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*The Rediscovery of the Mind.* JOHN SEARLE. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992. 270 p. Cloth \$22.50.

Everyone agrees that consciousness is a very special phenomenon, unique in several ways, but there is scant agreement on *just* how special it is, and whether or not an explanation of it can be accommodated within normal science. John Searle's view, defended with passion in this book, is highly idiosyncratic: what is special about consciousness is its "subjective ontology," *but* normal science can accommodate subjective ontology alongside (not within) its otherwise objective ontology. Once we clear away some widespread confusions about what science requires, and dismiss the misbegotten field of cognitive science that has been engendered by those confusions, the subjective ontology of the mind, he claims, will lose its aura of unacceptable mystery.

## I. SEARLE'S CHALLENGE

Searle sees himself as an iconoclast, waging lonely battle against "the tradition"—the "mainstream orthodoxy" of functionalistic materialism that has unjustly captured the flag of the scientific establishment. Unsullied common sense is his chief ally, and his frequent invocations of common sense and its endorsement of his views give the book a characteristic populist flavor. Recognizing, however, that common sense has had an embarrassing history of bowing to scientific revolution in the past, Searle is particularly intent to challenge the arguments that claim that functionalism (and its family of supporting doctrines) is nothing more than an application of standard scientific method to the phenomena of mind. He identifies seven propositions that compose the "foundations of modern materialism" (10–1), and undertakes to show that each of the seven is "at best, false." Here they are:

- (1) Where the scientific study of the mind is concerned, consciousness and its special features are of rather minor importance. . . . (2) Science is objective. (3) Because reality is objective, the best method in the study of the mind is to adopt the objective or third-person point of view. (4) From the third-person, objective point of view, the only answer to the epistemological question 'How would we know about the mental phenomena of another system?' is: We know by observing its *behavior*. (5) Intelligent behavior and causal relations to intelligent behavior are in some way the essence of the mental. . . . (6) Every fact in the universe is in principle knowable and understandable by human investigators. (7) The only things that exist are ultimately physical, *as the physical is traditionally conceived*, that is, as opposed to the mental.

I think he is almost exactly right about this foundational list. As a targeted representative of orthodoxy, I for one accept all seven propositions, with only one demurrer: I would insist, in a revision of (1), that consciousness, while of major importance, is an advanced or derived mental phenomenon, not the foundation of all intentionality, all mentality. Since I would insist that cognitive science is wise not to *start* with consciousness, I endorse the spirit of (1), as Searle's discussion (18–9) makes plain. So, aside from that revision of emphasis, I would say Searle has done a good job of identifying the enemy and its foundational assumptions. (I am also happy to accept his attempt at a cognitivist credo of sorts on 197–8.)

Searle has discovered that the whole cognitivist enterprise "hangs together," thanks to a lot of detailed supporting arguments, some of them counterintuitive, others quite generally accepted. He realizes that, if he is going to have any hope of defeating the parts of it he is

dead set against, he is going to have to attack it root and branch. The central doctrine of cognitive science is that there is a level of analysis, the information-processing level (there may be more than one, depending on how we count), intermediate between the phenomenological level (the personal level, or the level of consciousness) and the neurophysiological level. Searle sees that his position requires that this central doctrine be entirely and hopelessly mistaken. "There are brute, blind neurophysiological processes and there is consciousness, but there is nothing else" (228).

Cognitive science has had twenty years or so to hammer out its enabling assumptions, and allowing for a good measure of overstatement and misunderstanding, it has actually got its act together pretty well by now. So Searle has a monumental task. It *all* has to come tumbling down, or it will not budge. Attacking such a well-fortified tower of prevailing wisdom is not a job for the faint-hearted, but Searle has never lacked for confidence in the clarity and truth of his own vision. Indeed, his supreme self-confidence is the one fixed point that emerges from the shifting interpretations of the intentions that are suggested by what he has written, as we shall see.

