

NATURALISM, PANPSYCHISM, AND FUNCTIONALISM

Maxwell MacDonald Pond

A thesis submitted to the  
Department of Philosophy  
Mount Allison University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Bachelor of Arts degree with Honours

April 21, 2020



## Table of Contents

Preface.....	iv
Chapter 1.....	6
1. Introduction.....	6
2. Philosophical Naturalism.....	8
3. Strawson’s Naturalism.....	11
4. Strawson on the Mental.....	17
5. Dennett’s Naturalism.....	20
6. Dennett’s ‘Stances’.....	24
7. The Nature of the Dispute.....	27
8. Conclusion.....	29
Chapter 2.....	33
1. Introduction.....	33
2. A Substantive Naturalism.....	35
3. The Stuff of the World.....	37
4. Radical Emergence.....	44
5. Reductionism.....	48
6. An Alternative View: Quining Qualia.....	53
7. Conclusion.....	57
Chapter 3.....	58
1. Introduction.....	58
2. Liberal and Restrictive Naturalism.....	58
3. The Mental as Natural.....	67
4. Liberal Naturalism and the Mark of the Mental.....	77
5. Conclusion.....	80
References.....	82

## Preface

Naturalism in the philosophy of mind—and in philosophy generally—covers quite a wide range of ideas and commitments. This thesis had its genesis in the problems that arise when we ask what it concretely means to hold a naturalistic position in the philosophy of mind. Given the differing conceptions of naturalism that are put forward in the philosophy of mind, we might ask what substantively differentiates a naturalistic position from a non-naturalistic one. To put it roughly, the purpose of this thesis is to inquire into what it means to operate in a naturalistic framework and to evaluate two broad trends I see in naturalistic frameworks put forward in the philosophy of mind.

This thesis has three chapters. In the first, I broadly outline and explicate the naturalistic frameworks of Galen Strawson and Daniel Dennett. Both claim to operate according to the dictates of naturalism but have radically different accounts of the mental (that is, the category that includes such things as ‘experience’, ‘belief’, ‘understanding’, etc.) and consciousness or experience (which I use interchangeably). This chapter serves to survey two, mutually exclusive approaches to and accounts of the mental. Its purpose is both to highlight some of the ways in which the mental is accounted for and to display the points of departure that lead to those accounts. It also serves to outline two distinct kinds of naturalism, what I will ultimately call *liberal* and *restrictive* naturalism, as described by Hillary Putnam and John McDowell, for example. In this chapter, I also introduce a number of problems in the philosophy of mind that I revisit in the subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 2, I critically analyze the positions put forward by Strawson and Dennett by evaluating the plausibility of panpsychism—which Strawson accepts—versus functionalism/behaviourism—which, in a special form to be discussed in this thesis, Dennett

accepts. I characterize what I think a substantive naturalism consists in and then argue that panpsychism falls well within its range. I then argue, in part through considering a number of problems in the philosophy of mind (notably radical emergence and reductionism) that panpsychism provides the most felicitous framework for approaching and accounting for the mental. I also consider Dennett's alternative proposal for accounting for mental terms within a particular kind of materialist worldview, though I argue that it does not adequately deal with a number of concrete problems that arise.

In the last chapter, I characterize the two naturalistic systems of Strawson and Dennett in terms of *liberal* and *restrictive* naturalism, respectively, focusing on the former. Put simply, liberal naturalists wish to maintain the integrity of the concepts in what Wilfrid Sellars called the 'manifest image': the concepts of the mental outlined (not exclusively) above. Restrictive naturalists do not handle these categories in a way that would satisfy the liberal naturalist, since their program, broadly speaking, is characterized by the effort to reduce the concepts of the space of reasons into the space of causes. I argue in favour of a liberal naturalist approach in the philosophy of mind and demonstrate that the kind of reductionism that is popular in the philosophy of mind is neither possible nor auspicious for our understanding of the mental. To this end, I also show how I think we might be able to take some of Strawson's insights regarding panpsychism as a way to provide support for the idea that the concepts of the mental can be dealt with on their own merits rather than simply accounting for them behaviouristically.

