foster J. *The Immaterial Self* p.202

⁵ Kim J. *Philosophy of Mind* p.212

An ontological divide between mental and physical: I believe that the irreducibility of mental properties to physical brain properties is the central linchpin claim of property dualism and is an expression of the idea that ‘a dualist, whether of the substance or property version, maintains that there are two distinct and unreducible categories of reality’.⁶ This is meant as a meaningful ontological claim that when we survey our ontology of the world, psychological, mental, experiential properties have to be included in their own right rather than reduced to physical features or played down, so as to perhaps be thought of as any other objective physical feature of the world. In effect, this is the claim that ‘experience is different in kind from any other physical feature’.⁷ I think the underlying intuition that the ontological irreducibility claim of the property dualist is trying to satisfy is that experiences are real phenomena in the world that should be accommodated in any theory of consciousness in their own right. Zimmerman phrases it thus; ‘the mental properties of a person are significantly independent of, or in some other way distinct from, the physical properties of persons’⁸ and I think that in the eyes of property dualists, such an idea entails a claim of the irreducibility of experiences to brain states.

Summary of property dualism: So a monistic position about what things exist is coupled with the view that some of the things that exist are experiences, and those experiences are so sufficiently different from all other features of the world as to be considered to be in their own fundamental ontological category. As Levine puts it, property dualism is ‘the doctrine that mental properties are non-physical’.⁹ In summary, property dualists hold irreducibility at the centre of their theory. As Chalmers put it, ‘there are properties of individuals in this world – the phenomenal properties – that are ontologically independent of physical properties’, that is to say, they are ‘fundamentally new features of the world’.¹⁰ This is based on the claim that mental properties are irreducible to physical properties in that they cannot be fully described by the physical properties and the mental properties are something over and above the physical properties.

Looking to anti-reductionist arguments to explain why property dualists believe experiences to be irreducible: I will now turn to the reasons why property dualists see mental properties as irreducible to physical brain properties. The standard anti-reductionist arguments in

⁶ Palmer D. E. “Searle on Consciousness: or How Not to be a Physicalist” p.165

⁷ Chalmers D. *The Conscious Mind*, p.124

⁸ Zimmerman D. *From Property Dualism to Substance Dualism* pp.1-2

⁹ Levine J. *Purple Haze* p.12

¹⁰ Chalmers D. *The Conscious Mind*, p.125

philosophy of mind can be used by the property dualist as reasons why experiences should be considered irreducible to brain states. I will first look at Kripke's argument against identity theory, and then Nagel's work on the inability of experiences to be captured in an objective, third-personal physical way.

b) Kripke's argument against identity theory

If true, identities are necessarily true: Kripke's argument against identifying experiences with neuronal activity is based on his ideas surrounding identity and rigid designators, which are designators which pick out the same thing and not anything else in all possible worlds, that is to say, they pick out the same item they pick out in the actual world, in all worlds where that item exists. Kripke argued that terms like 'water' are rigid designators, in that, 'in every possible world it designates the same object'.¹¹ He held that where an identity concerns rigid designators, if true, an identity claim is necessarily true because each term will pick out the same pair of items in every world, so if they are identical in this world they are bound to be identical in every world. However, a problem arises from the apparent contingency of certain identity statements, for example $\text{water}=\text{H}_2\text{O}$, where it certainly seems perfectly possible that the clear liquid stuff that falls from the sky and comes out the tap might have had a different molecular makeup. Another example is heat where it seems a contingent fact that the phenomenon we register as felt heat is the mean kinetic energy of molecular motion in the thing that is hot, yet the fact that heat is identical to the mean kinetic energy of molecular motion, that is "heat is the mean kinetic energy of molecular motion", has been empirically discovered to be true. The task becomes explaining away the apparent contingency in an identity relation which if true, must be necessarily true.

Needing to explain away the apparent contingency: For examples like $\text{water}=\text{H}_2\text{O}$, the apparent contingency can be explained because when it seems that $\text{water}=\text{H}_2\text{O}$ is a contingent relation, despite being necessary, it is because what we are actually imagining is something that has the same appearance as water and which does all the watery things water does, but is not actually water, given that it is not in fact H_2O . In other words, we cannot in fact imagine that water is not H_2O , given that it actually is. This explanation of the contingency rests on a difference between appearance and reality, so in the $\text{water}=\text{H}_2\text{O}$ case, the appearance of the actual clear liquid stuff that falls from the sky and comes out the tap can be separated from the reality of it being the molecular substance H_2O . However, the thrust of the argument against identity between experiences and brain processes comes from the claim that no such

¹¹ Kripke S. *Naming and Necessity* p.48

separation of appearance from reality can be made in the case of experiences. In other words, if the having of an experience is considered to be an appearance, there is no separate underlying reality beneath the feeling of hotness, for to appear to have an experience is simply to have an experience. There is no way that the experience can be disconnected from the appearance of the experience, or as Kripke puts it, 'in the case of mental phenomena there is no 'appearance' beyond the mental phenomenon itself'.¹²

The inability to explain away the apparent contingency of pain=c-fibres: Kripke's argument against identity theory comes then from demanding of the identity theorist an explanation of the apparent contingency of identifying experiences with brain states. Take the classic example in philosophy of mind of pain=c-fibre firing. It seems possible, so the argument goes, that there can be pain without c-fibres firing, for example, in animals with different physiological makeups. If pain=c-fibres firing is to remain an identity, the apparent contingency needs to be explained. If the same process that I discussed above for water=H₂O is applied to pain, it would be the claim that when it seems that pain is not identical to c-fibres firing, it is because what we are actually imagining is something that has the same appearance as pain, and does all the painful things pain does, but isn't actually pain, given that there are no c-fibres firing. However, this type of approach, Kripke argues, cannot work for pain because if something feels painful then it is a pain; if it appears to me that I am experiencing a pain, then I am experiencing a pain. In other words, there is no appearance/reality distinction for pain, so you cannot explain the apparent contingency by saying we are imagining the appearances without the corresponding underlying reality, because the appearance is the reality. The anti-identity argument proceeds by declaring that there is no explanation for the apparent contingency of a relation that the identity theorist claims is identity, and according to Kripke must therefore be necessary, and concluding that the claim of identity is not in fact necessary and is therefore false. Property dualists agree with the sentiment of Kripke, indeed, property dualism is in fact a plausible consequence of Kripke's anti-reductionist argument. This anti-reductionist argument is one reason why property dualists see experiences as irreducible to physical states of the brain.

I will now look at Thomas Nagel's work and how his ideas on the perspectival nature of the subjective character of experiences motivates property dualism.

¹² Kripke S. *Naming and Necessity* p.154

c) Nagel and the essential subjectivity of experiences

Every experience is essentially from a particular point of view: Nagel has written extensively on anti-reductionism,¹³ and in his seminal article “What is it like to be a bat?” Nagel sets out an argument against reduction of experiences to brain states. He finds the subjective, phenomenal character of experience captures the essence of what an experience is, saying ‘an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism – something it is like *for* the organism’.¹⁴ The purpose of the bat example in the article is to highlight how the subjective character of experience is not captured by any of the reductive physicalist theories of mind, because they do not take into account experience’s subjective nature in itself, instead trying to claim it is “nothing but” a different physical feature. Nagel sees accounting for the phenomenological features of experience as essential to any theory of mind and this is impossible for reductive theories because their aim, as Nagel sees it, is to generalise out from a particular individual’s experience to a generalised, in other words an objective, conception of what an experience is. Along the way Nagel sees the essentially perspectival nature of experiences being inevitably lost. As Nagel puts it; ‘every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view, and it seems inevitable that an objective, physical theory will abandon that point of view’.¹⁵

Studying a subjective experience objectively does not capture its essence: The problem that arises when we try to ascertain what it would be like to be a bat and perceive the world via sonar is that the bat is substantially different from our own make-up, and navigating by sonar is so different from our own senses that we could not comprehensively put ourselves in the point of view of the bat. Given that Nagel thinks that having a particular point of view is essential to what experiences are, the fact that physicalist theories strive for objective accounts of subjective phenomena means they are bound to fail, because, as Nagel asks, ‘what would be left of what it was like to be a bat if one removed the viewpoint of the bat?’.¹⁶

He puts the point like this:

‘If the facts of experience – facts about what it is like *for* the experiencing organism – are accessible only from one point of view, then it is a mystery how the true character of experiences could be revealed in the physical operation of that organism.’¹⁷

¹³ See Nagel’s article “What is it like to be a bat?” or his book *The View From Nowhere*

¹⁴ Nagel T. “What is it like to be a bat?” p.436

¹⁵ Nagel T. “What is it like to be a bat?” p.436

¹⁶ Nagel T. “What is it like to be a bat?” p.443

¹⁷ Nagel T. “What is it like to be a bat?” p.442

Physicalist approaches to the mind abstract out from a particular point of view: The argument against reduction then rests on Nagel's belief that experiences are essentially always from a particular point of view, and that reductive or physicalist approaches in philosophy of mind always try to abstract away from the individual and how the experience is for them, instead focusing on objectively identifiable brain states or processes. The point is that the physical account is designed to be understandable to any creature, even one with quite different experiences. So it seems impossible that the specifics of the experience to be explained could be captured. The argument then proceeds by claiming that firstly, any physicalist account of the mind will, almost by definition, exclude an essential characteristic of experiences – their perspectival subjectivity. Second, there is a related claim that if a physicalist account of the mind must comprehensively explain the essentially subjective, perspectival, first-personal features of experience, we simply have no concept of what that would even look like, or how it would work. Although Nagel does not see this part of his argument as an out and out denial of physicalism, he does believe that,

'Physicalism is a position we cannot understand because we do not at present have any conception of how it might be true'¹⁸

The focus on an irreducibly subjective character of experiences is something property dualists will agree with, along with Nagel's resistance against reductive theories of mind. In fact many dualists have been motivated specifically by Nagel's arguments. In this way, Nagel is another way to explain what motivates the property dualist in their belief that experiences are irreducible to physical properties, leaving them ontologically distinct.

Similarities between Searle and Nagel: There are a number of features of Nagel's work which mirror what Searle claims within Biological Naturalism. For example, Nagel's claim that every experience is essential from a particular point of view seems to echo Searle's claim that experiences have a first-person ontology in that they are essentially subjective and perspectival. Where Nagel claims that objective study of experiences cannot capture their subjective essence, Searle states his belief regarding experiences such as pain as, 'no description of the third-person, objective, physiological facts would convey the subjective, first-person character of the pain.'¹⁹ Whilst Nagel warns against abstracting out from the subjective point of view to study of consciousness objectively, Searle says,

¹⁸ Nagel T. "What is it like to be a bat?" p.446

¹⁹ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.117

‘For any conscious being, there is a what-it-is-like aspect to its existence. And this is left out of any objective account of consciousness because an objective account cannot explain the subjective character of consciousness.’²⁰

The interesting point is that many philosophers have used Nagel’s arguments as a reason to reject physicalism and embrace a form of dualism, and yet Searle makes all these similar claims to Nagel, whilst also wanting to *reject* dualism. I will explore whether he is entitled to this view in the second half of this chapter.

I will now turn to another facet of the property dualist’s position – the idea that mental properties cannot be comprehensively and completely explained in purely physical terms.

d) Mental properties cannot be explained in terms of physical properties

Experiences have a qualitative nature: It seems intuitively true to many people that the qualitative, experiential, phenomenal states we experience have a certain nature which precludes them from being captured in purely physical terms. As Jackson puts it,

‘I think that there are certain features of the bodily sensations especially, but also of certain perceptual experiences, which no amount of purely physical information includes. Tell me everything physical there is to tell about what is going on in a living brain, the kind of states, their functional role, their relation to what goes on at other times and in other brains, and so on and so forth, and be I as clever as can be in fitting it all together, you won't have told me about the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches, pangs of jealousy, or about the characteristic experience of tasting a lemon, smelling a rose, hearing a loud noise or seeing the sky.’²¹

Physicalists try to explain the qualitative nature in terms of something that can be physically captured: The physicalist agenda is to go against this intuition and try to explain mental properties in terms of physical features of the world, so as to unproblematically incorporate them into a physicalist ontology. Property dualism is a reaction against this and incorporates the belief that experiences and mental properties cannot be fully explained solely in terms of physical properties.

Jackson’s knowledge argument: Jackson’s thought experiment involving Mary the colour scientist²² helps to explain this point because Mary is supposedly in the position of knowing all

²⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.60

²¹ Jackson F. “Epiphenomenal Qualia” p.127

²² See Jackson, F. (1986) “What Mary Didn't Know” in *Journal of Philosophy*, 83: 291–295.

the physical facts of the world, but when she experiences seeing a red rose, she is supposed to learn something new, exclaiming that she *now* understands what it is like to see red. Jackson describes the situation thus,

‘Mary is confined to a black-and-white room, is educated through black-and-white books and through lectures relayed on black-and-white television. In this way she learns everything there is to know about the physical nature of the world. She knows all the physical facts about us and our environment, in a wide sense of ‘physical’ which includes everything in *completed* physics, chemistry, and neurophysiology, and all there is to know about the causal and relational facts consequence upon this...it seems, however, that Mary does not know all there is to know. For when she is let out of the black-and-white room or given a color television, she will learn what it is like to see something red, say. This is rightly described as *learning* – she will not say “ho, hum.” Hence, physicalism is false²³

From an epistemic lack to an ontological divide: This is known as Jackson’s knowledge argument because it works by apparently showing that Mary does not know all of the facts about the world because on her release into the world of colour she learns a new fact about what it is like to see red despite already having all the physical facts about the world. Her epistemic lack regarding experiential facts, despite knowing all the physical facts, is then taken by Jackson to be indicative of a metaphysical gap between physical properties and experiential properties. In other words, she learns about a new, non-physical property. The Mary scenario is trying to show that mental properties cannot be fully captured in physical terms, for if they could, so the argument goes, Mary would not have learned anything new on her release. The inference which follows is that physicalism is false.

The conclusion is that physicalism is false: A view prompted by Jackson’s Mary story is both anti-physicalist and anti-reductionist in that the physical facts are not a complete set of facts about the world, or Mary would not have learned something new. So, in summary, a premise of Mary’s situation is that the experiential facts about the world are not capturable in purely physical terms, evidenced by Mary’s surprise at seeing red on her release and her realisation that she had not understood what seeing red was like pre-release. This leads to the conclusion that physicalism must be false. Indeed, Jackson embraces a form of property dualism at the end of his article about Mary.²⁴

²³ Jackson F. “What Mary Didn’t Know” p.291

²⁴ Although interestingly he later rejected property dualism, instead embracing physicalism.

The explanatory gap as showing an inability to explain experiences in purely physical terms:

Levine's explanatory gap argument also highlights how there seems to be no intelligibility to how our mental states can be explained in terms of the physical happenings in our brain. Less problematic examples include the solidity of a table, which can be intelligibly explained, so the argument goes, in physical terms, by the structure of molecules and the strong bonds between them. Levine believes that regarding physical explanations, 'in the case of qualia, the subjective character of qualitative experience is left unexplained, and therefore we are left with an incomplete understanding of that experience'.²⁵ The demand for intelligibility as to how and why experiences occur when we undergo certain brain states is the explanatory gap in Levine's argument, along with the belief that at present we cannot bridge such a gap of explanation. An inability to capture the qualitative subjective aspects of experience in purely physical, structural or functional terms agrees with the ideas of property dualists, who claim that mental properties should be included in our ontology in their own right, because they are not fully capturable in any other terms. It is to this claim of property dualism, that mental and physical properties must be fundamentally metaphysically distinct, that I now turn.

I have surveyed property dualism and explored its central tenets including what I think is the most important feature of the irreducibility of experiences to brain states. I will now turn to the question of whether Searle's Biological Naturalism is best interpreted as a variety of property dualism. I will start in section 3 by motivating such an interpretation of Searle, looking at what his critics charge him with and how he incriminates himself towards such an interpretation in the way he expresses his ideas. I will then proceed in sections 4-6 to show why I believe this is not the best interpretation of Searle's Biological Naturalism.

3. Motivating the interpretation of Searle as a property dualist

Before assessing whether property dualism is the best interpretation of what Searle's Biological Naturalism amounts to, I have first explored what property dualism is, and its central claims of non-reductivism, viewing mental properties as ontologically distinct and separate from physical properties, that is, seeing mental properties as something over and above physical features of the world. Before assessing Biological Naturalism as a form of property dualism I will look at why the charge of property dualism might be brought against Searle. This will help me focus my assessment of the correct interpretation of Biological Naturalism.

²⁵ Levine J. "On Leaving Out What It's Like" p.130

a) Why Searle's critics claim he is a property dualist

Searle's irreducibility claim makes him seem like a property dualist: In chapter 2 I looked at a variety of criticisms of Searle including the charge that Biological Naturalism is simply a form of property dualism in disguise. Many of Searle's critics are adamant that the right interpretation for Biological Naturalism is one of property dualism. For example, Feser believes that 'Searle *is*, whether he realizes it or not, a property dualist'.²⁶ These criticisms are mostly based on Searle's claim that experiences are ontologically irreducible to brain states. For example, Kim says, in answering whether experiences are reducible to features of the brain,

'Searle's answer, like the property dualist's, is a forceful no. But it is precisely this negative answer that defines property dualism.'²⁷

Searle's irreducibility claim as implying an ontological separation of mental and physical properties: The reason that Searle's irreducibility claim leads to so many interpretations of Biological Naturalism as a form of property dualism is because of the central role that irreducibility plays in property dualism. I explored above how the irreducibility claim links all other aspects of property dualism together; the fundamentally separate natures of mental and physical properties, and therefore that experiences as mental features are something over and above physical features of the world, in particular brain states. Any claim of irreducibility of experiences to brain states will therefore automatically invite interpretations of property dualism, and the irreducibility of brain states is a constant theme throughout Searle's writing, such as when he claims that 'in the case of consciousness...we cannot make an ontological reduction'.²⁸

I will now look at how Searle expresses his ideas within Biological Naturalism, and how this might lead his readers to interpret him as being a property dualist.

b) Things Searle says that motivate an interpretation of property dualism

Searle seems to openly admit that he agrees with the property dualist: Searle is all too aware that 'many mainstream philosophers still believe that if one grants the existence and irreducibility of consciousness one is forced to accept some sort of dualistic ontology'.²⁹ Therefore, his insistence on the ontological irreducibility of experiences to brain states will

²⁶ Feser E. *Why Searle Is a Property Dualist*

²⁷ Kim J. "Mental Causation in Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.192

²⁸ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.116

²⁹ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* p.194

mean that Biological Naturalism will be automatically interpreted as a form of property dualism by some of his philosopher critics. However, this does not seem to stop Searle from stating his position in such a way as to sound uncannily like property dualism. For instance, Searle asks ‘what is property dualism other than the view that there are irreducible mental properties’?³⁰ He then goes on to confidently claim that ‘the property dualist and I are in agreement that consciousness is ontologically irreducible’.³¹

Searle often talks in a way that suggests he believes in the ontological divide between mental and physical properties: When talking about the impossibility of fully describing the world, including its subjective features, in purely third-person terms, Searle says,

‘No third-person description of a physical system will entail that it has conscious states because there are *two different phenomena*, the third-person behavioural, functional, neurobiological structures and the first-person conscious experience’³² [my emphasis added]

The use of the phrase “two different phenomena” immediately suggests some form of property dualism, echoing its core belief that mental and physical properties are ontologically distinct categories. This is further echoed in Searle’s discussions of neuron firings, where he says that ‘The neuron firings cause the feeling, but they are not the same thing as the feeling’,³³ again implying that mental and physical are distinct. This idea resurfaces in Searle’s discussion of the impossibility of reducing experiences to brain states, where he writes that ‘the music critic who writes, “All I could hear were wave motions”, has missed the point of the performance’,³⁴ suggesting that physical wave motions and auditory musical experiences are fundamentally different categories.