People are not, in general, daft. This obvious fact gives Searle pause. He frequently expresses his astonishment that the other side could endorse such monumentally silly doctrines, but that is just what his analyses tell him, so he calls them as he sees them. "If I am right, we have been making some stunning mistakes" (246). He used to stop there, but in this book there has been a subtle but important change in his meta-opinion: "How is it that so many philosophers and cognitive scientists can say so many things that, *to me at least* [my emphasis], seem obviously false" (3)? Searle may find it a bizarre sociological fact that his common sense is not everybody's, but now he bows to that fact and thus accepts the burden of proof (however misplaced in the eyes of eternity) of showing that his "obvious facts" are so much as true. This is progress.

Here is the nub of Searle's case: "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" (20). He goes on: "The subjectivist ontology of the mental seems intolerable. It seems intolerable metaphysically that there should be irreducibly subjective, 'private' entities in the world, and intolerable epistemologically that there should be an asymmetry between the way that each person knows of his or her inner mental phenomena and the way that others from outside know of them" (21). Just so, but Searle calls this realization a crisis. Orthodoxy (or at least my version of it) says the crisis is not

really so bad, since the vaunted "essential" and "irreducible" subjectivity of consciousness dissolves under analysis. We can have our consciousness and objective science, too—at the cost of some initially disorienting counterintuitiveness. Searle claims, on the contrary, that we can have consciousness and common sense, too.

There is no denying that, at the outset, common sense is on Searle's side. It does seem just crashingly obvious that no gradualist bridge could be built between the intimate world each of us encounters in his own subjectivity and the alien, inscrutable world of billions of brain processes going on in our skulls. In the past, Searle's defense of his home truths has concentrated on trying to demonstrate the absurdities of the alternative positions, and he reiterates and elaborates these negative arguments here, but now he has also taken on the task of evincing in some detail the positive implications of his view and defending them. This is valuable. Self-exposure to rebuttal is generally more accurate than imputed exposure, which always invites the charge of uncharitable interpretation. In the course of making his positive case, Searle resolutely catalogues some of its rather costly implications, which I should think will seriously diminish the allure of an initial allegiance to his version of common sense.

#### II. SEARLE'S POSITIVE ACCOUNT

First there is the metaphysical extravagance (at best just peculiarity or at worse incoherence) of subjective ontology. Searle's use of this term is unprecedented and unobvious, and he never tells us just what he means by ontology, beyond distinguishing it vehemently from epistemology, but we can see why he feels constrained to use such a curious expression. He wants to insist that the subjectivity of the mental is not merely an epistemological fact—*e.g.*, a fact about how others cannot know what I can know about what is going on in my mind—but he cannot permit himself to say that it is simply an objective fact that each mind is a locus of subjectivity, for that would play right into the hands of those who champion the third-person point of view. The objective facts about someone's subjectivity are precisely the subject matter of what I call heterophenomenology—phenomenology from the third-person point of view—and Searle cannot accept that such an investigation could, in principle, exhaustively account for what is the case. Consciousness is more special than that, on his view, and hence cannot be just one more bit of objective ontology, the objective phenomenon of subjectivity loci scattered about in the world. That is why the so-called subjectivity of a robot, which has a limited and potentially mistaken fund of information about its environment, could not be *real* subjectivity, in

Searle's view, since this is manifestly an objective phenomenon, readily and exhaustively investigatable from the objective point of view.

Part of Searle's attempt to make a comfortable home for this unique doctrine is a thought experiment that is so central to his argument that I must present it at length.

Imagine that your brain starts to deteriorate in such a way that you are slowly going blind. Imagine that the desperate doctors, anxious to alleviate your condition, try any method to restore your vision. As a last resort, they try plugging silicon chips into your visual cortex. Imagine that to your amazement and theirs [not mine!—DCD], it turns out that the silicon chips restore your vision to its normal state. Now, imagine further that your brain, depressingly, continues to deteriorate and the doctors continue to implant more silicon chips. You can see where the thought experiment is going already: in the end, we imagine that your brain is entirely replaced by silicon chips. . . . In such a situation there would be various possibilities. One logical possibility, not to be excluded on any a priori grounds alone, is surely this: you continue to have all of the sorts of thoughts, experiences, memories, etc., that you had previously; the sequence of your mental life remains unaffected (65–6).

Searle finds this prospect “empirically absurd” but still a logical possibility, and goes on to consider other possibilities.