I would also like to express a brief word of thanks to the Department of Philosophy for their support over the last years. Special thanks also to my supervisor, Dr. Robbie Moser.

## Chapter 1

### 1. *Introduction*

In the philosophy of mind, it is popular to claim that one is a naturalist. Although this claim is often made to invoke a scientific sentiment and thereby to add legitimacy to one's conception of consciousness/the mental,<sup>1</sup> it means nothing until we have a substantive conception of what 'naturalism' means. There are incompatible positions in the philosophy of mind (and related areas, such as the philosophy of language) that claim to be naturalistic, and there is no self-correcting, essential mechanism that resolves these disputes between competing naturalistic positions. When faced with this problem, we might ask: What does it mean, then, to be a naturalist or to hold a philosophical position that is categorically naturalistic?

Naturalism is usually broken down into two tenets, *ontological* naturalism and *methodological* naturalism, although there are numerous ways in which naturalism is defined and delineated—what it precisely means to hold a characteristically naturalistic position in the philosophy of mind is an open question for many self-proclaimed naturalist philosophers (see Papineau 2015).<sup>2</sup> Ontological naturalism says that there is only one world—the natural world—and thus one need not posit any other ontological commitments. This tenet of naturalism would

---

<sup>1</sup> I will use 'consciousness' and the 'mental' more or less synonymously, distinguishing them where appropriate. As a general statement, however, by the 'mental' I mean any number of terms that fall under this descriptive category (Chomsky 2000, 75). By 'consciousness', I mean experience, broadly construed. There is thus some overlap between the two terms. In my thesis, I wish to explore how these aspects of the world are approached and accounted for. I am interested in how differing conclusions about the mental are best understood in terms of differing conceptions of naturalism and, furthermore, how these differing conceptions of naturalism constitute different points of departure—which thus influence the conclusions about the mental/consciousness themselves. This is a topic that I deal with extensively in Chapter 3, where I draw on the work of John McDowell and what he calls *restrictive* and *liberal* naturalism. By the former, McDowell means, roughly, a naturalism that places primacy on what Wilfrid Sellars called the "space of causes"; by the latter, he means a naturalism that seeks to preserve what Sellars called the "space of reasons." I will ultimately argue that the latter naturalism is an appropriate framework for sound inquiry into issues in philosophy of mind.

<sup>2</sup> David Papineau breaks down the two varieties of naturalism into ontological and metaphysical naturalism, although there are other ways in which to break down different sorts of naturalisms. For instance, Thomas Baldwin distinguishes between *metaphysical* and *epistemic* naturalism (Baldwin 1993, 172; found in Chomsky 2000, 79).

definitionally rule out anything supernatural or otherwise non-natural. And if our conception of the natural world cannot assimilate new phenomena that comes to light, then this conception of the natural world must change.

Methodological naturalism is often used to describe a commitment to remain consistent with the sciences, that is, to refrain from deviating from contemporary scientific inquiry. This is something to which I will return in the Chapters 2 and 3, for, although I think that it is reasonable to say that there is a sense in which philosophy is continuous with the sciences, I do not think that this entails the idea that philosophical inquiry must accept science as it is.<sup>3</sup>

It is a significant fact that one's interpretation of what it means to hold a naturalistic position—and thus what it means to remain consistent with methodological naturalism—depends upon what one thinks it means to be a naturalist in the first sense (i.e. ontological naturalism, which is concerned with the nature of the world). For if one thinks that  $x$  is a fundamental constituent of the world, then one's theories and models will reflect this in their structure and vocabulary—as well as what will be accepted as a viable account (i.e. one that maintains the integrity of  $x$  or incorporates it in an important sense in the theory or model itself). Now, it is for this reason that some philosophers who maintain that they are naturalists are keen to note that their naturalism is not unreservedly scientistic—it could be the case that contemporary science is off track. Others do take a scientistic approach and say that the vocabulary of the sciences is what a thoroughgoing naturalism requires; terms that fall outside of a scientific vocabulary are thus dealt with in such a way that they can be reduced to the scientific vocabulary or do not interfere with the integrity thereof. This commitment leads to such things as reductionism or