First-person ontology as parallel to the claims of the property dualist: The fundamental difference between mental and physical might furthermore be seen in Searle’s reference to an asymmetry between experiences and non-experiential phenomena;

‘There is an asymmetry. Where color is concerned we are willing (or at least some of us are willing) to carve off the conscious experiences, the color experiences with their first-person ontology,

³⁰ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, p.118

³¹ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.60

³² Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.71

³³ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* p.30

³⁴ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

to set them on one side, and then redefine the color words in third-person terms'³⁵

The fact that experiences have a distinctive “ontology” from brain states seems evident from Searle’s description of his notion of first-person ontology,

‘Consciousness has a first-person ontology. It exists only as experienced by a human or animal subject and in that sense it exists only from a first-person point of view’³⁶

The first-person ontology of Biological Naturalism, which Searle cites as the reason why experiences are irreducible, might seem to be a direct parallel to the irreducibility of experiences that the property dualist holds, based on the supposed essential subjectivity of experiences.

Throughout his writings on philosophy of mind, Searle seems to cover all the major tenets of property dualism – the inability to reduce experiences to brain states, the idea that mental properties are ontologically distinct from physical ones, and that a physical description of the world will leave out the ontologically non-physical mental properties. Given such strong support from Searle’s critics for a property dualistic interpretation of Searle’s position, I want to be very clear exactly what Searle means by reduction and irreducibility, so that I will be in a position to assess whether or not Searle is a property dualist. It is to this task that I now turn.

4. Searle’s notion of reduction and ontological irreducibility

a) Searle’s general idea of reduction

In Searle’s own words: I cannot start a discussion about Searle’s notion of ontological irreducibility without first being clear what he means by ontological reduction. Perhaps letting Searle put it in his own words is a good place to start. In *The Rediscovery of the Mind* Searle sets out what he sees as the process of reduction for perceivable features of the world such as heat and solidity, which he later uses as a parallel to explain why experiences are ontologically irreducible. For Searle, ontological reductions involve a “nothing but” claim and often follow on from causal reductions,

‘The basic intuition that underlies the concept of reductionism seems to be the idea that certain things might be shown to be *nothing but* certain other sorts of things’³⁷

³⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

³⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.94

‘Often, indeed typically, in the history of science we make an *ontological reduction* on the basis of a *causal reduction*. We say: solidity is nothing but a certain sort of molecular behaviour.’³⁸

When put into practice, Searle believes this to result in the following reductive process;

‘We discovered that a surface feature of a phenomenon was caused by the behaviour of the elements of an underlying microstructure...the point of the reduction was to carve off the surface features and redefine the original notion in terms of the causes that produce those surface features. Thus, where the surface feature is a subjective appearance, we redefine the original notion in such a way as to exclude the appearance from the definition.’³⁹

Using the example of heat he elaborates on his idea of ontological reduction;

‘Pretheoretically our notion of heat has something to do with perceived temperatures: Other things being equal, hot is what feels hot to us, cold is what feels cold. Similarly with colours: Red is what looks red to normal observers under normal conditions. But when we have a theory of what causes these and other phenomena, we discover that it is molecular movements causing sensation of heat and cold (as well as other phenomena such as movements of light meters). We then *redefine* heat and color in terms of the underlying causes of both the subjective experiences and the other surface phenomena. An in the redefinition we eliminate any reference to the subjective appearances and other surface effects of the underlying causes. “Real” heat is now defined in terms of the kinetic energy of the molecular movements, and the subjective feel of heat that we get when we touch a hot object is now treated as just a subjective appearance caused by heat, as an effect of heat. It is no longer part of real heat’⁴⁰

Ontological reduction as a process of redefinition: The process of ontological reduction for what Searle calls ‘perceivable’ features then is one of pre-theoretically defining phenomena as whatever the cause of our particular experiences were (what feels hot to us, what looks red etc.). This is what Searle means when he sees phenomena as defined pre-theoretically via their surface features.⁴¹ This is followed by empirical scientific discoveries which uncover an underlying causal reality which can explain the surface features. The reductive part of the ontological reduction is choosing to redefine what the phenomenon is in terms of the newly

³⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.112

³⁸ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.83

³⁹ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.119

⁴⁰ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.119

⁴¹ Whether subjective or objective – he allows for both, the importance is on it being a *surface* feature, i.e. appearance.

discovered underlying causal processes, which leaves the surface features, our experiences, mere effects of what is then to be considered the “real” phenomenon. The key then is that the redefinitions that Searle believes to be inherent in an ontological reduction ‘are achieved by way of carving off all the surface features of the phenomenon, whether subjective or objective, and treating them as effects of the real thing’.⁴² I will tabulate this process to make the different steps clear:

Searle’s process of ontological reduction of perceivable features:

	Heat	Red	
Pre-theoretic	Heat = something which feels hot	Red = something which looks red	The phenomenon is defined by the surface features and with reference to the effect it has on a subject
Scientific discoveries	Atomic theory, vibration of molecules etc.	Light reflectance, electro-magnetic spectrum etc.	We discover the underlying causes of the surface features
Redefinition	REAL heat = kinetic energy of molecular movements	REAL red = photon emissions of 600nm	Redefine the phenomenon to the underlying explanations; the phenomenon is now defined without any reference to any effect it has on a subject
Surface features then become mere effects	The <u>effect</u> of REAL heat= the feeling of hotness	The <u>effect</u> of REAL red = the visual experience of redness	The surface features become merely effects of the real phenomenon rather than part of the definition of the phenomenon

⁴² Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.120

The importance of how phenomena affect us as experiencers: I want to draw attention to the feature of Searle's reduction that pre-theoretically, he sees phenomena as defined in terms of how they affect us. Heat, for example is what seems hot to us and red is what looks red. After Searle's process of ontological reduction has been carried out, that same phenomenon is then defined in terms that are independent of how the phenomenon affects us – those become mere effects. This carves off the experiences of an experiencer from the definition of a particular phenomenon that has undergone Searle's form of ontological reduction. This will become important when I discuss below the way that experiences are ontologically irreducible because of Searle's belief that first-personal features cannot be captured in third-personal terms.

In summary: For Searle, reduction regarding perceivable features of the world is a “nothing but” relation; ‘A’s can be reduced to B’s, iff A’s are nothing but B’s’.⁴³ Scientific discoveries uncover an underlying causal reality which can explain all the higher level surface features. Pre theoretically those surface features were defined in terms of how that phenomenon affected us as subjects (e.g. causing hot feelings). Post-theoretically, if an ontological reduction is to be made, Searle believes that phenomenon becomes defined *as* the discovered underlying causal processes and the way it affects us as subjects becomes merely an effect of the phenomenon. Incidentally, Searle sees this reductive process as applying equally to what he calls ‘observer-independent’ features such as solidity. He describes solidity post-ontological reduction: ‘solidity is defined in terms of the vibratory movements of molecules in lattice structures, and objective, observer-independent features, such as impenetrability by other objects, are now seen as surface effects of the underlying reality’.⁴⁴

Having set out what Searle sees as the process of reduction for features of the world that can be perceived by us, I will now turn to why he claims that such an ontological reduction cannot be carried out for experiences.

b) Why Searle claims you cannot perform an ontological reduction of experiences

If reduction is a “nothing but” relation for Searle, then a claim of ontological irreducibility for conscious experiences is a denial that experiences are “nothing but” brain states or neuronal activity in the brain.

⁴³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.113

⁴⁴ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.120

Searle sees ontological reductions as dependent on our interests: The first part of the reductive process is the discovering of underlying causal features which can account for the surface level, higher-level appearances, by which the phenomenon was originally defined. This is Searle's process of causal reduction which I explored in chapter 4. For Searle, it seems that the decision about whether an ontological reduction can proceed from there is not always automatic. Searle acknowledges that 'often, indeed typically, in the history of science we make an *ontological reduction* on the basis of a *causal reduction*. We say: solidity is nothing but a certain sort of molecular behaviour.'⁴⁵ However, Searle holds the view that the acceptance of an ontological reduction or not depends on our interests and what we find useful. Generally, Searle reasons,

'To get a greater understanding and control of reality, we want to know how it works causally, and we want our concepts to fit nature at its causal joints. We simply redefine phenomena with surface features in terms of the underlying causes.'⁴⁶

The importance of reductions as carving off subjective experiences: So for many phenomena, and most scientific phenomena, it is the causal workings of it that interest us most and allow us to understand it most fully. Searle describes the process of ontological reduction as the desire to 'carve off the subjective experiences and exclude them from the definition of the real phenomena, which are now defined in terms of those features that interest us most'.⁴⁷ Searle's contention is that this is not the case for experiences. For Searle, pre-reduction, experiences are defined in terms of how it affects an experiencer, but the process of ontological reduction renders that experience of the experiencer as a mere effect of the phenomenon, newly defined in terms of underlying causal workings.

Searle thinks that with experiences it is the appearances that interest us: For non-experience ontological reductions, the process involves being able to 'distinguish between the subjective appearance on the one hand and the underlying physical reality on the other'⁴⁸ and finding that the underlying reality, as Searle refers to it, is most interesting to us because it is most useful for understanding the phenomenon. However, with experiences, Searle reasons,

⁴⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.83

⁴⁶ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.121

⁴⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.121

⁴⁸ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.121

‘we are reluctant to carve off the surface feature and redefine the notion in terms of the causes of the surface feature, because the point of the concept is to identify the surface features’⁴⁹

No appearance/reality distinction for experiences: By this I think he is referring to the way in which experiences *are* what we experience of them. I think Searle is echoing Kripke’s point that I detailed above, that there is no appearance/reality distinction for experiences; they cannot come apart because the appearance is the reality. In other words, if it appears to me that I am having an experience, a feeling of despair for example, then I am just having that feeling. I believe this is what Searle means when he says that ‘for the definition of “pain” we care more about how pains feel to us’.⁵⁰

Because Searle’s reduction is about carving off the surface features, it therefore cannot be applied to experiences: Searle’s argument for the irreducibility of experiences is that reduction cannot apply to experiences because it would carve off the very thing that we are interested in trying to understand better. Searle does not see experiences as unique in this regard;

‘There are lots of concepts where the surface features of the phenomena are more interesting than the microstructure. Consider mud or Beethoven’s Ninth symphony. Mud behaviour is molecular behaviour but that is not the interesting thing about mud, so few people are anxious to insist: “Mud can be reduced to molecular behaviour”, though they could if they really wanted to. Similarly with Beethoven. Performances of the Ninth can be reduced to wave motions in the air, but that is not what is interesting to us about the performance. The music critic who writes, “All I could hear were wave motions”, has missed the point of the performance.’⁵¹

In summary: The important factor is what most interests us, in terms of understanding any particular phenomenon most fully. For experiences, what we are trying to understand are the qualitative feely aspects that occur for the subject undergoing the experience. If the process of reduction, as Searle claims, is one of carving off these appearances, then doing an ontological reduction of experiences becomes self-defeating.

Having explored Searle’s ideas about the process of reduction and his thinking behind his ontological irreducibility of experiences claim, I am now in a position to assess whether Searle’s concept of irreducibility is the same as that of the property dualist. In the next

⁴⁹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

⁵⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.85

⁵¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

section I will show that they are not in fact the same and the difference in resulting positions justifies rejecting a property dualist interpretation of Searle.

5. Contrasting Searle's notion of ontological irreducibility with the irreducibility claim of the property dualist

Having set out what property dualism is and what motivates property dualists to adopt the position, I proceeded to show why it is understandable that some critics have interpreted Searle as a property dualist. However, Searle vehemently denies such an interpretation of Biological Naturalism, citing the ontological irreducibility of experiences to brain features as 'the crucial distinction between my view and property dualism'.⁵² Therefore, I will now compare and contrast the irreducibility claims of Searle and the property dualist. I will show how Searle's claim of ontological irreducibility is an inapplicable sort of irreducibility, rather than the metaphysically substantial variety held by the property dualist. Searle's take on irreducibility does not result in any ontological gap between 'mental' and 'physical', as the property dualists' version of irreducibility arguably does. Following this, in the next section, I will assess whether Searle is entitled to his restricted sense of irreducible whilst also claiming experiences have a first-person ontology, and are causally reducible to the neuronal processes going on in our brains. In effect, I will try to ascertain whether Searle manages to walk the very fine line between experiences being irreducible, but not too irreducible.

a) Ontological irreducibility as inapplicability

In Searle's own words: Searle is clear that for him, the ontological irreducibility of experiences is a 'trivial consequence of our definitional practices'.⁵³ Searle also expresses this downplaying of his irreducibility claim like this;

'Once you know all the facts about heat – facts about molecule movements, impact on sensory nerve endings, subjective feelings, etc.- the reduction of heat to molecule movements involves no new *fact* whatever. It is simply a trivial consequence of the redefinition'⁵⁴

Searle's view of the property dualist position: Searle believes the property dualist to be claiming, when they argue for the ontological irreducibility of experiences, that

'Because mental states are not reducible to neurobiological states, they are something *distinct from* and *over and above* neurobiological

⁵² Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.60

⁵³ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

⁵⁴ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.120

states. The irreducibility of the mental to the physical, of consciousness to neurobiology, is by itself sufficient proof of the distinctness of the mental, and proof that the mental is something over and above the neurobiological⁵⁵

The key difference between Searle's notion of irreducibility and that of the property dualist is that he denies the first sentence. That is to say, just because experiences are not reducible to neurological states, does not imply that they are distinct from and over and above those neurological states. I think this is the essence of Searle's triviality clause for irreducibility and is his way of restraining the ontological consequences of the irreducibility to avoid experiences being "over and above" neurological states, as he thinks the property dualist believes them to be.

Irreducibility as the inapplicability of the process of reduction: Remember that for Searle, experiences are what he calls ontologically irreducible because he believes the process of reduction simply cannot be applied to experiences. He sets out reduction as the practice of carving off appearances and redefining a phenomenon in terms of its underlying causal reality, as he puts it. However, because with experiences, it is the subjective appearances themselves which *are* the experiences, which are essential to them, and which interest us most, if you apply reduction to experiences you would be carving off the very thing you are trying to understand by focusing on experiences in the first place. In this way, Searle's construal of reduction means that experiences are unable to be reduced because it would be self-defeating; reduction simply cannot apply to experiences. As Searle puts it, the irreducibility of experiences,

'merely shows that in the way that we have decided to carry out reductions, consciousness, by definition, is excluded from a certain pattern of reduction. Consciousness fails to reduce not because of some mysterious feature, but simply because by definition it falls outside the pattern of reduction that we have chosen to use for pragmatic reasons'⁵⁶

Searle is very clear about this point. To highlight the way in which for him, the irreducibility of experiences to neuronal activity in the brain is merely a pragmatic point, he says,

'When I speak of the irreducibility of consciousness, I am speaking of its *irreducibility according to standard patterns of reduction*. No one can rule out a priori the possibility of a major intellectual revolution

⁵⁵ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.59

⁵⁶ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.123

that would give us a new – and at present unimaginable – conception of reduction, according to which consciousness would be reducible⁵⁷

b) Searle’s “inapplicable” meaning of irreducibility is not the same as the property dualist’s “over-and-above” meaning of irreducibility

Searle’s use of “irreducible” seems substantively different to the usual meaning of “over and above” physical features: Many of Searle’s critics find his inapplicability version of irreducibility confusing because they take any claim of irreducibility to mean a chasm between mental and physical features of the world such that they are so different from each other as to be not only reducible, one to another, but indicative of a fundamental difference in ontological category. In other words, the deep divide indicated by property dualists as the consequence of experiences being irreducible. Searle’s critics believe that any fundamental physical/mental divide is counteracted by Searle’s triviality claim, feeling that either a claim of irreducibility is a substantive claim *because* it separates off mental from physical, or it is merely a linguistic comment about how we use words. In other words, Searle’s critics are uncomfortable with his use of the term “irreducible” when it means simply that ‘the irreducibility of consciousness is relative only to our pragmatic notion of reducibility’.⁵⁸

The property dualist assumes, and Searle denies, that an irreducibility claim implies over-and-aboveness: I believe that whilst Searle is trying to make a substantive point about experiences, namely that they are essentially qualitative and first-personal, hence the first-person ontology claim, the label of “irreducible” is not indicative, for him, of an ontological division between mental and physical. Searle does not see the irreducibility of experiences as implying that they are “over and above” the physical features of the brain. For Searle, the step to an ontologically separated “mental” category for experiences, which the property dualist sees as inherent in a claim of irreducibility, is an extra commitment which he does not wish to make. In Searle’s eyes, experiences remain an ordinary biological feature of the brain, meaning that he does not concur with the property dualist’s feeling that the mental is distinctively separate from the physical. As Jacquette puts it, Searle ‘does not believe, as do most property dualists, that the irreducibility of the mind and the mental is due to the peculiar ontological nature of psychological properties.’⁵⁹ As I said at the start of this section, he is denying what he sees the property dualist as claiming, namely that ‘Because mental states are not reducible to

⁵⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.124

⁵⁸ Garrett B. “Non-Reductionism and John Searle’s *The Rediscovery of the Mind*” p.211

⁵⁹ Jacquette D. “Searle’s antireductionism” p.158

neurobiological states, they are something *distinct from* and *over and above* neurobiological states'.⁶⁰ Searle expresses this point quite clearly when he says that the dualist,

'ends up saying falsely that these are something apart from the ordinary physical world we all live in, that they are something over and above their physical substrate'⁶¹

And that,

'The dualist is trying to say, truly, that ontologically irreducible states of consciousness do exist, but he *ends up saying, falsely, that these are not ordinary parts of the physical world.*'⁶² [my emphasis added]

Is Searle entitled to use irreducibility in this way? I find it fairly clear that despite using the same terminology, the property dualist and Searle are not talking about the same thing when they refer to experiences being "irreducible" to neuronal activity in the brain. However, Searle's triviality claim refers merely to how, or whether, we can apply the process of reduction to a specific phenomenon, namely experiences. I believe that the difference between what the property dualist and Searle mean by irreducibility is sufficient to justify a rejection of the claim that Biological Naturalism is a form of property dualism.