A second possibility . . . is this: as the silicon is progressively implanted into your dwindling brain, you find that the area of your conscious experience is shrinking, but that this shows no effect on your external behavior. You find, to your total amazement, that you are indeed losing control of your external behavior. . . . [You have become blind, but] you hear your voice saying in a way that is completely out of your control “I see a red object in front of me.” . . . It is important in these thought experiments that you should always think of it from the first-person point of view. Ask yourself, ‘What would it be like for me?’ and you will see that it is perfectly conceivable for you to imagine that your external behavior remains the same, but that your internal conscious thought processes gradually shrink to zero. From the outside, it seems to observers that you are doing just fine, but from the inside you are gradually dying.

In a third variation, “we imagine that the progressive implantation of the silicon chips produces no change in your mental life, but you are progressively more and more unable to put your thoughts, feelings and intentions into action.” Your body becomes paralyzed and the doctors, to your conscious horror, decide to give you up for dead (67). Searle never explicitly says that these “see variations

exhaust the relevant possibilities, but he implies it in his discussion: "The point of these three variations . . . is to illustrate the *causal* relationships between brain processes, mental processes, and externally observable behavior" (68). When he goes on to analyze the second variation, he egregiously misdescribes its contribution. He says:

In the second case, we imagined that the mediating relationship between the mind and the behavior patterns was broken. In this case, *the silicon chips did not duplicate the causal powers of the brain to produce conscious mental states* [my emphasis], they only duplicated certain input-output functions of the brain. The underlying conscious mental life was left out (68).

But that is only one of the logically possible interpretations of his second variation, by Searle's own lights. The other is the crucial one: while *you* (remember, you are to imagine this from the first-person point of view) are dying, *another* consciousness is taking over your body. The speech acts you faintly hear your body uttering are not yours, but they are also not nobody's! They are the speech acts of a new consciousness, remarkably willing to call itself by your name and recall your memories, exploit your skills, etc., but just not you. This is surely logically possible, for it is simply a reminder of Searle's first logically possible variation: a silicon consciousness is possible—in this case it just is not you.

So the crucial claim of Searle's that I italicized above is a non sequitur. The second variation does not "illustrate" what he says it does. If the "underlying conscious mental life" was "left out" it is only because Searle's insistence on the first-person point of view encouraged you to overlook the possibility. Maybe the silicon chips duplicated the causal powers to produce consciousness and maybe they did not. The problem with this 'maybe'—and this goes to the heart of Searle's attempt to "naturalize" subjective ontology—is that Searle has left us no resources at all with which to investigate it. It is presumably a mind-bogglingly important matter whether there are two consciousnesses associated with this body or just one, but neither objective neurophysiology (united with objective siliconology) nor *your* first-person point of view can shed any light at all on whether there is, or is not, another "subjective ontology" created by the second variation. Of course, from the point of view of the doctors, there would never be any way at all of distinguishing the first variation from the second variation—that is something that only you could ever know about, and you could never communicate it! It is

only by ignoring these implications that Searle can say that the "irreducibility" of consciousness, with its subjective ontology, "has no untoward scientific consequences whatever" (124).

I find myself in Searle's predicament here. I cannot see how Searle could simply have overlooked this gaping loophole in his thought experiment. But there it is. Suppose I am flat wrong; suppose he has seen this *apparent* loophole and has decisively refuted it on many occasions. How then can he resist sharing this refutation with his readers, since it would counter such an obvious move for the opposition to make? I am baffled.