---

<sup>3</sup> This commitment is one of the features that distinguishes *liberal* naturalism from *restrictive* naturalism, two frameworks that I will discuss in detail in Chapter 3.

eliminativism, where traditional mental terms are reduced to a different vocabulary or are eliminated entirely.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to outline two conceptions of the mind—i.e. accounts of the mental—articulated by Galen Strawson and Daniel Dennett, who both maintain that their approaches to and accounts of the mental are thoroughly naturalistic. I will not critically evaluate either account in this chapter; instead, their theories will simply serve as examples of two opposing, so-called naturalistic accounts of the mental, which will also motivate some of the philosophical problems that I will address in Chapters 2 and 3. Such questions include: (1) whether reductionism in the philosophy of mind is the proper route of sound naturalistic inquiry and (2) what role (if any) traditional mental categories play in a naturalistic account of the mental.

## 2. *Philosophical Naturalism*

As I mentioned, ‘naturalism’ is not particularly well-defined, even if there are a few boundaries that most self-described naturalists agree upon. Broadly, they deny the existence of anything supernatural or otherwise non-natural. Since the tension between incompatible conceptions of the mind that claim to be naturalistic stems from the interpretation of the two aforementioned tenets of naturalism, it is useful to spell out these tenets in more detail.

---

<sup>4</sup> There is a special kind of reductionism espoused by Dennett, where he takes traditional mental categories and says that they do not play a role in an account of consciousness. One might say that he takes a kind of dualist approach, where mental categories are dealt with *behaviourally*, not as a natural object of scientific and philosophical inquiry. These categories have a role in our interactions with others, but they do not have anything to do with consciousness (given his framework for dealing with the nature of consciousness: functionalism/behaviourism). I say that this is a kind of reductionism because Dennett wants to say that traditional mental categories do not have a place in an account of the mental, which is precisely what reductionists want to say—for they want to reduce the mental or experiential to the non-mental, etc. Dennett does not eliminate these terms, however; he still wants to maintain them, but he does so in such a way that would not be satisfying to, say, a neo-Cartesian like Strawson who wants to maintain the integrity of mental categories as they are.

The methodological naturalist position holds that questions of philosophical concern (those questions that are not strictly speaking dealt with by the sciences) should nonetheless be dealt with in a way that is consistent with the assumptions and standards that would comprise an inquiry into any other natural object or phenomena. To give a simple example: When inquiring into questions in the philosophy of mind regarding the nature of cognitive development, making exclusive reference to either genetic factors or environmental factors that enter into cognitive development breaks with methodological naturalism. When inquiry is undertaken in the sciences regarding the development of an organism, both genetic factors and environmental factors are taken into account. The point is simply that the same sorts of standards ought to guide philosophical inquiry as well. The mental is simply an aspect of the natural world, and it is therefore erroneous to assume different standards and assumptions of inquiry than would comprise an inquiry into some physical phenomenon like the nature of the development and functioning of a bodily organ (Chomsky 2000, 81). Similarly, in a philosophical context where one is inquiring into the nature of how states of knowledge are achieved, then not only *experience* but also *conceptual structures* need to be incorporated into one's account.