That Searle believes reduction cannot apply to experiences is one thing. The reason it cannot apply is because of the essential features of experiences – their qualitative and perspectival nature – their first-person ontology. So the consequent question becomes whether Searle is entitled to downplay the significance of his irreducibility claim to being a mere consequence of our definitional practices, whilst holding that the reason reduction cannot apply is because of experiences' special type of ontology. In the second part of this chapter I will look more closely at whether Searle can legitimately maintain both beliefs at the same time.

⁶⁰ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.59

⁶¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

⁶² Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" pp.62-63

6. Irreducible but not too irreducible

First-person ontology suggests the property dualist's type of "irreducible": Having shown the difference between Searle's notion of irreducibility and the property dualist's version, I will now assess whether Searle is entitled to claim that experiences are "irreducible" given his other commitments from within Biological Naturalism. Searle claims that experiences have a first-person ontology. I explored what he meant by first-person ontology in chapter 3 and concluded that he was referring to the essential perspectivity and qualitative nature of experiences. This is, so far, in agreement with anti-reductionists and property dualists. The problem arises because such a view usually renders experiences irreducible in the substantive, over-and-above the physical sense, yet Searle's irreducibility as mere inapplicability seems to contradict this. In other words, in claiming that,

'it does not make any difference at all to our scientific world view that it should be irreducible. It does not force us to property dualism or anything of the sort. It is a trivial consequence of certain more general phenomena'⁶³

Searle is clearly trying to distance himself from the dualist's position, yet at the same time he professes that experiences have a first-person ontology, the very sort of thing that dualists rest their substantive irreducibility claim upon.

Searle is trying to achieve a position where experiences are irreducible but not *too* irreducible:

It seems to me that Searle is trying to walk the very fine line between an irreducibility claim that experience is irreducible, but not too irreducible. That is to say, irreducible enough to distance himself from reductive physicalists, hence the first-person ontology claim, yet not so irreducible as to tip over into dualism, hence his caveat about triviality. In this section I will look at Searle's ideas of conceptual dualism and a denial of an ontological difference between mental and physical features of the world. This will be in an attempt to reconcile his claim that experiences have a first-person ontology with his claim of trivial irreducibility. The aim is to ascertain whether Searle has, as he clearly believes himself to have done, carved out a space between experiences being reducible and dualistically irreducible in which to position Biological Naturalism.

⁶³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.116

a) First-person ontology and conceptual dualism

First-person ontology as the basis of irreducibility: Searle clearly links his belief that experiences have a first-person ontology to his claim that they are ontologically irreducible;

‘You can do a causal reduction of consciousness to its neuronal substrate, but that reduction does not lead to an ontological reduction because consciousness has a first-person ontology, and you lose the point of having the concept if you redefine it in third-person terms’⁶⁴

The fact that conscious experiences are essentially qualitative and perspectival, that is to say have what Searle is calling a first-person ontology, is the reason why he claims the process of reduction cannot apply to them. It must follow that it is the qualitative and perspectival nature of experiences that comprise their appearances, as opposed to the lower-level causal, neuronal processes going on in the brain, for it is the refusal to carve off the essential appearances and redefine experiences as the lower level brain features that means they are irreducible in Searle’s sense. The property dualist takes these essential features of experiences to imply that the “mental”, subjective aspect of experiences and the “physical”, neuronal aspect are ontologically separated, with the mental over and above any physical neuronal activity in the brain. Searle specifically denies this; he rejects that accepting the qualitative or perspectival nature of a particular phenomenon renders it non-physical. This is because of his denial of what he calls conceptual dualism.

Searle’s conceptual dualism: Searle describes conceptual dualism thus;

‘This view consists in taking the dualistic concepts very seriously, that is, it consists in the view that in some important sense “physical” implies “nonmental” and “mental” implies “nonphysical.”’⁶⁵

‘It is assumed that “mental” and “physical” name mutually exclusive ontological categories. If it is mental then it cannot be in that very respect physical. And if it is physical, then it cannot be in that very respect mental. Mental qua mental excludes physical qua physical’⁶⁶

For Searle the whole framework that the mind-body problem works within is plagued by what he sees as the tendency to pit mental against physical, where something that is deemed to be “mental” is thereby excluded from being classed as “physical”. This gets to the heart of Searle’s view of experiences, for although he sees them as essentially subjective and

⁶⁴ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.86

⁶⁵ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.26

⁶⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.76

qualitative, he denies that this means they are not fully incorporated into the “physical” world.

b) Rejecting “mental” and “physical” as fundamental ontological categories

The mind-body problem: Physicalism is a doctrine which sees the physical realm as the ultimate basis of reality. The mind-body problem arises because experiences seem to have features which are not included in a physical view of what exists in the world. The features that make conscious experiences puzzling are those very features which Searle sets out in his notion of first-person ontology, for example, the qualitative feel of experiences and the fact that they are tied to experiencing the world from an individual point of view. This is contrary to the usual view of physical items in reality which are considered equally accessible to any subject and in no way linked or dependent upon a particular point of view of the world. In other words, physical items are usually seen as objective and experiences as subjective, and therein lies the problem for incorporating experiences into a physicalistic world view because physicalists and dualists alike,

‘think that to grant the reality of irreducibility of consciousness and other mental phenomena commits one to some form of Cartesianism, and they do not see how such a view can be made consistent with our overall scientific world picture.’⁶⁷

Searle’s critics charge him with replacing one dichotomy with another: Searle’s rejection of the traditional divides between mental and physical is picked up by his critics as being replaced with a parallel first-person/third-person divide, as I detailed in chapter 2. The move Searle makes is that the philosophical tradition has developed so as to have defined mental as mutually exclusive with respect to physical, creating a dichotomy between mental and physical features which Searle thinks is fundamentally mistaken. Whilst the physicalist counts up to one in number of ontological categories, accepting only physical features, and the dualist counts up to two, allowing for mental as well as physical, Searle does not want to start counting at all, finding the question itself unhelpful. This is because, for Searle, the act of categorising types of features in the world is interest relative, meaning that you could group together “mental” features and “physical” features and divide them up into two groups if you wanted, but this would not reflect different fundamental, ontological categories;

⁶⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.2

‘There are not two (or five or seven) fundamental ontological categories, rather the act of categorization itself is always interest relative. For that reason the attempt to answer such questions as, ‘How many fundamental metaphysical categories are there?’, as it stands, is meaningless. We live in exactly one world and there are as many different ways of dividing it as you like. In addition to electromagnetism, consciousness, and gravitational attraction, there are declines in interest rates, points scored in football games, reasons for being suspicious of quantified modal logic, and election results in Florida. Now, quick, were the election results mental or physical? And how about the points scored in a football game? Do they exist only in the mind of the scorekeeper or are they rather ultimately electronic phenomena on the scoreboard? I think these are not interesting, or even meaningful, questions. We live in one world, and it has many different types of features.’⁶⁸

Corcoran sees Searle as a property monist: Corcoran picks up on this denial of a mental/physical dichotomy within Searle’s theory and sees it as stopping any possible interpretation of Searle as a property dualist. Indeed, Corcoran feels that if anything, Searle should, in light of this feature, be seen as a property monist;

‘What exonerates Searle from all charges of being a property dualist is not the claim that the categories of “mental” and “physical” sometimes overlap, for a property dualist might countenance not only mixed mental-physical phenomena but also features that do not land comfortably under either one or the other of these categories, e.g. features of the world such as points scored in football games, invitations to parties and denials of tenure. What exonerates Searle is the fact that for him there appear to be no non-physical properties i.e., the mental, although genuine and irreducible, is for all of that, a natural, physical phenomenon. So Searle’s biological naturalism is not a version of property dualism, on the plausible assumption that, at a minimum, a property dualist insists that some properties (i.e., mental properties) are distinct from physical properties. If, as Searle claims, mental properties are at some level of description physical, then Searle is, despite all his rhetoric to the contrary, a kind of property monist!’⁶⁹

Searle’s meaning of first-personal and third-personal: Searle does, however, maintain a difference between first-personal and third-personal, with experiences having this supposed first-person ontology. The key to understanding how this is not simply a replacement of the mental/physical divide, as his critics charge him with, is that Searle does not mean first-person and third-person as fundamental ontological categories in the way that he thinks both physicalists and dualists accept “mental” and “physical” as opposing categories. He sees this

⁶⁸ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” pp.59-60

⁶⁹ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” pp.311-312

as creating a conceptual space for him to claim that experiences are *both* qualitative and subjective *and* ordinary features of the world like any other, that is to say, 'consciousness is a feature of the brain and thus part of the physical world'.⁷⁰ He makes his point thus;

"Mental" is defined as qualitative, subjective, first-personal, and therefore immaterial. "Physical" is defined as quantitative, objective, third personal and therefore material...these definitions are inadequate to capture the fact that the world works in such a way that some biological processes are qualitative, subjective, and first-personal.⁷¹

Having looked at how and why "mental" and "physical" are considered fundamental ontological categories I will look at how Searle believes he undermines this standard view.

c) Undermining the mind-body problem by rejecting the metaphysical framework in which is it situated

Mental and physical as mutually exclusive: The tension highlighted at the end of chapter three is well described by Corcoran;

'Whereas Searle's discussion of "first-person ontology" and the "subjective ontology of consciousness" seems to be suggestive of dualism, his claims about consciousness being physical and therefore spatial is suggestive of materialistic monism'⁷²

Searle deals with this charge by denying the metaphysical framework inside which such a worry arises. Searle maintains that 'not all of reality is objective; some of it is subjective.'⁷³ In many places Searle asks us to start from the facts we know and base our conceptual framework and philosophical ideas on them. This means, for Searle, there is both an acceptance of qualitative, subjective experiences as real features in their own right *and* a broadly monistic ontology in which 'the universe is entirely made up of physical particles that exist in fields of force and are often organized into systems'.⁷⁴

Searle believes we should reject conceptual dualism because of the facts that we know: I think Searle sees many of the debates in philosophy of mind as trying to fit the facts around existing concepts and ontological commitments because he presents his ideas about rejecting conceptual dualism like this,

⁷⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.80

⁷¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.81

⁷² Corcoran K. "The Trouble with Searle's Biological Naturalism" p.316

⁷³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.19

⁷⁴ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.88

‘Given a choice between the facts as we know them—consciousness exists, it is caused by neuronal processes, it exists in the brain, and it has causal functions in the life of the organism—and various philosophical theories, I will take the facts any time.’⁷⁵

In other words, I think Searle sees the problems themselves as problematic because he rejects the ontological commitments on which they lie. He clearly states his belief that ‘is it not a condition of being a mental phenomenon that it be nonspatial, nonexplicable by microprocesses, and causally inert’⁷⁶ and that ‘there is no reason why a physical system such as a human or animal organism should not have states that are qualitative, subjective and intentional’.⁷⁷ Consequently, Searle sees the mind-body problem as solvable at source;

‘once you revise the traditional categories to fit the facts, there is no problem in recognizing that the mental qua mental is physical qua physical. You have to revise the traditional Cartesian definitions of both “mental” and “physical”, but those definitions were inadequate to the facts in any case’⁷⁸

‘it is better not to use that terminology at all and just say that consciousness is a biological feature of the brain in the same way that digestion is a biological feature of the digestive tract’⁷⁹

Strawson incorporates experiential features into the “physical”: Searle is not alone in believing that experiential features can be incorporated into a “physical” reality. For example, Strawson similarly believes,

‘The truth is that we have no good reason to think that we know *anything* about the physical that gives us *any* reason to find *any* problem in the idea that mental or experiential phenomena are physical phenomena.’⁸⁰

This all relates back to the triviality of irreducibility claim. In contrast to the doctrine of first-person ontology, which was trying to resist reductive physicalism, Searle’s triviality of irreducibility claim is trying to downplay the “irreducible” aspect of experiences, so that they are able to be incorporated into his broadly monistic world view. I take it that the reason why incorporating subjective phenomena into what is considered “physical” is normally resisted is because the features of conscious experiences, their qualitative, subjective nature, are seen as

⁷⁵ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.15

⁷⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.82

⁷⁷ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.82

⁷⁸ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* pp.82-83

⁷⁹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.81

⁸⁰ Strawson G. “Realistic Materialist Monism” p.24

so different to other features of most other phenomena, that they do appear to be fundamentally different. So different, in fact, as to warrant a division of ontological category. Given that this is precisely what Searle denies, Searle's rejection of the metaphysical framework in which the property dualist is working explains my rejection of a property dualist interpretation of Searle.⁸¹

I will now turn to another complaint from Searle's critics, that he uses examples of features which are ontologically reducible, such as solidity, to explain experiences, which are ontologically irreducible, according to Searle.

d) Using ontologically reducible examples to explain the ontological irreducibility of experiences

Searle's critics complain that he uses inadequate examples: Searle tries to show how experiences are not separated off from other features of the world by giving examples which he means to be parallels to the relationship between experiences and the brain. A favoured example by Searle is that of solidity as a higher-level feature being realised by a lower-level tightly bound structure of molecules. For example, he says;

'I mean that consciousness is a state the brain can be in, in the way that liquidity and solidity are states that water can be in.'⁸²

Searle's critics see his use of what they deem inappropriate examples as indicative of a confused theory. They believe that it is inadequate to use examples of higher level features which do ontologically reduce to their lower-level features to try and explain experiences which are supposed to be higher-level features which do *not* reduce to their lower level biological features. There is also a concern that Searle uses what are generally accepted as objective features of items, such as solidity, which are not restricted to particular points of view on the world, to try and explain experiences which Searle maintains have a first-person ontology and therefore an inherently subjective, rather than objective, nature. So to his critics, Searle's examples are simply not helpful for the explanatory work Searle is asking them to do.

Searle's examples do highlight experiences as higher-level system features: I believe that by comparing experiences to solidity, Searle is trying to stop conscious experiences from being too irreducible, too dualistic, and to present his belief that experiences are just like other

⁸¹ In section 7 below I will deal more fully with whether Searle has dealt with the actual differences in the natures of mental and physical items, in addition to how we classify them.

⁸² Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.61

biological features. To be fair to Searle, using solidity as an example to help understand consciousness and the brain does at least show a higher-level system feature which can also be picked out by its lower-level molecular makeup. This does mimic Searle's view of the relationship between the higher-level system level feature of consciousness and the lower-level neuronal activity going on in our brains.

How can a reducible phenomenon be explanatorily relevant to an irreducible one? However, the tension that Searle's critics feel comes from the combination of claiming that experiences are like solidity *and* that experiences have a first-person ontology, because solidity is ontologically reducible, according to Searle, yet first-person ontology is the very cause of the irreducibility of conscious experiences, so his critics wonder how one can help to explain the other. I think a related issue is that on the one hand solidity, because it is ontologically reducible to its lower-level "physical" molecular structure, is generally considered unproblematically a physical feature of the world whereas on the other hand, first-person ontology seems to be similar to the exclusively mental features of the world proposed by dualists. However, Searle clearly denies such a fundamental division between mental and physical, because he denies what he calls conceptual dualism and because his form of irreducibility is the technical, pragmatic variety which I detailed above in section 6a. To recap in Searle's own words;

'The property dualist and I are in agreement that consciousness is ontologically irreducible. The key points of disagreement are that I insist that from everything we know about the brain, consciousness is causally reducible to brain processes; and for that reason I deny that the ontological irreducibility of consciousness implies that consciousness is something 'over and above', something distinct from, its neurobiological base.⁸³

'The irreducibility of consciousness is a trivial consequence of the pragmatics of our definitional practices. A trivial result such as this has only trivial consequences. It has no deep metaphysical consequences for the unity of our overall scientific world view. It does not show that consciousness is not part of the ultimate furniture of reality or cannot be a subject of scientific investigation or cannot be brought into our overall physical conception of the universe.'⁸⁴

⁸³ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.60

⁸⁴ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.122

e) Resolving the tensions - can Searle have a position which is irreducible but not too irreducible?

Searle's position cannot be reconciled on the standard meaning of "irreducible": So how is the tension to be resolved? It seems that Searle's monistic instincts and desire to view experiences as nothing over and above the neuronal activity in the brain is incompatible with also claiming that experiences are ontologically irreducible because they have a first-person ontology. To some extent it has to be acknowledged that if each of these terms are taken as their standard meaning in philosophy, it seems there is no way to reconcile Searle's position. It just cannot be the case that experiences are both over and above brain states, as standard irreducibility would have it, and also nothing but brain states as Searle's causal reduction might imply. It also seems irreconcilable to claim that experiences have a first-person ontology, and are therefore limited to a particular individual's point of view on the world, yet are modelled by objective features of the world such as solidity.

Searle's trivial sense of irreducibility allays some of his critics' concerns: I have already tried to show how Searle's notion of irreducibility is not the standard dualistic notion and is not intended to result in experiences being anything ontologically over-and-above the neurological features of the brain. In Searle's sense, experiences are irreducible because what he sees as the usual pattern of reduction is simply inapplicable to experiences, because you cannot split off appearances from an underlying reality. This is because, Searle believes, if it appears to me that I am in pain, then I am in pain. So on Searle's account experiences are, or are realised by neuronal states in the brain, but are nevertheless irreducible in his inapplicable sense. Appreciating the difference between the irreducibility claim of the property dualist and that of Searle goes some way to resolving the first tension. Unfortunately, whilst alleviating the concern with the first tension, this seems to heighten the problems of the second tension. If Searle's merely trivial sense of irreducibility is not the more substantive sense of the property dualist, it seems even further away from his first-person ontology claim.