A second hard-to-swallow feature of Searle's positive view is the *connection principle*: "all unconscious intentional states are in principle accessible to consciousness" (156). For instance, I have not forgotten what my boyhood home looks like, though I very seldom think about it, and during the times when I am not consciously thinking about it, some state of my brain keeps the memory alive (or amenable to resurrection). This state of my brain is *about* my boyhood home—it has intentionality—and the connection principle requires that no state of my brain could be about anything unless its intentional content were in principle directly experienceable by me. (This is because only a conscious state could have the "aspectual shape" that is the hallmark of intentionality—but so far as I can see, the aspectual shape of an intentional state is what other theorists might call the description under which it is appreciated in consciousness, and I do not see that Searle has given good reasons for ruling out unconscious descriptions.) The main task of the connection principle is to rule out the wide variety of intentionalistic formulations ubiquitous in cognitive science. Noam Chomsky has said there is something in the brain (something like a rule or a principle) that is *about* possible grammars, and David Marr has said there is something in the brain (something like a primal sketch) that is *of* an object in the visible world, but when these theorists go on to insist, as they do, that these so-called representations in my brain are not recoverable by me in the manner of the memory of my boyhood home, they are talking nonsense. The mere "as if" intentionality of such so-called representational states is a hoax at worst, a metaphor at best. It is neither necessary nor illuminating to characterize any such intermediate states or processes in intentional terms. (It is crucial to Searle to erect an absolute barrier here—no way can you pile up "as if" intentionality until it amounts to the real thing! Perhaps that is why he likes to concentrate on the simplest, most trivial cases from cognitive science, such as the Ponzo illusion [231ff]—because in such cases there is less imaginative tug in the direction of the pile.)

There are curiosities about Searle's positive arguments in defense of the connection principle, but setting those aside, consider one of its more awkward implications. For Searle, "[c]onsciousness is an on/off switch; a system is either conscious or not" (83), and we do not yet know where to draw the line as we descend the phylogenetic scale: "I have no idea whether fleas, grasshoppers, crabs, or snails are conscious" (74). He wants to leave these questions to the neurophysiologists, who will explore them by looking for evidence of "mechanical-like tropisms to account for apparently goal-directed behavior in organisms that lacked consciousness" (75). Now, suppose that the neurophysiologists find it tempting to describe the "mechanical-like tropisms" in some spider in intentional terms: "State *A* of the spider's nervous system represents the location of the fly in the web, and state *B* represents the best route, and state *C* represents the second-best route to the fly" (or something like that). Is this real intentionality or mere *as if* intentionality? For Searle there can be no middle ground; spiders could not be held to be "sort of" conscious. If spiders are conscious, the neurophysiologists can succumb to the temptation with equanimity; these spider-brain states really are intentional states. If spiders are not, the neurophysiologists are committing the cardinal sin of cognitive science. How are they supposed to know which they are doing?

In fending off this embarrassing question, Searle must go to remarkable lengths to deny that it could ever be reasonable to give an intentionalistic or representational interpretation of a "mechanical-like" feature of a nervous system. He grants that there is a "functional" story to be told, for instance, about how the brain arrives at depth or distance judgments. "*But there is no mental content whatever at this functional level*" (234, Searle's emphasis). He then puts to himself the following quite reasonable retort from the cognitive scientists: "the distinction does not really make much difference to cognitive science. We continue to say what we have always said and do what we have always done, we simply substitute the word 'functional' for the word 'mental' in these cases." To answer this, he is obliged to maintain that not only is there no information-processing level of explanation for the brain, there is also really no "functional level" of explanation in biology: "To put the point bluntly, in addition to its various causal relations, the heart does not have any functions. When we speak of its functions, we are talking about those of its causal relations to which we attach some *normative* importance" (238). Now, I have often been viewed somewhat askance for suggesting that *in some regards* functionality is in the eye of the be-

holder.<sup>1</sup> Searle has gone me one better, because he has forsworn the possibility of an intermediate position; there are only brute facts and brute falsehoods for Searle. So, while he and I are in agreement that the intentional level combines "the causal with the normative," he must go on to assert that "the actual facts of intentionality contain normative elements, but where functional explanations are concerned, the only *facts* are brute, blind physical facts and the only norms are in us and exist only from our point of view" (238). It turns out, then, that function-talk in biology, like mere "as if" intentionality-talk, is not to be taken seriously. Only artifacts made by genuine, conscious human artificers have *real* functions! Airplane wings are really for flying, but eagles' wings are not; if one biologist says they are adaptations for flying and another says they are merely display racks for decorative feathers, there is no sense in which one biologist is closer to the truth. If, on the other hand, we ask the aeronautical engineers whether the airplane wings they designed are for keeping the plane aloft or for displaying the insignia of the airline, they can tell us a brute fact.