The methodological naturalist principle stems from the assumption that the object (or objects) under investigation is (or are) natural—insofar as one maintains that one is dealing with a natural object in the world, the methodological naturalist principle logically follows. Breaking with methodological naturalism would imply that the thing under investigation is, in an important sense, not natural, or that it is not amenable to the kind of inquiry suitable for an object of the sciences—and it is precisely this point that naturalists rule out. There may be pseudo-questions, but any well-formed question about the natural world can in principle be investigated—though perhaps not immediately solved, given our own cognitive limitations and

theoretical constructs available to us. Different methods may be employed in moral psychology and biochemistry, but this is not because one of these two realms deals with something supernatural and would thus require radically different standards and assumptions to enter into their respective investigations. Inquiry into biological phenomena and chemical phenomena may use different methods and models, but the important point here is that the standards of inquiry are not radically different. We would not, for instance, make reference to some supernatural entity to do the explanatory work that we need.

Another component of philosophical naturalism is the view that the natural world is all that exists—one need not posit any other ontological commitments in an investigation of natural phenomena. This tenet of naturalism is also a source of a great degree of disagreement. Naturalists agree that the natural world is all that exists, but they disagree about the nature of the world and hence what this tenet of naturalism concretely entails. Moreover, and relatedly, one's conception of scientific practice, as well as one's picture of nature, influences one's investigations and, ultimately, one's conception of the mental.

Both Strawson and Dennett maintain that they operate within a naturalistic framework (See Strawson 2012, 126 and Dennett 1991, 40). But it is precisely the picture of nature and the question of what it means to be a naturalist that are at stake in the debate between them; both of their positions of these issues bleed into their work, including their respective accounts of the mental. Dennett is eliminativist/reductionist<sup>5</sup> about conscious experience—the experience of

---

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes Dennett seems to be a reductionist and sometimes an eliminativist about consciousness. When I say that Dennett is an eliminativist, I mean that Dennett proposes that conscious experience is an utter illusion: It is not as things seem, and thus it is illusory if what one means by 'conscious experience' what is normally meant, namely, an experiential what-it-is-like-ness. When I say that Dennett is a reductionist, I wish to draw attention to the fact that Dennett also proposes that consciousness experience is a relevant property to attribute, in some circumstances, to an agent. Still, Dennett maintains that an appropriate account of consciousness will not include such notions as *experience*, since an account of consciousness is appropriate at the *physical stance*, and notions like experience have a home only at the intentional stance. I discuss this further in Section 6.

seeing red or the experience of pain, i.e. qualia—whereas Strawson is not. Dennett’s framework is functionalist/neo-behaviourist, in that mental categories like ‘experience’ are dealt with as behavioural terms that do not enter into a naturalized account of the mental. By contrast, Strawson’s framework is neo-Cartesian, for he is a realist about conscious experience and maintains that conscious experience needs to be explained naturalistically in its own terms (Strawson 2012, 134–35, 154). By contrast, Dennett often attempts to reduce conscious reality to the non-conscious or to the behavioural because, he claims, conscious experience is ultimately illusory—it does not play a central role in an explanation of the nature of the mental (Schuessler 2013, para 14; quoted in Strawson 2018, para 35).

### 3. *Strawson’s Naturalism*

Strawson accepts both tenets of philosophical naturalism, although he interprets them differently than Dennett does. Concerning the first, Strawson denies the “existence of anything [...] supernatural or otherwise non-natural” (Strawson 2012, 126). However, Strawson notes, correctly, that this is un-insightful until one gives a “substantive conception of the natural” such that there is a criterion for determining whether something is natural or not (Strawson 2012, 126). To this, Strawson replies that the natural world is wholly physical—but ‘physical’ is a natural-kind term, and we may be wrong about its nature (Strawson 2003, 43). I will return to this. Strawson also accepts the second tenet as “the view that enquiry into the [...] nature of concrete reality should always proceed so far as possible in accord with the methods of the natural sciences” (2012, 126). I will here draw out how these two components of philosophical naturalism figure in Strawson’s conception of the mental.

Strawson’s investigation of the mental is deeply informed by his interpretation of the first component of philosophical naturalism, namely, the view that the natural world is all that exists.