To resolve the tensions surrounding irreducibility and first-person ontology you must first accept Searle's denial of conceptual dualism: In one way, a solution can be reached, and these claims can make sense together, but only after accepting Searle's underlying premise of the rejection of what he calls conceptual dualism. With this, there is no tension between the triviality of irreducibility denying that 'consciousness does not exist in a separate realm'⁸⁵ and Searle's first-person ontology claim, for neither would be excluded from a "physical" view of

⁸⁵ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.62

the world. Such a position might be phrased as Searle puts it as denying the categories of mental and physical as they currently exist and therefore that ‘there is no metaphysical gulf’⁸⁶ between experiences and other biological features; that ‘there is no reason why a physical system such as a human or animal organism should not have states that are qualitative, subjective and intentional’.⁸⁷ Alternatively, it might be phrased as others have put it as broadening the scope of “physical” so as to include subjective features. However, in another way Searle could be seen to just be playing with words rather than dealing with the underlying metaphysical issue. Searle certainly *says* that experiences are simply the same as other biological features in our brain;

‘the whole terminology of mental and physical was designed to try and make an absolute opposition between the *mental* and the *physical*, so maybe it is better not to use that terminology at all and just say that consciousness is a biological feature of the brain in the same way that digestion is a biological feature of the digestive tract’⁸⁸

However, one might still ask whether, regardless of what words are used to describe them, Searle makes any headway with dealing with the seemingly distinctive features of the mental, such as their subjectivity, which he not only acknowledges but actually builds into his theory under the notion of first-person ontology. Unless he is able to answer, in what sense experiences are equally physical or biological, in the same manner as digestion, *despite* having their seemingly unique features of subjectivity and qualitative feel, Searle’s Biological Naturalism will remain unfulfilling to some readers. Therefore, I will turn to this question in the next section.

7. Has Searle dealt with the seemingly intractable problem of fitting together subjective experiences and objective brain states?

a) Has Searle actually answered the problem?

Has Searle tackled the substantive problem? There is a problem which seems to rear its head, despite Searle’s insistence that “mental” and “physical” are terms that are no longer useful in philosophy of mind. Whichever words you choose to categorise experiences and brain processes, the substantive problem still arises. Experiences seem to be essentially private

⁸⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.81

⁸⁷ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.82

⁸⁸ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.81

phenomena, subjective in that they are essentially tied to the first-person point of view of the subject undergoing them. There also seem to be all the other non-experiential phenomena, what you might call “physical” phenomena. These seem to be essentially objective and public in that they are not tied to any particular subject’s point of view. This seems to lead towards two different ontological categories, two different categories of being, and yet we know that experiences depend heavily on, and correlate with, the objective neuronal states in our brain. This problem can be translated into Searle’s terminology; experiences have a first-person ontology, in that they are qualitative and subjective, and yet experiences are causally reducible to the underlying neuronal processes in the brain.

Replacing subjective/objective with first-person/third-person: This intractable problem of reconciling an essentially subjective phenomenon, an experience, that so closely depends on an essentially objective phenomenon, a brain state, is referred to by Searle’s critics when they complain that he simply replaces the standard subjective/objective mind/body problem, and thus does not actually go any way to solving the mind-body problem at all. As Olafson describes it,

‘What [Searle] thus appears to be doing is reproducing all the inside/outside contrasts of traditional dualism quite literally inside our heads; and ‘brain dualism’ does seem the right name for such a paradoxical undertaking’⁸⁹

I think Howell’s theory of subjective physicalism can help to give an understanding as to why it is not mysterious that experiences depend upon on third-personal brain states given that they are essentially first-personal. So it is to Howell’s theory that I now turn.

b) Howell’s subjective physicalism

Howell denies a metaphysical divide between mental and physical: According to Howell in his theory of subjective physicalism, it is the very act of instantiation which explains what it means for an experience to be “first-personal” as well as linking first-personal experiences to third-personal brain states. Howell accepts that

‘We find it hard to reconcile the continuity of constitution that holds between us and the rest of the world with a surprising discontinuity introduced by the presence of consciousness’⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Olafson F. “Brain Dualism” p.259

⁹⁰ Howell R. *The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism* p.339

Considerations of this type usually end up with the metaphysical gulf between subjective mental features and objective physical features of the world. This is the kind of fundamental divide that is inherent in property dualism and its separation of mental and physical properties. Such a metaphysical division is strongly denied by Howell because he sees the difference between mental and physical features not as some fundamental metaphysical difference, but simply as the claim that ‘there are aspects of the world that one cannot fully understand without occupying particular subjective states’.⁹¹

First-personal is the need for a brain state to be instantiated in a subject: Howell phrases the difference between first-personal and third-personal in terms of the need to occupy certain brain states in order to fully grasp them. He denies that this renders experiences as metaphysically distinct from all other objective features of the world;

‘Minds are unique, however, in that the outside take is not the only one. This doesn’t mean that a new fundamental *type* of property appears from the inside’⁹²

Subjective and first-personal means requiring instantiation in a subject: Howell’s take on the link between first-personal and third-personal features seems to rest on the belief that ‘what is essential to experience [is] the point of view its subject occupies’.⁹³ If this is accepted, then it is not surprising that Howell believes that ‘subjective experience is not something that can be grasped, much less explained, from outside the machine’⁹⁴ and that “qualia” are somehow inextricably bound up with how they seem to a particular subject’.⁹⁵ The “bound up” phrasing refers to the acceptance that certain brain states require being instantiated by a subject in order for that particular subject to fully grasp them. Howell says, ‘states and properties are “subjective” in the sense that they cannot be fully grasped except by an agent that is undergoing them’.⁹⁶

The instantiation requirement does not make experiences non-physical: The crucial point here, in drawing both a distinction from the property dualist and a similarity to Searle is that the need to instantiate certain brain states in order to fully grasp them does not, according to Howell, mean that they are in any way non-physical;

⁹¹ Howell R. “Subjective Physicalism” p.131

⁹² Howell R. “Subjective Physicalism” p.130

⁹³ Burwood S., Gilbert P. & Lennon K. *Philosophy of Mind* p.139

⁹⁴ Howell R. *The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism* p.336

⁹⁵ Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.335

⁹⁶ Howell R. *The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism* p.320

‘One can learn about everything in the world through objective methods, but there will nevertheless be something more to be learned by occupying some of the states studied by those objective methods. Those states are physical, but they cannot be fully understood without undergoing them’⁹⁷

When Howell says that ‘It is the necessarily experiential nature of qualitative states that makes them intractable for an objective description of the world’,⁹⁸ this mirrors Searle’s claim that

‘a complete description of the third-person objective features of the brain would not be a description of its first-person subjective features.’⁹⁹

and

‘no description of the third-person, objective, physiological facts would convey the subjective, first-person character of the pain, simply because the first-person features are different from the third-person features’¹⁰⁰

In summary: Reminding ourselves that ‘to have an experience is to take up a certain point of view towards the world’¹⁰¹ diminishes the problem of fitting together first-personal experiences and the third-personal brain states upon which they depend. This is because the situation changes from being mysterious and unintelligible that first-personal subjective experiences arise from third-personal objective brain states to a situation whereby first-personal experiences arise by instantiating a particular third-personal brain state. Howell claims that certain brain states have to be instantiated in order to be fully grasped from the first-person point of view. Searle claims that experiences are just a state the brain can be in and their first-person ontology is what makes reduction inapplicable to them, that is, why they cannot be fully grasped by third-personal objective means alone. Just as Searle downplays his irreducibility claim to one of a trivial irreducibility, so Howell maintains that the requirement to instantiate certain brain states ‘does not show that they are not physical; it just shows that a complete grasp of them cannot be gained solely by objective theories’.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Howell R. *The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism* p.333

⁹⁸ Howell R. “Subjective Physicalism” p.131

⁹⁹ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” pp.60-61

¹⁰⁰ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.117

¹⁰¹ Burwood S., Gilbert P. & Lennon K. *Philosophy of Mind* p.140

¹⁰² Howell R. “Subjective Physicalism” p.128

I will now turn to the specific task of relating Howell's requirement that certain brain states need to be instantiated in order to be fully grasped, to aspects of Biological Naturalism.

c) Relating Howell's instantiation requirement to Searle

The need to match up the weight of an irreducibility claim with the weight of any claim about experiences: It seems to me that Searle has two options; either he accepts that the ontological irreducibility of experiences is a substantive metaphysical doctrine which results in the sort of mental/physical divide that we see in property dualism, or he demystifies the special nature of first-person ontology to fit with the downgraded trivial/inapplicable sense of irreducibility. I believe that Searle in effect takes the second option, and that Howell's insistence that certain brain states need to be instantiated in order to fully grasp them can help in explaining Searle's position.

Searle says many times that experiences exist only as experienced by a subject;

'Consciousness has a first-person ontology; that is, it only exists as experienced by some human or animal, and therefore, it cannot be reduced to something that has a third-person ontology, something that exists independently of experiences. It is as simple as that.'¹⁰³

Linking Searle's claims that experiences exist only as experienced to the need to instantiate certain brain states: The meaning of this phrase is not immediately obvious for it could be said analogously that gusts of wind only exist when they are gusting, and what is special about that? I think that Howell's insistence that some brain states need to be instantiated by a subject in order to be fully grasped is a way of understanding the ideas behind Searle's claim of first-person ontology in a demystified way. I have interpreted Searle's claim of first-person ontology as the idea that experiences are both essentially qualitative and linked to a particular subject's point of view on the world. Such claims can seem to be so different in kind from anything that is said of objective physical properties of the world that it pushes experiences out into their own ontological category, away from, and over and above physical properties, as happens in property dualism. Supposing the essentially first-person claim was to be understood as Howell's requirement for instantiation in a subject, let me review the quote from Searle above. It would amount to the claim that conscious experiences exist as experienced, in as much as certain brain states must be instantiated in a subject in order for an experience to occur. Objective, third-personal phenomena are ones which are not tied to a particular subject's point of view on the world, and which are equally accessible to any other

¹⁰³ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.60

subject “from the outside”, so to speak. It is not that experiences are bluntly tied to a first-person point of view, on this interpretation there is more explanation to be given; they are tied to the first-person point of view on the world, because certain brain states, those which occur when a subject has an experience, need to be instantiated by a subject in order for them to be fully grasped, to be grasped *experientially*.

Demystifying first-person ontology and irreducibility: The requirement of instantiation interpretation of Searle dissolves the metaphysical mysteriousness of first-person ontology because needing a brain state to be undergone in a subject’s brain does not mean that any separate mental realm is entered. As Searle says,

‘There are not two different metaphysical realms in your skull, one “physical” and one “mental.” Rather, there are just processes going on in your brain and some of them are conscious experiences.’¹⁰⁴

This matches Searle’s notion of inapplicable irreducibility because given the required-instantiation interpretation of Searle’s claim that experiences exist “as experienced” it plainly follows that phenomena whose nature require them to be instantiated by a subject in order to be fully grasped by that particular subject, cannot be reduced, that is, said to be nothing but, phenomena which are independent of any particular point of view on the world. This could be seen as the reason why Searle claims ‘it is as simple as that’, because on this interpretation, both the irreducibility and the first-person ontology have been demystified to match each other’s status. The end situation is one where property dualism proposes a weighty form of irreducibility because of a view of experiences with radically different properties than physical objects, but Searle can be seen to hold an inapplicable sense of irreducibility based on the requirement that certain brain states must be instantiated by a subject in order to be fully grasped, rather than because of any mysteriously unusual features of experiences themselves.¹⁰⁵

I will now turn to an outstanding question; why it is that some states of our brains are experiences when we instantiate them, and others are not.

¹⁰⁴ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.89

¹⁰⁵ Of course, such a view does rest on the brute assumption that certain brain states just are experiential, in that they do just require instantiating by a subject, which I discussed above.

d) But why is it that some brain states are experiential and others are not?

Why are certain brain states experiential when instantiated? A question that Howell's position might generate is *why* it is that certain brain states, those which occur in the brains of subjects when they undergo and experience, need to be instantiated by a subject in order to be fully grasped? That is, why they have a first-personal aspect. This "why" question can apply equally to all theories of mind; why is it that certain brain states feel a certain way for the subject, from their own point of view, when instantiated in their brains, and other ones feel no particular way whatsoever? Howell is clear and honest on his response to such a question:

'Subjective physicalism does not put the mind body problem to rest, nor does it explain the subjective. It would be nice, for example, to have a full explanation as to why certain physical states have aspects that reveal themselves when those states are occupied. Subjective physicalism is not alone in its silence on this issue.'¹⁰⁶

Response options: It seems to me that the options open when dealing with the question of why some brain states are experiential when undergone by a subject, and others are not, are

- 1) Deny that experiences are essentially tied to a first-personal point of view of the world
- 2) Accept some form of panpsychism so that the experiential aspect is present "all the way down", thus dispelling the mystery of how it suddenly appears at the higher level of conscious experience
- 3) Bluntly assert that some brain states just are subjective

Howell clearly opts for the third option of blunt assertion;

'According to subjective physicalism it is simply a fact that there is something that it is like to instantiate certain physical states. Instantiating those states is sufficient for there being conscious experience – something that objective sciences cannot fully capture'¹⁰⁷

Searle also opts for a blunt assertion: I think a strong case can be made for claiming that Searle also opts for a simple blunt assertion that some brain states just are experiential, in that when they are instantiated in the brain of a subject, that subject undergoes an experience. Not only does Searle claim, similar to Howell that;

'No description of the third-person, objective, physiological facts would convey the subjective, first-person character of the pain,

¹⁰⁶ Howell R. *The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism* p.339

¹⁰⁷ Howell R. "Subjective Physicalism" p.132

simply because the first-person features are different from the third-person features¹⁰⁸

He also talks about the facts that we know about experiences, and consciousness just following from the constitution of reality;

‘The facts are that biological processes produce conscious mental phenomena, and these are irreducibly subjective’¹⁰⁹

‘Given the constitution of reality, consciousness has to follow in the same way that any other biological property, such as mitosis, meiosis, photosynthesis, digestion, lactation, or the secretion of bile, follows.’¹¹⁰

e) How does this mean Searle deals with the problem of fitting first-personal into third-personal?

A fine balance between reductionism and dualism: Some responses to this problem try to downgrade subjective experiences as “nothing but” other physical features of the brain, such that they become unproblematically physical and the same as other brain states. Such reductive approaches are well established in philosophy of mind, prompting Dupré to warn against the ‘tyranny of the microphysical’.¹¹¹ Howell and Searle both want to reach the same end-point as the reductionist, namely that experiences are encompassed in the ordinary physical world along with all other physical things. As Howell says, ‘It seems implausible that in this world of physical things our minds are the sole things that cannot be accounted for by physical laws, properties, and states of affairs’.¹¹² However, Howell and Searle both want to keep the subjectivity of experiences in their own right, rather than rendering them “nothing but” different physical properties, whilst not sliding into property dualism. Howell does this through his talk of subjectivity being the need to instantiate certain physical brain states in order to fully grasp them. Searle does this through his insistence that experiences have a first-person ontology whilst also being causally reducible to brain states, that is, the subjective aspect of an experience is just one way to refer to a particular brain state going on in the brain of a subject. Howell puts the point like this; “Subjective” properties are called physical because they are necessitated by the physical¹¹³ and

¹⁰⁸ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.117

¹⁰⁹ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.98

¹¹⁰ Searle J *Dualism Revisited* p.22

¹¹¹ Dupré J. “Against Reductionist Explanations of Human Behaviour” p.169

¹¹² Howell R. “Subjective Physicalism” p.135

¹¹³ Howell R. “Subjective Physicalism” p.133

‘Subjective physicalism maintains, whereas property dualism denies, that these qualitative states are completely metaphysically grounded in physical states’¹¹⁴

Searle similarly claims that;

‘The mind and the body interact, but they are not two different things, since mental phenomena just are features of the brain’¹¹⁵

‘There is no reason why a physical system such as a human or animal organism should not have states that are qualitative, subjective and intentional’¹¹⁶

The mutually exclusive natures of first-personal and third-personal:

The way in which Howell, and I believe also Searle, deal with the problem of fitting first-person subjective phenomena into an otherwise third-person objective world is by claiming that an experience just *is* a subject undergoing a certain brain state, coupled with the blunt assertion that some



brain states just are subjective when instantiated. So, by the very nature of what it means to be first personal, even if you watch the brain activity of someone on an fMRI scan, if it's not your brain that it's happening to right then and there you will be missing the first-personal aspects of the brain state, because you won't be undergoing the particular brain state in your own brain. This is a picture taken from an fMRI scan I had. It might be very informative in many ways, but no outside, objective information will be able to capture what I was experiencing as I underwent the scan.

¹¹⁴ Howell R. "Subjective Physicalism" p.133

¹¹⁵ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.26

¹¹⁶ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.82

8. Conclusion

This chapter has been sectioned into two halves. The first half dealt with whether Searle's Biological Naturalism is, as some of his critics suggest, a form of property dualism. I started this by looking at what property dualism is and finding that its central belief is the irreducibility of mental properties to physical properties, that is, mental properties being ontologically separated from physical properties. I explored the motivations for property dualism and showed how arguments provided by philosophers such as Kripke and Nagel have fed the property dualists' intuitions about the ontological distinctness of specifically mental properties. This was important to do because many similar beliefs are held by Searle, such as the perspectivalness of experiences and the primacy of appearances as their deep reality. The interesting fact is that observing these features does not lead Searle to dualism as they do with other dualists.

Having established the foundation of property dualism, in section 3 I looked at why Searle's Biological Naturalism might be interpreted as a form of property dualism, showing how his notion of first-person ontology and irreducibility seem to mirror the way that the property dualist expresses their view of experiences. Before assessing whether the interpretation of Searle as a property dualist was a legitimate one, in section 4 I set out Searle's view on reduction as a process of carving off appearances of a particular phenomenon from its underlying causal reality and redefining that phenomenon as those lower-level features. This means that Searle requires a distinction between the higher-level appearance and lower-level underlying causal processes in order for a reduction to apply.

Searle does, like the property dualist, claim that experiences are irreducible, but in section 5 I showed how he does not mean it in the standard sense which renders mental properties as ontologically separated from physical properties. Searle's sense of irreducible is merely an inapplicable sense in which reduction cannot apply to experiences, because he denies that their appearances can be separated from any underlying reality; if it appears to me that I am feeling a sense of despair, then I am definitely feeling a sense of despair – the feeling cannot be mistaken. In other words, Searle's notion of first-person ontology of experiences means that they cannot undergo a reduction in the way that Searle believes us to standardly use the process. I believe this difference in meaning of "irreducibility" is decisive in rejecting any interpretation of Searle as a property dualist.