I should mention that Searle devotes a considerable portion of the positive side of his book to developing his theses about what he calls the *background* and the *network*, and the relation he sees between these. These passages are often interesting, but I could not see that the details were anything other than a restatement in somewhat novel (but not improved) terms of familiar facts about consciousness, duly recognized by earlier theorists. They raise some difficulties for Searle's own view, which he solves, but I could find no salient challenges to "orthodox" functionalism among any of them.

### III. SEARLE'S VIEW OF THE OPPOSITION

As I said at the outset, Searle sees that his view is not just a minor disagreement with one feature of this orthodoxy; he must declare the opposition to be wrong from the ground up. Faced with the difficulty of finding common ground from which to launch non-question-begging arguments for such a revolutionary proposal (8-9), Searle recognizes that he must mount a less direct campaign. In chapter two, he presents a diagnosis of the historical path to error, from behaviorism and the early formulations of the identity theory, through various forms of functionalism and eliminative materialism, more or less up to the present state of play. This is a promising tactic

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: MIT, 1987), pp. 269-86, 314-21.

under the circumstances. If he can show that he is an acute and sympathetic interpreter of the processes of thought that have led to the impasse, we shall 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.

This makes sympathetic interpretation difficult. On numerous occasions, he *seems* to be willfully ignoring the best interpretation of his opponents, *seems* to be willfully oblivious of well-known arguments in the literature. The intentional-stance reasoning supporting this appearance is straightforward. For instance, *surely* Searle

- (a) is acquainted with the many arguments against the coherence of the inverted-spectrum case (43);
- (b) knows that Ruth Millikan's position is not refuted by such a simple objection (50);
- (c) is familiar with David Rosenthal's improvement on the Wittgensteinian position he dismisses so abruptly (146, and in a different regard, 171);
- (d) has encountered and understood at least a few of the subtleties in Donald Davidson's discussions of self-deception (148);
- (e) has not forgotten how John Haugeland's discussion of these issues obviates his claims (203–5).

If these premises are true, one reasons, he must be deliberately ignoring these points, confident that his lay readers will be none the wiser. Either that or worse: he actually intends to express contempt for these authors—as if to say “their objections to my position are so ludicrous they are not worth even mentioning.” There are other cases to consider. For instance, can Searle seriously believe that the mere fact that someone else can know better than I whether I am “jealous, angry, or feeling generous” (145) scores a hit against any actually maintained doctrine of incorrigibility? This looks like deliberate misdirection of the lay reader.

But there is also evidence against this interpretation. To me, the most persuasive evidence is that he treats friend and foe alike. Would a deliberate distorter treat his fellow critics of cognitive science as cavalierly as Searle treats Saul Kripke (38–40), Thomas Nagel (100–3), Colin McGinn (104–5), and Ned Block (163–4)? I have my own disagreements with each of these authors, but I would not endorse any of Searle's accounts of what is wrong with them. It was a refreshing experience to feel such sympathy for them, as well

as for my worthy opponents within the "orthodox" tradition: Paul Churchland (46–7), Jerry Fodor (50), and Chomsky (242–5)—to say nothing of poor Sigmund Freud (151–2).

So we should look for some way to block the reasoning that seemed so persuasive, by denying premises (a–e) and their kin. The hypothesis that Searle has actually not read the literature he purports to criticize can be rejected out of hand. Is it possible that although Searle has at one time or another read all the literature, and understood it at the time, he has actually forgotten the subtle details, and (given his supreme self-confidence) not bothered to check his memory? For instance, has he simply forgotten that what he calls his *reductio ad absurdum* of my position (81) is a version of an argument I myself composed and rebutted a dozen years ago?<sup>2</sup> There is evidence of extreme forgetfulness right within the book. For instance, he poses an excellent question and answer on page 32, and promises "[l]ater on I will show that both the question and the answer are incoherent," but I can find nowhere in the later pages where he does anything that I can construe as even attempting to make good on this promise.