One of Strawson's main philosophical endeavours is to inquire into the nature of the stuff that comprises the natural world—which he categorizes under the natural-kind term 'physical' or 'material'—and he is thus in agreement with the great majority of naturalists on the question of what the world consists of. In fact, Strawson's position on this question, that is, that "concrete reality is entirely physical in nature," may simply be an entailment of a naturalist conception of reality (Strawson 2012, 126).<sup>6</sup> However, Strawson disagrees with the conception of the physical held by many self-proclaimed naturalists. In particular, Strawson maintains that there is no evidence to suggest that matter is "wholly non-experiential in its fundamental intrinsic [...] nature," and his conception of the physical enters intimately into how he maintains that the mental should be investigated and what its defining characteristics are (Strawson 2012, 144).

First, Strawson stresses that consciousness is a certainly known fact and that there is no plausible reason to doubt the reality of conscious experience (Strawson 2012, 125). In this sense, Strawson is a kind of naïve realist when it comes to conscious experience—he takes it at face value, that is, that it *is as it seems to be*, for he maintains that there need not be any further investigation into whether or not conscious experience is real. By the *reality* of conscious experience, Strawson means that it is a simple, basic fact that we have experience: experience of seeing red, of feeling pain, or of understanding.

Strawson is keen to defend the reality of conscious experience against objections that it is purely illusory. Objections that cast doubt on the reality of conscious experience, Strawson holds, are decidedly unsound, even as a point of departure. Suppose that one was to assume that conscious experience was illusory. One still has the experience, the *seeming*, of conscious

---

<sup>6</sup> It is conceivable to hold a naturalist view of nature in which the fundamental stuff of the universe is not physical. However, it is currently popular to maintain a physicalist or materialist view of nature as a naturalist, and what is under dispute among naturalists is not therefore whether or not the natural world is entirely physical but instead what the nature of the physical stuff is that constitutes the world.

experience, and this seeming to have conscious experience is itself a natural fact; it is not possible to open up an is/seems distinction here, because the seeming to experience red or pain just is to experience red or pain, respectively (Strawson 2012, 137). Because of Strawson's stress on the reality of conscious experience, he maintains that many paradigmatic cases of the mental are mishandled by functionalist and behaviourist approaches. Strawson takes these to be reductionist modes of explanation, which do not account for conscious experience in a way that is consistent with the primacy on the *seeming* of conscious experience as something fundamental. In other words, these approaches do not maintain the integrity of mental terms as they are traditionally understood. These approaches maintain that experience is really just a matter of non-experiential brain activity, and therefore they utterly miss the point regarding how to account for mental categories, Strawson maintains. That is, it is almost a tautology that consciousness is experiential—and to say that consciousness is a matter of non-experiential brain process is to looking glass “the ordinary meaning of the word ‘consciousness’” (Strawson 2019a, 33).

One of Strawson's complaints is that a functionalist conception of the mind results in the production of psychological and philosophical programs of reductionism. Reductionism implies a reduction of mental terms to non-mental terms. It can even devolve into eliminativism, where mental terms are eliminated altogether from a predictive-explanatory vocabulary. Although a naturalistic approach to the mind holds that all that exists is physical, one need not reduce mental categories to physical ones. Instead, one simply needs to properly categorize the mental in such a way that maintains the integrity of the claim that all that exists is physical, and, furthermore, one must maintain that the nature of the physical is much different than what is implied by reductionist programs.

For Strawson, conscious experience is a natural fact (Strawson 2012, 125). “Materialists,” by which Strawson means naturalists, “must hold that experiences (mental phenomena in general) are physical phenomena in *every* respect, and hence even in respect of their having the experiential character they have; and thus not just in respect of their having the character they appear to have to physical and neurophysiology as they inspect the brain” (Strawson 1994, 57). If it is correct to assume that the world is wholly physical, then it is in keeping with a thoroughgoing naturalism to conclude that consciousness, an aspect of the natural world, is also wholly physical. Thus, Strawson’s conception of the mental is deeply informed by his conception of the nature of the physical world, which in turn stems from what he takes to be the most certainly known natural fact: conscious experience (Strawson 2012, 125).