The second half of the chapter looked at a tension within Searle's position; on the one hand Searle downplays the metaphysical importance of irreducibility, and uses examples of

reducible features like solidity to try to explain the relationship between consciousness and the brain. On the other hand he maintains that experiences have a first-person ontology and are essentially subjective. It is as if he is trying to make experiences irreducible enough to distance himself from reductive physicalism whilst at the same time making experiences not too reducible, thereby distancing himself, in the other direction, from property dualists.

In section 6 I explored the issues surrounding this tension and found that one must accept Searle's denial of conceptual dualism if the remainder of his theory is to be coherent. In section 7 I looked at the substantive problem which remains, even with a denial of conceptual dualism; the seeming inability to reconcile first-personal phenomena being entirely dependent upon third-person phenomena. I looked at the work of Howell whose subjective physicalism bears strong resemblance to Searle's Biological Naturalism. I highlighted how they both attempt to keep the subjectivity of experiences without reducing it to being "nothing but" a different physical feature. I concluded that "subjective" is taken by them to mean inextricably tied up with the first-person point of view of a subject and that, consequently, certain brain states must be instantiated in order to be fully grasped.

The fact that with this view experiences are in some sense simply token brain states undergone by a subject, the question might be raised as to how similar the position is to an identity theory of mind. It is this question that I explore in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 –

Is Searle an identity theorist?

1. Introduction

I will start this chapter by looking at what mind-brain identity theory is, and its central tenets of the mental and physical descriptions as co-referring to a single brain state and experiences being “nothing but” physical brain states, which masks a reductive privileging of the physical over the mental. I will then look at what motivates an interpretation of Searle as an identity theorist by considering both what his critics accuse him of and the way he expresses the different aspects of his theory of Biological Naturalism.

Traditional mind-brain identity theory assumes that a claim of identity is made in conjunction with a reduction of the mental to the physical, but I will show that it is possible to split apart a claim of identity from a claim of reduction and show that these are two separate steps to be taken, and they can be accepted or rejected individually. Real identity, I argue, is identity without any additional reduction of mental to physical. Once this is established, and the desire to reduce mental to physical is put in question, I will move on to showing why I think Biological Naturalism should be seen as a form of what I will call real identity theory, which is identity theory without any additional privileging of the physical over the mental. To do this I will first point out the differences between the features of Biological Naturalism and traditional reductive mind-brain identity theory. I will then look at why Searle insists that reality is not wholly objective, which points away from a reduction of mental to physical. Searle’s notion of different levels of description of a single system will then be explored, and I will show how Searle’s approach to these different descriptions backs the non-privileging aspect of real identity theory, using Howell’s theory of Subjective Physicalism as support. I will conclude that whilst Searle is clearly not a traditional mind-brain identity theorist, in other words a reductive physicalist, he should be interpreted as a non-reductive identity theorist, as I have defined it.

2. Identity theory

Mind-brain identity theory is an approach to the mind-body problem which resists any hint of dualism by identifying the mind with the brain. That is to say, identity theory views experiences as identical to brain states, considering pains, for example, to just *be* certain configurations of activity in our brains. In this section I will set out what I believe to be the two main principles of identity theory. Firstly, that identifying experiences with brain states is to say that two descriptions which seem separate, the experiential description of conscious states and the neurological description of conscious states, are actually referring to, and picking out, the same single brain state. Secondly, that experiences are considered to be “nothing but” brain states, which masks an inherent reductive privileging of the physical over the experiential within identity theory.

a) Identity as two descriptions co-referring

Two names or descriptions, but one referent: Identity is mostly considered to be a metaphysical relation concerning a thing and itself; something is always identical to itself; the process we use when we identify two things which we originally thought to be separate, but then realise are one and the same is a process of saying how two names or descriptions actually pick out the one same item in the world. For example, the morning star is identical to the evening star because they are both in fact Venus, and when we identify them, we come to realise that ‘the morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ are both referring to the same feature of the world – the planet Venus. As Levine puts it, ‘when A is identical to B, then in fact there is only one property, referred to in two different ways – “A” and “B”’.¹ Using the example of a rainbow, it is not that there are rainbows *and* there are various refractions of light through water particles in the atmosphere, the process of identity shows that there is only one feature in the world, which can be picked out via the description “rainbow” or equally the description “various refractions of light through water particles in the atmosphere”. As Place described it, identity theorists used identity to mean, ‘a relation between two different names or descriptions such that they both refer to the same individual’ such as ‘Bill Lycan is the American philosopher Ullin Place met for the first time in Sydney in 1983’².

Picking out the same feature in the world: In other words, the two states or features which were originally thought to be separate, are said to be one once identified, but there remains two names or descriptions, it is just that these are accepted, post identity, to co-refer and in

¹ Levine J. *The Purple Haze* p.14

² Place U.T. *Identity Theories*

fact pick out the same feature in the world. Kripke later showed that if the two terms which co-refer pick out the same thing in all possible worlds, that is, they are both rigid designators, then the identity statement is necessary. This is because a rigid designator picks out the same individual in all possible worlds, which makes the identity between two such terms necessarily true in other words because the identity holds in all possible worlds.

Smart worked before Kripke, but also described this process of two terms c-referring:

‘Note that there are not two things: a flash of lightning and an electrical discharge. There is one thing, a flash of lightning, which is described scientifically as an electrical discharge to the earth from a cloud of ionized water-molecules.’³

This is what I consider to be the first main feature of mind-brain identity theory. It is the pure identity part of the theory, showing that where we thought we had two separate features of the world, we in fact have just one feature and two terms referring to it. I will now turn to what I consider to be the second feature of identity theory – an inherent reductionism and privileging of the physical over the mental.

b) The “nothing but” claim and reductive privileging

The extra claim of reduction included in identity: It might be thought that once I had explored the identity part of identity theory, as I did in the section above, I would have covered what identity theory means. However, I think that identity theory has another main feature which is most often accepted without question or not even overtly realised to be a separate feature of identity theory at all. This is the privileging of the physical over the mental. To see how it is so often included as part and parcel of identity theory, I will quote the full passage from Smart, part of which I used above in section a). I used the first part of this quote to explicate the idea of identity within identity theory. Quoted in full, it reveals how a form of reductionism is tagged onto the identity, thereby privileging the physical over the mental;

‘Note that there are not two things: a flash of lightning and an electrical discharge. There is one thing, a flash of lightning, which is described scientifically as an electrical discharge to the earth from a cloud of ionized water-molecules...*We say that what lightning really is, what its true nature as revealed by science is, is an electric discharge.*’⁴ [my emphasis added]

³ Smart J. J. C. “Sensations and Brain Processes” p.146

⁴ Smart J. J. C. “Sensations and Brain Processes” pp.146-147

The “nothing but” claim as a resistance against any hint of dualism: This is the basis of the “nothing but” phrasing so often associated with identity theory, generally along the lines of “experiences are nothing but neurological activity in the brain” or even “the mind is nothing but the brain”. I believe this tendency to include a reduction of mental to physical can be traced back to the origins of identity theory; when it was first proposed. In the late 1950s and 1960s,⁵ mind-brain identity theory was a reaction against the prevailing behaviouristic theories of the time which equated conscious experiences with outwardly identifiable behaviours. Believing that ‘organisms are able to be seen as physic-chemical mechanisms’,⁶ Smart seemed to think that admitting of *any* irreducibly mental, or as he might phrase it, psychic aspect, is akin to some form of dualism. Therefore, identity theorists, like Smart, specifically wanted to avoid any hint of dualism in their theory. For example, Smart was very keen to show that the phrase “I am in pain” does not refer to ‘an irreducibly psychical something’.⁷ Indeed, Smart claims that the point of his article “Sensations and Brain Processes” is ‘to show that there are no philosophical arguments which compel us to be dualists’.⁸ His solution for avoiding the plight of dualism, as he saw it, was to identify the particular neuronal states activating in our brains, and the corresponding experiences that occur for the subject whose brain it is, which seem to be distinct. Or as Lewis stated it, ‘every experience is identical with some physical state, specifically, with some neurochemical state’.⁹

An in-built reductive privileging of the physical over the mental: However, the identification of experiences with properties of the brain usually includes an in-built privileging of the physical over the mental. With early identity theorists, like Smart, this can be seen in the way mental descriptions are claimed to be topic-neutral, that is not saying anything at all about the experiential or mental nature of their referents, and hence when they co-refer with physical descriptions, the result is to physicalise the referent of the mental description. Smart was particularly keen to avoid any idea that experience involves ‘an irreducibly psychical something’.¹⁰ Place counted the fact that identity theory is ‘effective in eliminating mental events and mental processes as a separate class of events’¹¹ as a strength of the theory. Identity theory includes a covert reduction of mental to physical and corresponding privileging

⁵ For examples of the identity theorists, see J.J.C. Smart (1959), U.T. Place (1956), Armstrong (1968) and Lewis (1966)

⁶ Smart J. J. C. “Sensations and Brain Processes” p.142

⁷ Smart J. J. C. “Sensations and Brain Processes” p.142

⁸ Smart J. J. C. “Sensations and Brain Processes” p.143

⁹ Lewis D. “An Argument for Identity Theory” p.17

¹⁰ Smart J. J. C. “Sensations and Brain Processes” p.142

¹¹ Place U.T. *Identity Theories*

of physical over the mental, which I will refer to as a reductive privileging. Identity theorists are claiming that the essence of the mental is actually something physical; what is most important about our experiences, what is the key to making them what they are, is that they are in fact physical states. Smart expresses the reductive privileging that I think has become inextricably entwined with identity theory when he says that, the identity between experiences and brain states shows an experience's 'true nature as revealed by science'.¹²

Reductive privileging is in addition to a claim of identity: I should be clear that the reductive privileging of identity theory is, I believe, in addition to a pure claim of identity. Mind-brain identity theory is not ambiguous in its claims; it is the idea that the mind is "nothing but" the brain. This reflects the way that mind-brain identity theory includes a reductive privileging with its claim of identity. You might hear from an identity theorist something like "mental states are actually physical states in our functioning brains". What you would *not* hear is something like "neuronal activity in our brains is actually just conscious experience", which would be an example of reductive privileging in the opposite direction, with physical states thought to be nothing but mental states. Neither do you generally hear about claims of identity where neither of the two referring descriptions is privileged over the other. I believe that pure identity does not have the implication of reduction that identity theorists seem to assume; it is an extra claim that is being included.

Having looked at the two main features of mind-brain identity theory, as it is used in the literature, I will now turn to Searle's Biological Naturalism and explore the reasons why he might be interpreted as an identity theorist.

3. Motivating the idea of Searle as an identity theorist

I find it interesting that Searle's Biological Naturalism has been interpreted both as a form of dualism, as I explored in the previous chapter, and as a variety of identity theory. For example, Place considers Biological Naturalism as having an aspect of identity within it;

'According to Searle, mental states are both identical with and causally dependent upon the corresponding states of the brain. I say you can't have your cake and eat it. Either mental states are identical with brain states or one is causally dependent on the other. They can't be both.'¹³

¹² Smart J.J.C. "Sensations and Brain Processes" p.147

¹³ Place U.T. "Thirty Years On – Is consciousness still a brain process?" p.209

In this section I will look at the reasons why Searle might be interpreted as an identity theorist. If I am to accurately assess whether this is an appropriate interpretation I think it is important to understand all of the reasons which motivate such a view of Biological Naturalism. I will start by revisiting some of the criticisms I first broached in chapter 2, looking at why Searle's critics claim that Biological Naturalism is tantamount to identity theory. I will then look at what Searle actually says and how the way he expresses his ideas can seem very closely allied with the views of mind-brain identity theorists.

a) Why Searle's critics interpret him as an identity theorist

If conceptual dualism is wrong, why not embrace identity theory? Garrett finds fault with Searle's inability to accept what Garrett sees as the consequences of Searle's own views. Searle's belief that modern philosophy of mind is in the grip of conceptual dualism, that is, the approach of pitting mental against physical and viewing them as mutually exclusive, leads Garrett to argue that Searle should simply reject such a picture, which he believes would leave Searle with a position of identity theory. This is because if mental and physical are not set against each other, and all properties are accepted as physical, then why talk of ontologically irreducible subjective features of the world and of experiences having a first-person ontology? Why not, Garrett contends, simply embrace identity theory and accept that experiences are physical like all other properties in the world. As Garrett puts it,

'What Searle owes us here is an answer to the query, Why do we need to understand consciousness as an emergent property given the falsity of conceptual dualism? The tradition Searle rejects has motivations for such inclinations towards property dualism; the problem of multiple realisability and Kripke's modal objections, being the most prominent. But it is hard to understand why Searle speaks in the language of irreducibility, if the tradition is so confused.'¹⁴

Interpreting causal reduction as the co-referring aspect of identity theory: Collins' criticism of Searle focuses on Searle's ideas about causal reduction. The simultaneous style of causation that Searle employs in causal reduction is, for Collins, akin to the kinds of claims made by identity theorists. Because simultaneous causation focuses on a micro-macro link between what Searle calls different levels of description of the same system, this can appear similar to an identity theorist claiming that there is just one feature here, but it has two co-referring descriptions – a lower-level neuronal description and a higher-level experiential description in

¹⁴ Garrett B. "Non-Reductionism and John Searle's The Rediscovery of the Mind" p.210

the case of conscious experiences. Searle motivates such interpretations by expressing his views like this;

‘Causally speaking, there is nothing there, except the neurobiology, which has a higher level feature of consciousness. In a similar way there is nothing in the car engine except molecules, which have such higher level features as the solidity of the cylinder block, the shape of the piston, the firing of the spark plug, etc. ‘Consciousness’ does not name a distinct, separate phenomenon, something over and above its neurobiological base, rather it names a state that the neurobiological system can be in. Just as the shape of the piston and the solidity of the cylinder block are not something over and above the molecular phenomena, but are rather states of the system of molecules, so the consciousness of the brain is not something over and above the neuronal phenomena, but rather a state that the neuronal system is in.’¹⁵

Collins takes such a view as claiming that ‘solidity *just is* the molecular structure. Solidity is identical with the molecules in lattice structures’.¹⁶ Hence Collins’ accusation that Searle is an identity theorist.

Interpreting causal reduction as the identity theorist’s “nothing but” claim: Corcoran’s complaint against Searle rests on the fact that Corcoran reads causal reduction as implying that experiences are entirely explainable in purely physical terms. Corcoran describes the picture of causal reduction as meaning that ‘for Searle, the mental *causally* supervenes on and so is wholly explainable in terms of lower level neurophysiological going-on in the brain’¹⁷ and considers that this implies that ‘consciousness is entirely caused by and so is wholly explainable in terms of the behavior of lower level biological phenomena’.¹⁸ This obviously motivates an interpretation of Searle as an identity theorist, for it is akin to the claim that experiences are “nothing but” brain activity.

I will now look at some features of Searle’s theory and the way that his mode of expression often matches the way that the identity theorists articulate their views.

¹⁵ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” p.60

¹⁶ Collins C. “Searle on Consciousness and Dualism” p.31

¹⁷ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.309

¹⁸ Corcoran K. “The Trouble with Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.309

b) What Searle says that implies he is an identity theorist

In Searle's own words:

'Is consciousness identical with a brain process or not? Well, obviously and trivially, as I have said, consciousness is just a brain process. It is a qualitative, subjective, first-person process going on in the nervous system.'¹⁹

'There is nothing in your brain except neurons (together with glial cells, blood flow and all the rest of it) and sometimes a big chunk of the thalamocortical system is conscious.'²⁰

Just as the identity theorist does, Searle really wants to avoid any hint of dualism: Searle is more than clear about his desire to avoid dualism, firmly rejecting anyone interpreting him as holding 'some crazy doctrine of property dualism'.²¹ Searle clearly declares that 'I find property dualism unacceptable'²² and desires to keep experiences 'as much a part of the natural biological order as any other biological features such as photosynthesis, digestion, or mitosis'.²³ This mirrors the staunch rejection by traditional mind-brain identity theorists of anything dualistic or mentalistic. In my discussion of identity theory in section 2 above, I showed how identity theory is founded on a rejection of dualism, with the aim of giving an account of seemingly mental features of the world in purely physical terms, for example, Smart wanted 'to show that there are no philosophical arguments which compel us to be dualists'.²⁴ The agreement between Searle and the identity theorists about the need to resist dualism and provide a physicalist, or at least naturalistic account of conscious experience could easily lead in the direction of interpreting Searle's theory as a form of identity theory.

Just as the identity theorist does, Searle could be interpreted as privileging the physical: Searle could be interpreted as denying the existence of any mental domain, for he believes that there is only your brain in your skull and just your active brain is all that is needed for conscious experience. He holds that there is not mental stuff over and above, or in addition to, your functioning brain - 'there are not two different metaphysical realms in your skull, one "physical" and one "mental"'.²⁵ This certainly could seem like a reductive privileging of the

¹⁹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.87

²⁰ Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" pp.60-61

²¹ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.192

²² Searle J. "Why I Am Not A Property Dualist" p.192

²³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.90

²⁴ Smart J. J. C. "Sensations and Brain Processes" p.143

²⁵ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.89

physical: 'the *real* existence of consciousness is in human and animal brains'²⁶ (my emphasis). If Searle sees consciousness as something completely ordinary in the physical/biological realm, then this might justify a reading of him as a traditional mind-brain identity theorist. When Searle says that consciousness is 'as much a part of the natural biological order as any other biological features such as photosynthesis, digestion or mitosis',²⁷ it is natural to see a parallel to the mind-brain identity theorist's claim that the mental is really nothing but the physical. In other words, Searle and the mind-brain identity theorist both seem to agree on the physical brain-based nature of consciousness, in that a functioning brain is a conscious brain; 'we know consciousness happens and we know the brain does it.'²⁸

Having explored a number of reasons that motivate an interpretation of Searle as an identity theorist, I will now turn to the task of assessing whether this is a fair construal of his position. First expanding on my claim that real identity can be separated from any claim of reductive privileging, I will look at the standard format of identity theory, and defend my belief that Searle's Biological Naturalism should not be interpreted as a variant of traditional mind-brain identity theory, but can, and should, be seen as a form of real identity theory.