More substantively, it is utterly central to his discussion of his thought experiment about silicon-chip implants, as we saw, that apparently intelligent *behavior* has no conclusive or even probative bearing on whether an entity is conscious. A "zombie" who perfectly fools the doctors (or Turing testers) into thinking it is conscious must be a genuine possibility for Searle. But he forgets all this (apparently!) when forty pages later (107) he sets out to explain the evolutionary advantage of consciousness, which, he says "serves to organize a certain set of relationships between the organism and both its environment and its own states": consciousness, he says, "gives us much greater powers of discrimination than unconscious mechanisms would have. . . . The hypothesis I am suggesting then is that one of the evolutionary advantages conferred on us by consciousness is the much greater flexibility, sensitivity, and creativity we derive from being conscious" (109). If that is true, it actually favors my alternative reading of the second variation. You yourself should reason: since my body continues to exhibit the "flexibility, sensitivity and creativity" that I always used to exhibit, odds are there is a silicon consciousness providing these benefits! These passages on evolution flatly contradict his earlier insistence that consciousness is entirely independent of "control powers," and revoke

<sup>2</sup> "True Believers," in A. F. Heath, ed., *Scientific Explanation* (New York: Oxford, 1981), pp. 53–75; see esp. pp. 61–2.

his denial of orthodox claims (4) and (5) above, so the principle of charity leaves the hypothesis of forgetfulness the only refuge.

But is such extreme forgetfulness all by itself really plausible? There is yet another possible interpretation. At several points, Searle insists he has done his level best to interpret his opponents; we might try taking him at his word. Perhaps his bull-in-the-china-shop routine is not a policy, and not the result of forgetfulness, but a necessity. Perhaps when he attempts to see what an author is going on about, he translates what he reads into the only terms he can understand—one comic-book version or another. 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.

The superficially implausible hypothesis that Searle has been unable to entertain the sophisticated versions of his opponents' views is helped along by noting that someone who, like Searle, *begins* with the firm conviction that these matters are black-and-white, on-or-off, yes-or-no, is going to be constitutionally unsympathetic toward, and hence impatient with, those who announce they have rather intricate arguments in support of intermediate positions. It takes some genuine effort to suspend disbelief, and Searle admits to having had to work hard at taking seriously the views he is attacking. I know only too well how hard it is to curb my own impatience with those who set out on what seem to me to be manifestly bootless exercises in subtlety. If Searle is guilty of colossal impatience, he is only exhibiting in extreme form a failing we all share to one degree or another.

Finally, of course, we could try to take seriously the humbling possibility that Searle has actually underestimated the size of his Herculean task; he is simply right—and the rest of us are so hopelessly in the grip of the pseudo-sophisticated confusions he imputes to us that we are *still* unable to get our heads around the simple truths of which he is trying to remind us. It can hardly be credited that it was Searle's intention to leave his philosophical targets with no agreeable alternative to the thesis that we are so disabled. Nevertheless, we could try to maintain this well-nigh-incredible (to us, of course!) prospect as a working hypothesis. In fact, I have attempted this. I have reasoned that, if he really were right, when I turned to his positive arguments from as neutral a perspective as I could muster, I would find it surprisingly difficult to find any plausible diagnoses of fallacious argument or overlooked possibilities on his part. But I do find apparent contradictions and major gaps in that posi-

tive account—I noted some of them in the previous section—so I can breathe easily.

In the end, I find I have no strong opinion on which of the remaining interpretations of Searle is the truth (or what proportions of truth lie in each of them). And it is a welcome implication of my own view that although all of these patterns can be considered real up to a point,<sup>3</sup> there may be no deeper fact of the matter about what Searle *really* believes about the arguments of his colleagues. From his own first-person point of view, however, he may know better (or at least think he does). If so, there will be occasions for him to attempt to communicate that plain truth to us.

What, then, of the challenge from common sense with which we—and Searle—began? Such a powerful hunch does not fall to the ground just because one philosopher fails to provide any support for it. I wish I were in a position to say, “If this is the best that the defenders of ‘intrinsic subjectivity’ can do, then this particular aspect of common sense is history,” but I have no faith in the antecedent. I expect that others, perhaps inspired by Searle’s campaign, will come along with better, more responsible arguments; it is still too early for the “orthodox” to declare victory.

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<sup>3</sup> See “Real Patterns,” this JOURNAL, LXXXVIII, 1 (January 1991): 27–51.