4. Separating identity and reduction - real identity

In the previous section I set out what motivates an interpretation of Biological Naturalism as really being a form of identity theory. In this section I want to look more closely at what identity theory is, and develop a new terminology of real-identity, as opposed to privileging-identity, depending on whether a reductive privileging is incorporated within the identity claim. In section 5 I will develop a real identity theory which amounts to an approach to the mind-body problem based on an identity claim but without any accompanying privileging or reduction. The purpose of this exercise will become clear in section 6 when I argue that although it is mistaken to view Searle as a traditional reductive identity theorist, Biological Naturalism can, and should, be viewed as a form of real identity theory.

a) Standard identity regarding experiences includes a privileging claim

Two meanings of reduction? As I briefly covered in section 2b) above, traditional mind-brain identity theorists assume that a claim of identity regarding experiences, and a reductive privileging of the physical over the mental go hand in hand. Perhaps the sense of reduction is

²⁶ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.6

²⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.90

²⁸ Searle J. "The Mystery of Consciousness Continues"

ambiguous here. I believe philosophers sometimes take reduction to be synonymous with identity, however, there also seems to be a clear sense in which reduction includes a privileging of physical over mental, for after all, in philosophy of mind, reductive theories always claim that experiences reduce down to brain states, as a justification for a materialist theory of mind. If there are these two meanings of reduction, sometimes as a synonym of identity, and sometimes to mean a privileging of physical over mental, then perhaps this is the source of the covert inclusion of a reductive privileging of physical over mental within identity theory. If the usage of reduction slips between the sense of simply being identified and the sense of privileging the physical as more fundamental or basic, then perhaps this is one way that standard mind-brain identity theory has come to include a surreptitious aspect of reductive privileging.

Reduction as an additional claim beyond a claim of identity: It might be understandable that when it comes to the relation between experiences and the brain, reduction has come to be bound up with identity, because in one sense an identity relation occurs where you thought you had two phenomena, and it turns out that really you have got just one, picked out by two different descriptions. In this way, the numerical reduction of two phenomena to one might lead to the inclusion within the identity claim of philosophical reduction, that is to say privileging one description over another. However, I think that the relation of pure identity, based on two descriptions co-referring, is not privileging one description over another, nor is it commenting on which of the two descriptions reveals features more basic or essential to the phenomenon. This identity relation itself makes no judgement about which one of the two ways of picking out the phenomenon reveals the truest or most fundamental of its features, it simply says that two terms *co-refer*. There is no privileging going on here, and the dual meaning and uses of “reduction” are a way of building the privileging of the physical over the mental into the notion of mental-physical identity. Indeed, part of the enterprise of the process of identification of experiences to brain states is to capture the folk phenomenon within the wider explanatory and ontological net of physical science.

The main point I am trying to make is that identity itself does not imply reductive privileging of one description over another. In the case of philosophy of mind, this means that identity claims between experiences and brain states do not imply that brain states are more essential, fundamental or basic than experiences. Identity claims simply mean that experiential descriptions and neurobiological descriptions co-refer to the same conscious

phenomenon. In order to be clear about this difference in the use of “identity”, I will introduce alternative terminology in the next section.

b) Introducing alternative terminology for identity

Being clear about the meaning of “identity”: I am aware that the standard use of identity is entrenched in philosophy of mind as two names or descriptions co-referring to a single phenomenon, *and* one of those descriptions being seen as more fundamental to the phenomenon, as revealing part of its essence. In light of this I think I must introduce alternative terminology so as to be clear what I am referring to. I believe that a pure identity claim is a non-privileging metaphysical relation based on two names or descriptions picking out one real feature of the world. This makes no comment as to which, or indeed whether, either one of the two names or descriptions is more basic. On this reading, identity is a neutral relation; whilst realising that two different terms can co-refer to a particular referent, any reduction or privileging of one description over another is an additional claim.

In order to keep these ideas clear I will now use the following terminology:

Real-identity:	The neutral metaphysical relation where two terms are found to co-refer to the same referent.
Privileging-Identity	The compound claim found in traditional mind-brain identity theory, which amounts to a claim of real-identity plus an additional claim of the reductive privileging of the physical over the mental.

5. Reclaiming identity theory as non-reductive and non-privileging

Having set out my belief that an identity claim does not include any reductive privileging (what I will call real-identity); in this section I want to explore an identity theory based on real-identity rather than the traditional privileging-identity. This will be a non-reductive, non-privileging approach to the mind-body problem which remains neutral about the status of either of the two descriptions, neurological or experiential, which co-refer to the conscious experience.

a) Using real-identity to construct the position of real identity theory

With the notion of real-identity I have tried to split identity from reduction and reclaim identity as a non-privileging relation, with reduction as a separate claim to be added on top of any question of identity. As I have set out above, with this view, real-identity involves two terms picking out or referring to only one phenomenon. It is a metaphysical relation that does not incorporate bias or fundamentality of one over another, and therefore makes no comment on which one of the two descriptions is the most real or most fundamental, or which best captures the essence of the phenomenon which they pick out. I will now explore how real identity can be developed into a real identity theory relating to the mind/body problem.

Summary of real identity theory: The real identity theory I am proposing is a form of token identity theory regarding the mind-body problem where for any particular brain state which occurs in the brain of an experiencing subject, there are two ways of picking out that token brain state – an experiential way and a neuronal way. That is to say, any particular token brain state which occurs when a subject is having an experience will fall under two different types – both the “experience” type and the “neuronal activity” type. As identity is a metaphysical relation between a thing and itself, the identity part of real identity theory is referring to the fact that where it was thought there was a neuronal state and a separate experience, in fact there is just a particular token brain state occurring in the brain of a subject, and that brain state is *both* an experience *and* a particular configuration of neuronal activity. So, for any subject undergoing an experience, there is one token brain state going on in their brain which can be brought under two types; “experience” and “neuronal activity”. This view is token identity theory in as much as every time an experience is occurring for a subject, a particular state of their brain is coming under the type “experience” and, at the very same time, that very same brain state will also come under the type “configuration of neuronal activity”.

An approach to the mind-body problem based on identity but without any privileging: Real identity theory based on real-identity would resist the move incorporated into traditional mind-brain identity theory of a privileging of the physical over the mental. Real identity theory is based on the belief that identities involve parity rather than privileging. An example might be illuminating here; a privileging approach to identity might claim that H₂O is the more basic or fundamental description of water, or that H₂O is more essential to what water is than “the wet clear stuff that actually falls out the sky and comes out the taps”. Real identity is

more of a claim that H₂O just *is* water, there is a relation of identity between the two, in other words, both “H₂O” and “the wet clear stuff that actually falls out the sky and comes out the taps” pick out and refer to water, and given that this is the case, it makes no sense to ask which one is the most fundamental, for they both refer to one and the same thing. Traditional mind-brain identity, based on privileging-identity, views a mental experiences as *really* a brain state, in other words that the experience’s true essence is of being a brain state. Real identity theory makes no such claim about basicness or fundamentality and refrains from privileging one description over the other. This fits with the water example above, where H₂O is merely seen *as* water.

Terminological precautions to avoid sliding into privileging-identity or property dualism: It is important to phrase my position carefully at this point, for it is very easy to either slide back into the locution of traditional privileging-identity, or in relation to experiences and brain states, to seem as if you are sliding towards property dualism. To avoid the latter, I must be clear that the property of having a particular experience, of an itchy foot say, *just is* the property of having certain configurations of neuronal activity going on in my brain. If I am now clear about this, the two different descriptions might seem disparate enough to warrant an interpretation of a dualism of properties. The problem with using the “just is” terminology is that it almost suggests an inherent reduction or privileging of physical over mental. I must be clear here that to avoid any confusion about a “just is” claim seeming reductive, when I claim that experiences “just are” certain patterns of neuronal activity going on in a brain, what I mean is that there is a single phenomenon going on in a subject’s brain, and that phenomenon can be picked out either in terms of neurological activity or in terms of being an experience – the two descriptions concerned co-refer. This avoids any sense of reduction that might be caught up with the “is” or particularly the “just is” expression, which might seem all too close to the “nothing but” reductive claim of traditional mind-brain privileging-identity theorists.

Finding a conceptual place for real identity theory: A question that often arises in relation to the levelism, and talk of different levels of description, which Searle employs, is the status of the relationship between the levels. The levels are sometimes deemed to have their own specific properties, for example, solidity and transparency could be seen as properties of the molecular level. If this is so, then the question becomes how do the properties of each of the levels relate to each other? Kim phrases the question thus,

‘Are these higher-level physical features of the brain (a.k.a. mental properties) reducible to, or *reductively* identifiable with, the lower-level properties’²⁹ [my emphasis added]

I find it extremely revealing that Kim has specified “reductively identifiable with” rather than merely identifiable with. Kim is claiming that unless higher level mental experiences are reductively identifiable to the lower level physical properties then we are dealing with an example of property dualism. This is presumably because if reduction is rejected, he sees any form of irreducibility as tantamount to dualism. I contend that rejecting reductive identity, or identity based on privileging-reduction as I have called it, still leaves open the option of real-identity and real identity theory rather than having to simply settle for property dualism. The difference between the two is that property dualism views the different properties as being metaphysically distinct and separate. Instead, real identity theory does not see the different levels to be descriptions of independently existing separate features, where the higher level feature must be explained in terms of the lower level feature. Rather, “experience” and “neuronal activity” are viewed as differing ways of picking out one and the same phenomenon.

Clarification of real identity theory as giving no priority to one description over another: Let me be clear about what a real identity theory regarding the relationship between experiences and brain states amounts to. The problems arise because of two appearances; the mental appearance of felt experiences and the physical appearances of neuronal activity in brains. A real identity theory based on real-identity is an attempt to say that both of those appearances, the experience and the neuronal activity, are equally of the phenomenon, and neither is more fundamental or essential than the other. I take this to be in contrast to the privileging-identity claims that experiences are “nothing but” neuronal activity in our brains upheld by traditional mind-brain identity theorists. So real identity theory is not only merely saying that there is one phenomenon with two different appearances or terms which pick it out, it is also saying that these appearances that we are tempted to ascribe separately to two phenomena both belong, and equally so, to the one phenomenon with no priority of one over the other. This is the real-identity part of real identity theory coming to the fore, because other relations are asymmetrical, such as realisation where the instantiation of one property is sufficient for the instantiation of another, but not the other way around, but real-identity is symmetrical in comparison. As Levine puts it, relations like realization involve ‘metaphysical

²⁹ Kim J. “Mental Causation in Searle’s Biological Naturalism” p.192

necessitation, but only in one direction' but with identity 'the metaphysical necessitation goes in both directions'.³⁰

How real identity theory compares to privileging mind-brain identity theory: A particular token brain process in a subject's brain, one which is going on when they are undergoing an experience, falls both under the type "being an experience" and the type "being a pattern of neuronal activity". Early identity theorists, such as Smart, proposed that the mental description be topic neutral and, therefore, avoiding any reference to exclusively mental features. This is clearly a privileging of the physical description over the mental. More recent identity theorists could accept that the mental and physical description are equally real descriptions of the brain state, but would still want to ontologically privilege the physical description as the most fundamental. In contrast, with real identity theory, not only are both descriptions of the token brain state, the one coming under type "experience" and the one coming under type "neuronal activity", equally picking out the phenomenon, but there is no privileging going on as to which of those two descriptions reveals an aspect which more essential or fundamental.

Idealists could also make identity claims based on privileging-identity: Note here that I have focused on reductive physicalist theories, but the charge of using privileging-identity could equally apply to an idealist who privileges the mental over the physical. The idealist could make the same mistake as the physicalist but in the opposite direction; instead of claiming an identity between physical and mental and then making the extra claim that the mental was "nothing but" the physical, the idealist might claim the identity between mental and physical, yet make the extra claim that the physical was "nothing but" the mental. Both positions are equally based on privileging-identity and sneak a reductive privileging into their picture of the mind-brain relation. Such privileging is not part of real-identity, which is always a purely neutral relation.

Multiple realisability and real identity as a token identity theory: Multiple realisability is an idea which originally threatened the early type identity theories which claimed identity between mental types and physical types, for example "pain" and "c-fibre stimulation". The argument against type identity rests on the belief that any mental kind can be instantiated in a variety of different physical ways. For example, there are multiple ways that "pain" can be realised, so the argument goes, c-fibre excitation in humans, perhaps o-fibre excitation in

³⁰ Levine J. *The Purple Haze* p.14

octopuses, or the excitation of a particular type of goo in aliens. As Fodor puts it using an example outside philosophy of mind; 'some monetary exchanges involve strings of wampum. Some involve dollar bills. And some involve signing one's name to a check'.³¹ Fodor adds that 'the reasons why economics is unlikely to reduce to physics are paralleled by those which suggest that psychology is unlikely to reduce to neurology'.³² By this he is referring to the fact that in relation to experiences, it does not matter what the different ways a type can be realised are, just that there are different ways, just as monetary exchanges can be realised in different ways. This is because it is multiple realisability which, if true, contradicts the type identity theorist's claim that mental types are identical to single physical types. Real identity theory accepts the consequences of the multiple realisability of mental types, and hence is a version of token identity theory claiming identity for particular mental tokens rather than types.

In summary: Traditional mind-brain identity theory, based on privileging-identity, privileges the physical over the mental, reducing the mental to "nothing but" physical goings-on. Real identity theory is even-handed and non-judgemental towards the two ways of understanding the one phenomenon. It is not that there are these funny experiential goings on and they must be captured in other, different, physical terms. There is just an acceptance that the token brain states that are occurring when a subject undergoes an experience come under both the type "neuronal activity" *and* the type "experience", and they do so equally, with neither being more essential or fundamental than the other. As such, they should be included in our full understanding of reality. So unlike the traditional mind-brain identity theorists, there's no need to say that experiences are *really* neuronal processes or in any other way try to reinterpret experiences as non-subjective physical phenomena. With real identity theory, the feature of phenomenality does not have to be explained away in non-phenomenal, neurophysiological terms. Experiences just are what they are, and experience-talk is a way of picking out a phenomenon which is equally picked out by talk of occurrences of neuronal activity in the subject's brain. Real identity theory simply accepts that as well as the objective physical way of referring to experiential phenomena, there is also the route of picking conscious experiences out by how they feel for the subject undergoing them.

³¹ Fodor J. "Special Sciences" p.103

³² Fodor J. "Special Sciences" p.104

b) Strawson's views are an example of real identity theory

Strawson accepts experiences as physical features of the world: Strawson's notion of real physicalism includes experiences as real features of the world, which are irreducibly subjective, yet still physical. He views experiences as physical features of the world, just like other non-experiential features, and feels confident that there is no reason to reduce away or explain away the subjective, mental features in non-mental or objective terms;

'Does one really have good reason to think that the phenomenon of consciousness or experience is not a physical thing, strictly on a par with the phenomena of mass and extension as apprehended by physics? I think not.'³³

Experiences as physical phenomena in the world with their own subjective features: Strawson's real physicalism is a view of the world that encompasses a monistic tendency that all existents are made from one fundamental type of stuff. The fundamentals might be quarks, superstrings or some other type of fundamental particle yet to be discovered. Real physicalism includes the acceptance that experiences just are physical features and yet also have irreducible subjective, first-personal features: 'experience is necessarily experience *for* – for someone or something'.³⁴

Strawson and real-identity can accept subjective experiences as part of the world without needing to reduce them: The traditional, reductive mind-brain identity theorist working with privileging-identity feels the need to see experiential phenomena as physical phenomena, which in their eyes makes them less problematic and able to fit into a physical picture of the world. In contrast, Strawson simply accepts subjective features of reality in their own right without an accompanying desire to reduce them to objective features or explain them away in objective terms. This might be very difficult for a physicalistic privileging-identity theorist to accept, but Strawson believes that;

'The truth is that we have no good reason to think that we know *anything* about the physical that gives us *any* reason to find *any* problem in the idea that mental or experiential phenomena are physical phenomena.'³⁵

Both Strawson and real identity theory insist on not privileging either mental or physical but simply accepting the reality of both: I believe Strawson's relaxed acceptance of subjective

³³ Strawson G. "Realistic Materialist Monism" p.27

³⁴ Strawson G. "What is the relation between an experience, the subject of the experience, and the content of the experience" p.280

³⁵ Strawson G. "Realistic Materialist Monism" p.24

experiences into a physical view of the world parallels the non-privileging aspect of real-identity. Whereas the traditional mind-brain identity theorist's position reduces the experiential to the physical, Strawson's real physicalism accepts both the physical nature of experiences and the experiential nature of certain physical configurations of neuronal activity in the brain.³⁶ This mirrors the way that real-identity sees the physical brain state description and the experiential description as equally co-referring to the same phenomenon, resisting any privileging move where one way of picking out the phenomenon is seen as more basic or more revealing of the phenomenon's true nature. As Strawson puts it, referring to physical stuff, 'when you put it together in the way in which it is put together in brains like ours, it regularly constitutes – is, literally is – experience like ours'.³⁷ It is not that the physical brain state is the real feature and another secondary way of describing it is via our vocabulary of experiences. It is a view where experiential descriptions and physical brain state descriptions are irreconcilably different ways of understanding the same aspect of reality, just as happens in real-identity.

In the past two sections I have explored real-identity in more detail, focussing on how it does not privilege either of the relevant different ways to pick one phenomenon out over the other. I will now apply the ideas that I have established of real-identity and real identity theory to Searle's Biological Naturalism so as to ascertain whether or not Biological Naturalism is really a form of identity theory.

6. Why Searle's Biological Naturalism should not be seen as a form of traditional privileging identity theory

In the previous chapter I looked at whether Searle should be interpreted as a property dualist. I concluded that he should not, based on how Searle and the property dualist disagree on the meaning of "irreducible" when applied to experiences. The property dualist's position includes a metaphysical gulf between mental and physical at its core, but Searle wholeheartedly denies such a picture, wanting to maintain that experiences are just part of the ordinary physical world like everything else. In this section I will look at the reasons why, contrary to some of his critics, I think Searle should not be interpreted as a traditional

³⁶ Although many might have a problem with Strawson's expansion of "physical" to include experiential features, given that he views physical items as essentially conscious. See chapter 5, where I looked more closely at the implications of expanding the definition of "physical" to include "experiential".

³⁷ Strawson G. "Realistic Monism" p.9

reductive identity theorist, using the privileging-identity conception of identity, because of his insistence on the irreducibility of experiences and their essentially first-person ontology.

Searle does not feel the need to reduce mental features to physical ones in order to make them fit into his view of what physical is: As I showed above, reducing mental phenomena to physical ones is part of the driving force of mind-brain identity theory. Smart talked of a desire not to involve anything 'irreducibly psychical'³⁸ and Place of 'eliminating mental events and mental processes as a separate class of events'.³⁹ More recent identity theorists might talk of trying to naturalise experiences, to capture them in physical terms as a way to tackle the problem of fitting seemingly subjective phenomena into what they see as an otherwise wholly objective world picture. However, this is at odds with Searle's treatment of mental experiences as irreducible to objective physical states; 'Conscious states...are real parts of the real world and cannot be eliminated or reduced to something else'.⁴⁰ In fact, Searle recognises that the idea of accepting subjective phenomena as features of reality in their own right, 'does not give the materialists what they wanted',⁴¹ in other words, a reduction of mental to physical. This is one way that Searle is at odds with the traditional mind-brain identity theorists who base their approach on privileging-identity.

First-person ontology and the acceptance of irreducibly subjective features of physical reality is contrary to the ideas of traditional mind-brain identity theory: Another feature of Searle's Biological Naturalism that is contrary to traditional mind-brain identity is his belief in the first-person ontology of experiences. First-person ontology contrasts with the idea I outlined above, of the physicalist project of incorporating experiences into a physicalist view of the world, by explaining away the problematic subjective features as really just some sort of objective physical feature. Explaining away subjective experiences by seeing them as objective physical features is the antithesis of Searle's project, and directly contradicts his assertion that experiences have a first-person ontology. What Searle wants to get across with his first-person ontology is similar to Strawson's insistence I covered above, that experiences are real features of the physical world, yet nevertheless are subjective. It also reflects Nagel's concerns that you cannot eradicate the subjective perspectival nature of experiences without somehow eradicating the experience itself. Such a view could not be more fundamentally

³⁸ Smart J. J. C. "Sensations and Brain Processes" p.142

³⁹ Place U.T. *Identity Theories*

⁴⁰ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.5

⁴¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.87

different from the traditional mind-brain identity theorist's aims when using privileging-identity to understand what experiences are.

Not only do I think there are strong reasons to resist an equation of Searle's Biological Naturalism with traditional, privileging-identity based mind-brain identity theory, I also think there are many reasons why Searle's work should be interpreted as a form of real identity theory. It is to these reasons that I now turn. First focusing on Searle's insistence that reality is not wholly objective, I then move onto Searle's discussion of different levels of description for single systems.

7. Why Searle's Biological Naturalism should be seen as a form of real identity theory

In this section, having set out my ideas on real-identity and real identity theory, I will assess whether Searle's Biological Naturalism should be interpreted as a form of identity theory. I will first draw links between real identity theory and Biological Naturalism by exploring their common view that reality is not wholly objective. Next, I will look at the links between Howell's subjective physicalism, real identity theory and Searle's Biological Naturalism. I hope that such a comparison will help focus our understanding of Searle's position. I will then conclude that the most consistent and accurate way to interpret Searle's theory of Biological Naturalism is as a version of real identity theory.

a) Searle believes that physical reality is not exclusively objective

A belief in a wholly objective reality forces the need to reduce mental features to physical ones: Including irreducibly subjective, first-personal features into your view of the world is the antithesis of the traditional mind-brain identity theorist's assumption that reality is objective, in that its features are not dependent upon any particular subject's point of view. As Howell phrases it, 'too often "objective" is used as a synonym of "real" thus leaving "subjective" a mark of ontological deficiency.'⁴² The corresponding claim that any real feature of the world is actually an objective physical feature, meant in a reductive sense of "actually" and an objective-only sense of "physical", results in a need to explain mental phenomena in physical terms, or reduce experiential properties down to physical properties. This view, were it to be real, is considered to be objective, is described by Nagel thus;

⁴² Howell R. "Subjective Physicalism" p.127

'Objectivity is naturally linked with reality; it is easy to feel that anything has to be located in the objective world in order to qualify as real, and that it must have as its real nature some character which, whether physical or not, can be regarded impersonally and externally.'⁴³

Searle strongly resists such a reductive desire: Searle could not disagree more with this reductive, objectifying desire inherent in traditional mind-brain identity theory. He says that 'ontologically, the claim that all of reality is objective is, neurobiologically speaking, simply false'.⁴⁴ In fact, he openly criticises the view of reality as objective and third-personal, that the traditional mind-brain identity theorist, like Smart, holds;

'The conception of the mental employed by the tradition is misconceived from the beginning, for it is essentially an objective, third-person conception. The tradition tries to study the mind as if it consisted of neutral phenomena, independent of consciousness and subjectivity. But such an approach leaves out the crucial features that distinguish mental from nonmental.'⁴⁵

Howell agrees that the traditional mind-brain identity theorist's aim to mould experiences into purely physical features, meaning objective features, is problematic. He complains that, 'too often "objective" is used as a synonym of "real" thus leaving "subjective" a mark of ontological deficiency'.⁴⁶ Searle's position seems sympathetic to Howell's concerns, for he gives great importance to accepting experiences in their own right as experiential qualitative features within a view of what exists in the world. Searle believes that 'the ultimate absurdity is to try and treat consciousness itself independently of consciousness, that is, to treat it solely from a third-person point of view'.⁴⁷ I think that by this, Searle is referring to a view where the brain state occurring when a subject undergoes an experience is seen as what the experience is, to the exclusion of the phenomenal feel that the subject experiences. They are, for Searle both equal aspects of what an experience is and therefore just as much part of the ontological makeup of the world. He says,

'On my view, consciousness does not need naturalizing: It already is part of nature and it is part of nature as the subjective, qualitative biological part.'⁴⁸

⁴³ Nagel T. *Mortal Questions* p.202

⁴⁴ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.19

⁴⁵ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.19

⁴⁶ Howell J. "Subjective Physicalism" p.127

⁴⁷ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.20

⁴⁸ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.8

Subjective mental features can be either separated from physical features or accepted as part of physical features: When trying to fit seemingly subjective features of reality into a seemingly otherwise objective world, I think there are two alternatives. One option is to split subjective features from objective features, and hold onto a view that whatever exists is objective. This forces the move of trying to objectify the supposedly subjective features so that they can fit into the objective world view. As Levine describes this situation; ‘what the physicalist needs to maintain is that having a certain qualitative character is a physical or functional property.’⁴⁹ The other option is to accept that when it seems that there are subjective features of reality, there really are, but try to accommodate them into your physical view of the world by accepting that not everything in physical reality is in fact objective. It is this sort of approach that leads to a view where experiences are seen as physical, but also subjective, with the implication that one must simply accept that some physical phenomena have subjective features. As Searle says,

‘It seems to me we can treat one and the same event as having both neurobiological features and phenomenological features. One and the same events is a sequence of neuron firings and is also painful’⁵⁰

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Other support for the view that not all of reality is objective: I can see the second option of accepting subjective features as part of the physical world echoed in Strawson’s real physicalism, in the non-privileging basis of real identity theory and in Searle’s Biological Naturalism. As Searle puts it, ‘I believe you can consistently accept physics and chemistry, while also accepting that the world contains subjective, qualitative, first person, mental phenomena’.⁵² Howell also concurs with this view that not all of reality is objective, when he states that ‘there is something about minds that cannot be fully understood from “the outside”’.⁵³ This echoes both Nagel’s point about the importance of the first-personal point of view and Searle’s insistence that experiences have a first-person ontology.

⁴⁹ Levine J. “On Leaving Out What It’s Like” p.127

⁵⁰ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.87

⁵¹ I am aware that this might sound like property dualism to some, based on this quote from Searle. I will just recap from last chapter that I do not believe Searle should be considered a property dualist because he does not agree that the irreducibility of conscious experiences is indicative of a metaphysical gulf between mental and physical, like the property dualist does. In fact, the property dualist takes the first option I mentioned above, but simply resists the move to redefine experiences in physical terms.

⁵² Searle J. “Consciousness, the Brain and the Connection Principle – A Reply” p.221

⁵³ Howell R. “Subjective Physicalism” p.127

I have considered similarities between Searle's Biological Naturalism and the real identity theory in the way that they approach subjective features in a supposedly wholly objective reality. I will now turn to Searle's use of differing levels of description as an additional reason why Searle should be seen as a real identity theorist.

b) Howell's different aspects, real identity theory's different terms for picking out a brain state and Searle's different levels of description

One token brain state with two ways of picking it out: Real identity theory involves a particular token brain state occurring in a subject's brain when they're undergoing an experience. That brain state comes under both the type "experience" and the type "neuronal activity". These two different ways of picking out the brain state do not correspond to separate properties of the brain state, an experiential property and a neuronal property. If they did then real identity theory would of course simply be a form of property dualism. What then are these two ways of picking out a brain state?

Howell's notion of different aspects: Howell's theory of Subjective Physicalism similarly proposes a single brain state with what he refers to as two different "aspects", which he clearly states, 'are not themselves properties, but are instead part of the nature of properties that are not expressible by physical description'.⁵⁴ This means that for Howell;

'Subjective physicalism does not, therefore, recognize a distinct set of *properties* that correspond to qualia...There are, to be sure, aspects of states and properties that are subjective, and these roughly correspond to qualia...But unlike qualia traditionally conceived, the subjective aspects of certain physical properties do not enjoy independent metaphysical status. They cannot be a source of difference between objects, and they cannot become detached from the property of which they are aspects.'⁵⁵

So just as real identity theory posits a token brain state occurring in a subject which falls under two different types, which can be picked out in two different ways, Subjective Physicalism holds that 'when a subject is undergoing a conscious experience he occupies a state with two "aspects", a subjective aspect and an objective aspect'.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Howell R. "The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism" p.335

⁵⁵ Howell R. "The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism" pp.335-336

⁵⁶ Howell R. "Subjective Physicalism" pp.133-134

What are Howell's different "aspects" if not different properties? Howell seems to see them as conceptual features of a brain property, akin to the idea of the front half and the back half of a sphere being aspects of the sphere. He states that,

‘Real parts are parts that can be separated spatially from one another. Conceptual parts are parts that can be separated “in mind only:” the mind can attend to them and distinguish between them, but in fact they constitute a basic physical unity.’⁵⁷

This means that Howell sees aspects as individuated conceptually by how we think about them, or conceptualise them. Because Howell holds an extensional view of properties, he does not therefore see the different aspects as being different properties, and hence the aspects are not different metaphysical phenomena in their own right, but merely “aspects” of the brain state in question. As Howell puts it, ‘aspects are intensionally individuated while properties are not. As merely conceptual parts of the properties, they do not have individuation conditions that are purely metaphysical.’⁵⁸ So for Howell, any particular brain state which is instantiated when a subject has an experience can have different aspects, that is to say different ‘features of the properties that the mind can discern’⁵⁹ which are not, however, separable from the whole of which they are a “part”;⁶⁰ ‘they cannot become detached from the property of which they are aspects’.⁶¹ Specifically relating to brain states that occur when a subject is undergoing a conscious experience, he believes that ‘the subjective aspect cannot exist without the physical aspect and *vice versa*,’⁶² that ‘they are metaphysically dependent on the properties of which they are conceptual parts’.⁶³

Comparing Howell to real identity theory to Biological naturalism: I find Howell's position very similar to that of real identity theory in that for any particular brain state undergone by a subject, that brain state has two different aspects, as Howell calls them. He sees them as relating to the experiential aspect of the brain state and the physical aspect. This directly parallels the two ways of picking out the brain state that real identity theory involves, one experiential, one neuronal. I also think that this mirrors Searle's notion of different levels of description, that is, different ways of picking out a particular token brain state.

⁵⁷ Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.335

⁵⁸ Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.335

⁵⁹ Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.335

⁶⁰ Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.335

⁶¹ Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.336

⁶² Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.335

⁶³ Howell R. “The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism” p.336

Searle's different levels of description are different ways of describing a single system: In chapter 3 I explored in depth Searle's idea of different levels of description, where any particular phenomenon can be grasped in a number of different ways. For example, a table, at a time, can be described as a collection of molecules tightly bound in a stiff lattice structure in particular configuration XYZ or it can be described by saying it is a piece of furniture which supports objects put on its top, and has multiple legs for holding up the top. The first description is given at the level of molecules, the second at the level of household items. As Searle puts it,

'Any complex system can be described in different ways. Thus, for example, a car engine can be characterized in terms of its molecular structure, in terms of its gross physical shape, in terms of its component parts, etc. It is tempting to describe this variability of descriptive possibilities in terms of the metaphor of "levels," and this terminology has become generally accepted. We think of the microlevel of molecules as a lower level of description than the level of gross physical structure of physical components, which are higher levels of descriptions.'⁶⁴

Levels of description and brain states: Regarding the relationship between experiences and the brain, Searle takes it to be the case that 'because mental states are features of the brain, they have two levels of description – a higher level in mental terms, and a lower level in physiological terms'.⁶⁵ An important point to be clear about is that Searle does not see the different descriptions, at different levels, as 'competing or distinct, but rather different levels within a single unified causal system'.⁶⁶ I think this exactly mirrors both Howell's view that his different aspects of a brain state 'do not enjoy independent metaphysical status'⁶⁷ and real identity theory's belief that the two ways of picking out the particular brain state, the two types it comes under, are not competing to be the most fundamental or essential, but instead simply accepted as both equally valid, real and relevant facets of the brain state.

Different levels of description are not metaphysically mysterious: Searle insists that 'the fact that the brain has different levels of description is no more mysterious than that any other physical system has different levels of description'.⁶⁸ He describes it like this,

⁶⁴ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.49

⁶⁵ Searle J. *Minds, Brains & Science* p.26

⁶⁶ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.7

⁶⁷ Howell R. "The Ontology of Subjective Physicalism" p.336

⁶⁸ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* p.7

‘We can describe my arm going up at the level of the conscious intention-in-action to raise my arm, and the corresponding bodily movement, or we can describe it at the level of neuron firings and synapses and the secretion of acetylcholine at the axon endplates of my motor neurons, just as we can describe the operation of the car engine at the level of piston cylinders and spark plugs firing, or we can describe it at the level of the oxidization of hydrocarbon molecules and the action of metal alloys. In both the case of the brain and the case of the car engine, these are not separate causal structures; it is a single causal structure described at different levels.’⁶⁹

What this actually amounts to is a picture where a single system can be described in a number of different ways, at different levels. Searle could have painted a picture where the neurobiological property of a brain state was seen as a distinct entity or property from the experiential one. This would have separated brain states from experiences in a metaphysically fundamental way. Such a separation of mental and physical is evident in both traditional mind-brain identity theory, which sees the mental properties as needing to be reduced to the physical ones, and in property dualism where the mental properties are embraced as fundamentally distinct from the physical properties. In effect, they both consider mental and physical to be, on the face of it, fundamentally different properties or features,⁷⁰ which therefore need reconciling. In contrast, Searle is clear that for him, conscious states in the brain are fundamentally no different from any other feature of our bodies; ‘consciousness is a system-level, biological feature in much the same way that digestion, or growth, or the secretion of bile are system level, biological features’.⁷¹ This echoes the way that real identity theory finds it unproblematic that any particular feature of the world will be describable in a multitude of different ways, and Howell’s view that a brain state can have different aspects, one of which is experiential, without there being different properties, or creating a metaphysical divide.

c) Addressing a concern: How can Searle be an identity theorist when he claims experiences are ontologically irreducible?

Aren’t identity and irreducibility mutually exclusive? In the previous sub-sections I have been highlighting the parallels between Biological Naturalism and real identity theory. I would like,

⁶⁹ Searle J. *Biological Naturalism* pp.6-7

⁷⁰ If each level of description is thought to have its own specific properties, the question becomes one of how the properties of each of the levels relates to the properties of the adjacent levels, with the available options of reduction, supervenience or dualism being open for debate.

⁷¹ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.80

at this point, to answer a concern that might arise, as I think it will aid in understanding Searle's position. Someone could ask;

How can Searle's Biological Naturalism be a form of identity theory when he also claims that experiences are ontologically irreducible?

The triviality of Searle's irreducibility claim leaves no metaphysical gap between mental and physical: In responding to this concern I would first point to the conclusion of the previous chapter, that although Searle uses the terminology of "irreducible" he does not mean it in the same weighty sense that the property dualist does, to denote a metaphysical divide between mental and physical properties. Searle accompanies his irreducibility claim with the acknowledgement that experiences are only "trivially" irreducible, which means that for Searle they are reducible merely because of our use of the process of reduction. Therefore, in Searle's eyes, the irreducibility of experiences does not result in a metaphysical gulf between mental and physical of the sort that would rule out any claim of identity. In fact, the triviality of the irreducibility claim could be seen as supporting the general framework in which an identity claim can be made; for Searle's trivial style of irreducibility keeps experiences as features of the world alongside neuronal states or brain states, in that no metaphysical divide between mental features and physical features opens up in light of Searle's irreducibility claim.

Irreducibility is seen as incompatible with an identity claim: However, this still leaves the concern that admitting any irreducible features of the world rules out an identity claim. Indeed, Searle describes just such a situation where for many philosophers, he believes that,

'they think that to grant the reality of irreducibility of consciousness and other mental phenomena commits one to some form of Cartesianism, and they do not see how such a view can be made consistent with our overall scientific world picture'⁷²

The concern I have raised assumes that admitting of irreducible mental features in the world rules out an identity claim, because if experiences are ontologically irreducible, then they are metaphysically separated off from physical features. The other side of this coin is the desire to reduce mental features which might appear to be ontologically irreducible, so that they become unproblematically "physical". The problem occurs because identity is usually taken to include a reductive, privileging element, and hence is obviously incompatible with an

⁷² Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.2

irreducibility claim. Searle expresses the idea when he discusses the identity theory approaches to the mind-body problem, stating that

‘Either materialism of the identity variety leaves out the mind or it does not; if it does, it is false; if it does not, it is not materialism.’⁷³

Emphasising that real identity theory does not include any reduction: It is important to emphasise again that real identity theory is non-reductive in that it does not include any additional privileging claim on top of the claim of identity. So whilst some, including Searle, take identity theory to be inherently reductive, I deny that it has to be this way and propose real-identity theory as an alternative to the identity-plus-reduction forms of identity theory. Given that real identity theory is a token identity claim that for any particular brain process going on in a subject when they undergo an experience, the token brain state can come under two types, “experience” and “neuronal state”, there is no tension in claiming that a particular token experience is irreducible to, yet also identical to a particular brain state in the subject undergoing the experience. This is because of real identity theory’s non-privileging approach to the two ways of picking out the brain state; they are seen as equally referring to the brain state, yet not reducible, one to the other, in either direction. This means that the trivial form of irreducibility that Searle adopts is no barrier to a claim of identity in the real identity theory sense.

Irreducible, yet identical: Real identity theory can accept that an experience has an irreducibly phenomenal, mental description, yet is also identical to a brain state in that the mental description equally refers to the brain state alongside the physical description. Searle seems to fully support the identity side of identity theory, but vehemently disagree with the reductive, privileging aspect. As he puts it,

‘In one way it seems to me that...the identity theory is absolutely right and could hardly be false. However, historically the identity theorists that I know, with very few exceptions, had a reductionist motive. They wanted to get rid of subjectivity. They wanted to say that consciousness is *nothing but* neurobiological states of the brain neurobiologically described in third person terms. I have argued in this article that we know independently that that claim is false.’⁷⁴

⁷³ Searle J. *The Rediscovery of the Mind* p.37

⁷⁴ Searle J *Dualism Revisited* pp.19-20

Given that Searle seems to feel an intuitive pull towards identity theory but is strongly repelled by its reductive nature, I think real identity theory is the best way to make sense of Searle's claims within Biological Naturalism.

8. Conclusion

I have split this chapter into two main parts. In the sections 2-5 I set out to divorce the identity relation from reductionism. I started by showing how traditional mind-brain identity theory meshes together reduction and identity as being intertwined, even inseparable. Taking identity as the metaphysical claim that something is identical with itself, real identity theory describes a situation where one phenomenon can be picked out in two different, equally illuminating ways, which are not reducible to one another. I then argued that identity does not, in fact, inherently include any notion of reducing one way to another, and that any such privileging is an addition to identity theory on top of the actual identity. I introduced a split terminology to deal with the two different forms of identity relation; privileging-identity for the type used by traditional mind-brain identity theorists, and real-identity meant as pure identity with no accompanying reductionism. I developed this into a real identity theory, which is based on the identity relation but does not privilege the mental over the physical, like traditional mind-brain identity theory does.

Having reclaimed identity from any additional privileging or reduction, sections 6 and 7 were devoted to showing how this newly reclaimed non-privileging notion of real identity theory is the best way to make sense of the different features of Searle's Biological Naturalism. First, I set out the differences between Searle's position and that of the traditional, reductive identity theorist, to put distance between the two. Next, I explored the ways in which Biological Naturalism is similar to real identity theory, by looking at Searle's insistence that reality is not wholly objective and how his ideas about levels of description can be seen to echo both Howell's position and that of real identity theory. Lastly, I addressed a possible concern that any irreducibility claim would automatically rule out any claim of identity. Searle claims that experiences are ontologically irreducible, yet he also claims that experiences are just states that the brain can be in. Real identity theory can account for both of these claims together, which have been such a source of confusion for philosophers trying to understand Searle's position. Therefore, I strongly believe that real identity theory is the best possible way to make sense of Searle's Biological Naturalism.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

1. Summary of chapters

I began this dissertation by highlighting the confusion that Searle's Biological Naturalism has caused among philosophers trying to understand him. Given that Searle claims to have created a unique approach to the mind-body problem, which lies in between physicalism and dualism, I agree with Nagel that 'if this view could be clarified in a way that distinguished it from the alternatives, it would be a major addition to the possible answers to the mind-body problem'.¹ This is why I consider that my endeavour to make sense of Searle's Biological Naturalism is an important one.

Chapter 2 emphasized the vast array of difficulties that philosophers have in understanding Searle's position. General critique of Searle included replacing the subjective/objective dichotomy with the parallel first-person/third-person dichotomy, to misconstruing both the property dualism and physicalism that he rejects, to redefining "physical" to simply include subjective, which critics saw as a merely linguistic move. Specific criticism of facets of Biological Naturalism included a concern that Searle had not created a theory which could deal with the problem of mental causation, confusion over exactly what was "causal" about causal reduction and worry about the triviality of Searle's irreducibility claim. There is also criticism about how to interpret what Searle claims in Biological Naturalism, with some believing it to be tantamount to property dualism, others finding it akin to identity theory.

Chapter 2 concluded by drawing out what I considered to be the main barriers to making sense of Biological Naturalism, of all the separate criticisms. These became the basis for the following chapters. My aim was to gradually break down the obstacles that prevented a clear understanding of Searle's position, thereby diagnosing the areas of tension in his theory with a view to reaching a coherent interpretation of Searle's intentions.

I began by tackling Searle's notion of first-person ontology in chapter 3. The name may be unique but I found Searle to be expressing ideas inspired by other philosophers such as Nagel, Jackson and Kripke. After analysing what first-person ontology might mean, I concluded that Searle was expressing the dual claim that experiences are essentially subjective, in that they

¹ Nagel T. "Searle: Why We Are Not Computers" p.105

are tied to a specific subject's point of view on the world, as well as essentially qualitative, in that it feels a certain way for any subject to undergo an experience. I concluded my discussion of first-person ontology by stressing how first-person ontology creates a problematic tension within Biological Naturalism. The conflict arises from first-person ontology being the kind of claim which dualists classically make about the special nature of experiences, whilst other areas of Searle's theory, such as his claim of causal reduction, seem to be akin to the claims made by physicalists. I therefore turned my attention to making sense of causal reduction and Searle's talk of levels of description so that I could ascertain if there was a way to dispel this tension that I had identified with first-person ontology.

I constructed an ontological wish list on Searle's behalf which detailed all the different features of an ontological view which Searle appeared to want to include, which helped the apparent contradictions come to the fore. It could be clearly seen that Searle wanted experiences to be simply a state the brain can be in, yet also based in differing levels of description of a single feature of the brain. Searle proposes that experiences are causally efficacious, yet also denies that they have any specifically mental causal powers of their own. Finally, Searle claims that experiences are both caused by, and yet also realised in the brain. The remainder of chapter 4 was spent trying to deal with each of these issues in turn with the purpose of reconciling these apparent contradictions.

Searle's view of levels of description was discussed, and I detailed my belief that Searle is not referring to different metaphysical levels which have their own independent properties. Instead, I believe he is referring to particular token brain states falling under different types, all of which equally pick out the token brain state in question. I looked at the way that Searle seems to individuate properties extensionally, which added weight to my view of Searle as positing differing ways of picking out a brain state, rather than differing properties of the brain state.

I proceeded to focus on the problem of mental causation as a conduit for elucidating Searle's view of the causal efficacy of experiences, and determining if that is in conflict with his claim that experiences have no causal powers above and beyond those of the neuronal activity in our brains. I concluded that because Searle views experiences as a state the brain can be in, with different types under which the token brain state can be picked out, there is only a single set of causal powers of the token brain state in question. These causal powers can be characterised either experientially or neuronally, but there remains just a single causal sequence for any instance of mental causation. In this way, Searle's claim that experiences

are causally efficacious does not conflict with his claim that experiences have no causal powers specifically of their own, over and above any of those identified to be at the neuronal level. Proceeding to consider Searle's claim that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain, I found his simultaneous style of causation to be atypical, with cause not robustly separated from effect in the way required by standard causation. This was in contrast to the typical use of realisation as a metaphysical relation where a type is instantiated by a particular token. I concluded that when Searle says that experiences are both caused by *and* realised in the brain, this is tantamount to the claim that they are simply realised by the brain. This dissolves the apparent tension.

In chapters 5 and 6 I turned my attention to the criticisms made of Searle that Biological Naturalism was not the unique position he claims it to be, but instead a form of either property dualism or identity theory. Taking property dualism first, I looked at what that doctrine involved, finding the claim of irreducibility, that is, experiences being something over and above physical brain features, to be at its core. I then contrasted the property dualist's view of irreducibility with Searle's and found that because Searle sees the irreducibility as a simple consequence of the way we define and use reduction, rather than the metaphysically more weighty concept employed by the property dualist, an interpretation of Biological Naturalism as a form of property dualism was unwarranted. I concluded chapter 5 with a discussion of whether Searle was entitled to hold such a view of irreducibility, given his other claims in Biological Naturalism. Specifically, I wanted to deal with the tension that exists between claiming that experiences have a first-person ontology, which I previously showed to be a similar claim to the standard dualist line, whilst also downgrading his irreducibility claim to something clearly distinct from, and less metaphysically substantial, than that of the property dualist. I employed the work of Howell and his notion that experiences need to be instantiated in order to be fully grasped to help explain how Searle deals with the difficult problem of fitting together first-personal experiences and third-personal brain states. I concluded that Searle is claiming that experiences just *are* certain brain states, with the proviso that they have to be instantiated in a subject in order for the experience to be grasped experientially by that subject. The idea that token experiences are just a particular way the brain is at a given time naturally leads onto the charge against Searle that he is some kind of identity theorist.

When considering whether Searle's Biological Naturalism is tantamount to identity theory, I thought it was very important to be clear exactly what identity theory does, and does not,

entail. I developed a view of identity, real identity, which does not include the reductive privileging which I believe to be inherent in traditional identity theory. My subsequent development of real identity theory was one of a neutral identity claim without any attached reduction. Having established what identity amounts to, I turned to Searle's theory and concluded that because of his vehement rejection of reductive approaches to experiences and his belief that they have a specifically first-person ontology, Biological Naturalism cannot be a form of traditional identity theory. However, when I compared Searle's position to that of real identity I found that substantial parallels could be drawn, such as reality not being exclusively objective. Looking again at Howell's theory of subjective physicalism, I compared Howell's idea of different aspects of properties to Searle's differing levels of description, that is, different ways of picking out a particular token brain state. I concluded that Biological Naturalism both can, and should, be seen as a form of real identity theory.

In order to consolidate this interpretation of Searle, I will revisit the original barriers to making sense of Biological Naturalism that I set out in chapter 2. In light of all the subsequent chapters I will set out the reasons I believe they should no longer be seen as obstacles, concluding that Searle's position is coherent.

2. Revisiting the barriers to making sense of Searle's Biological Naturalism

In order to show how my discussions have achieved my aim of making sense of Biological Naturalism, I will look again at the obstacles that many of Searle's readers find prevent them from fully understanding his position. In light of the work done in previous chapters I will now give my response to each of the worries.

a) Ontological irreducibility and first-person ontology, but the irreducibility is trivial

Searle's ontological irreducibility claim, although using the same language as that of the property dualist, is not of the same metaphysically substantive variety. By claiming that experiences are ontologically irreducible the property dualist means that mental properties have features which fundamentally exclude them from the physical realm. The essential subjectivity and qualitative feel of experiences are considered by dualists to justify a metaphysical divide between mental and physical features of the world, seeing mental properties as over and above any physical properties of the brain. This is completely contrary to Searle's view of irreducibility as being a mere inapplicability of our notion of reduction to experiences because of his belief that you cannot separate off the appearances of experiences

from any underlying reality. As Searle puts it, the ontological irreducibility of experiences is simply a ‘trivial consequence of our definitional practices’.²

However, the problem that remains is that Searle appears to be making a substantive point about the essential nature of experiences on one hand, with his claim that they have a first-person ontology, whilst on the other hand trying to avoid any substantial metaphysical consequences of a claim of irreducibility, with his construal of irreducibility as mere inapplicability. I think that understanding first-person ontology as being underpinned by a brute assertion that some brain states just are experiential when instantiated by a subject, first-person ontology becomes demystified enough to match the downgraded sense of inapplicable irreducibility. It becomes just the way things are, that certain brain states require being undergone by a subject in order for them to be fully grasped experientially by that subject, so almost by definition, they will not be able to be reduced to, that is said to be “nothing but”, objective properties which do not require any such instantiation for their nature to be fully understood. This can be seen as the origin of Searle’s claim that ‘the characteristic mistake in the study of consciousness is to ignore its essential subjectivity and to try to treat it as if it were an objective third person phenomenon’³ and why he believes that ‘a complete description of the third-person objective features of the brain would not be a description of its first-person subjective features.’⁴ Searle’s irreducibility claim, based on his notion of first-person ontology, is a claim of irreducibility without the metaphysical baggage.

b) Causal reduction and at the same time, ontological irreducibility

In order to make sense of Searle’s notion of causal reduction, we must again return to the idea that certain token brain states, ones which are occurring when a subject has an experience, can be brought under at least two different types; “experience X” and “neuronal activity Y”. Causal reduction amounts to the claim that the causal powers of that brain state are equally described by the experiential way of picking the state out, or the neuronal way. There is one set of causal powers, which can be picked out in two different ways.

I set out how for Searle, reduction is a process of carving off the surface features, the appearances of a phenomenon, and redefining that phenomenon in terms of the underlying causal processes. As I showed in the previous sub-section, Searle’s notion of ontological irreducibility amounts to the claim that given what the process of reduction is, at least as

² Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.84

³ Searle J. *The Problem of Consciousness*

⁴ Searle J. “Why I Am Not A Property Dualist” pp.60-61

Searle sees it, it is simply inapplicable to experiences. This is because Searle believes both that the appearance of an experience cannot be separated from any underlying reality, and that experiences require instantiation by a particular subject, and are therefore tied to a particular subject's point of view on the world.

At first glance, causal reduction and ontological irreducibility seem to be in competition with each other, for on the standard use of the terminology, experiences are *either* reducible or irreducible; the two terms are mutually exclusive. However, I think Searle's position is more nuanced than this, because of his non-standard understanding of ontological irreducibility. Searle states that,

‘The real contrast between such features as solidity and pains is that the causal reduction leads to an ontological reduction for physical features, but not for mental features. The first person ontology of mental reality makes it impossible to carry out the ontological reduction without losing the point of having the mental concepts’⁵

I take this to mean that whereas the essential features of physical phenomena can be captured at the lower level, the essential features of experiences, their subjectivity and qualitative nature, cannot be fully grasped except from the first-person point of view of a subject undergoing that particular experiential brain state. This picture is clearly not one where causal reduction and ontological irreducibility are polar opposite positions which are seen as mutually exclusive.

c) Experiences are caused by, *and* realised in, the brain

This problem arises because causation, as standardly used, involves separate phenomena ordered sequentially such that one causes the other, but realisation is a metaphysical relation where a certain type is realised by a particular token. I believe this tension is one of the easier ones to dispel once Searle's non-standard form of causation has been appreciated.

Searle proposes that where experiences are concerned, causation refers to a bottom-up, non-event style of causation where the lower-level features “cause” the higher level system level features simultaneously. Searle puts it like this,

‘Think of the solidity of the table. It is explained causally by the behaviour of the molecules of which the table is composed. But the solidity of the table is not an extra event; it is just a feature of the table. Such examples of non-event causation give us appropriate

⁵ Searle J. “Mental Causation, Conscious and Unconscious” p.172

models for understanding the relation between my present state of consciousness and the underlying neurobiological processes that cause it. Lower-level processes in the brain cause my present state of consciousness, but that state is not a separate entity from my brain; rather it is just a feature of my brain at the present time.’⁶

Searle has expanded the notion of causation beyond two separate events ordered sequentially. Non-event bottom up causation, as Searle puts it, seems very similar to the metaphysical instantiation that occurs in a realisation claim. Just as the type solidity can be realised by the rigid molecular structure of this table, so Searle claims that the rigid molecular structure of this table “causes” the solidity.

I therefore think that given Searle’s non-standard use of causation, which could be seen as tantamount to a realisation claim, to say that experiences are both caused by and realised in the brain translates to the claim that experiences are realised by, and realised by the brain, and hence the tension is dissolved.

d) Mental causation, but experiences have no causal powers over and above those of the neuronal activity in the brain

Searle’s view that experiences are particular token brain states, picked out under experiential or neuronal types is the key to understanding his solution to the problem of mental causation. A view of token identity like this will result in a single set of causal powers belonging to the brain state in question, which is occurring when a subject has a certain experience. Just as the brain state can be picked out in at least two ways, neuronally and experientially, so can the causal powers be. This means that there are not two sets of causal powers competing for which one caused a mental experience, which is the premise of the problem of mental causation. Overdetermination is not a problem, again for the reason that there are not separate mental and physical causes, just one set of causal powers differently described. Neither is epiphenomenalism a concern because an experience can be said to have just as many causal powers as the neuronal activity way of picking out the brain state, for they refer to the same causal powers.

I should note here that my contention that Searle is a real identity theorist, rather than a traditional reductive identity theorist can be seen in the equal status of either way of describing the causal powers of the brain state. Many solutions to the problem of mental causation collapse the mental causes *to* the physical causes. However, seeing Searle as a real

⁶ Searle J. *The Mystery of Consciousness* pp.7-8

identity theorist, who resists reduction of the mental to the physical, views the two characterisations of the causal powers on an equal footing. This means that Searle manages to solve the problem of mental causation without the need for reduction.

3. Making sense of Biological Naturalism

I believe that Biological Naturalism makes sense. Searle is presenting a view which is that of real identity theory, where an experience is just one way to pick out a particular token brain state occurring in a subject, and both the experiential and neuronal way of referring to the brain state are valid and informative characterisations of it.

Experiences have a first-person ontology in that a subject undergoes a qualitative experience when certain token brain states are instantiated. This is the sense in which an experience is just a state the brain can be in. It is the reason why experiences are subjective; because they need to be grasped experientially from the first-person point of view of the subject undergoing them. That is to say, experiences exist 'only as experienced by a human or animal subject'⁷.

Searle's notion that experiences are ontologically irreducible is meant in a trivial way meaning that reduction is simply inapplicable to experiences. The source of the inapplicability is the impossibility of separating the appearance from the reality where experiences are concerned, which is what Searle believes the process of reduction is. The appearances of an experience cannot be separated from any underlying reality because, claims Searle, the appearance of an experience, what it feels like for the subject undergoing it, is that experience's quiddity, so attempting to reduce it, that is, carve it off in favour of an underlying causal process, loses the very nature that was trying to be understood.

So, Searle's Biological Naturalism, as I have construed it, is a view that holds both token identity and irreducibility. I have called this view real identity theory. Experiences are irreducible to neuronal activity in the brain, but they are just a particular brain state occurring in a subject. If you wanted to reject a reductionist approach to experiences, but not slide all the way to dualism, then Biological Naturalism offers a position between the two. I think this is an important option in philosophy of mind, which is mostly overlooked in the literature, and deserves a lot more attention.

⁷ Searle J. *Mind: A Brief Introduction* p.94

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