Strawson notes that it is simply an (unjustified) assumption that the physical stuff that constitutes the universe is essentially non-experiential (Strawson 2012, 140). It is as plausible to assume that the physical stuff that constitutes the world is experiential as it is to assume that it is non-experiential. It is arguable that it is *more* plausible that the constitutive elements of the world are experiential, given that experience is a known natural fact. Furthermore, Strawson notes that reductionist programs that attempt to reduce the mental to the non-mental or the experiential to the non-experiential are not the only reductionist programs, for there have historically been attempts to reduce the non-mental to the mental (Strawson 1994, 32). And unless one can provide a justification that the physical is non-experiential, then reductionist programs are unsound. In Strawson’s words, “[n]o clearheaded physicalist can think that there is a fundamental distinction between the physical on the one hand and the experiential/mental on the other hand” (Strawson 2019b, 326). The point that I want to stress here is that a philosopher’s or scientist’s picture of the natural world moulds their investigations. The non-reductionist

character of Strawson's framework is in large part a result of his notion that consciousness, by which one may include such notions as experience and all sorts of other mental categories, is wholly physical. One need not, therefore, attempt to reduce mental categories to non-mental categories.

“To be a *physicalist*,” Strawson writes, “is simply to hold [...] that all the stuff in this universe, including of course [...] all experientiality, is wholly physical in every respect and feature” (Strawson 2019b, 330). Part of what Strawson takes ‘physical’ to mean is that “everything physical has a *single fundamental metaphysical nature*—a single fundamental metaphysical *stuff-nature* that we denote by the word ‘physical’” (Strawson 2019b, 326). The conception of the physical that Strawson holds has the notion of experientiality embedded in it, and this informs his investigation of the mental, which is the concern here.

Regarding the term ‘naturalism’, I noted that unless one has a substantial conception of what counts as natural, one cannot distinguish between what would make something natural versus non-natural. The same is true of a related term, ‘physical’. Strawson assumes that “[ $x$  is found in our universe  $\rightarrow x$  is physical],” where  $x$  stands for anything in the universe; whatever is in the universe, that is,  $x$ , is physical (Strawson 2019b, 325). This assumption, and the assumption that “[ $x$  is physical  $\rightarrow x$  is the subject matter of physics]” is sufficient to “*fix the reference* of the term ‘physical’” while maintaining silence on what the nature of the physical is (Strawson 2019b, 324, 325). Thus, Strawson's is essentially a neutral monist position: There is only one substance, but the essential nature of it does not fall under any limiting category of substance (Strawson 1994, 1). This leaves open the possibility of navigating between the kinds of categories that have traditionally been delineated as ‘physical’ and ‘mental’. These terms are merely descriptive categories, natural-kind terms, thus putting aside the traditional problems

associated with dualism. Now, although Strawson holds that the physical is the subject matter of physics, he does not hold that the physical as it is understood by contemporary physics is necessarily correct (Strawson 2019b, 326).

Strawson's monism highlights an important assumption in his framework: Mental phenomena are *natural* phenomena and hence *physical* phenomena. This does not mean that mental phenomena ought to be reduced to questions of physics and perceptual psychology—as Quine interpreted the doctrine of methodological naturalism. Rather, the mental ought to be investigated in its own terms, for the mental is simply a part of the natural, physical world—there is nothing further to reduce the mental to, either neurobiological or behavioural.<sup>7</sup> This non-reductionism clearly and consciously results from Strawson's argument that the experiential is itself, as natural phenomena, strictly physical. Any attempt to reduce the experiential to the non-experiential is one that needs substantial justification. If one accepts that Strawson is correct about the reality of conscious experience (and hence that the nature of the physical is radically different than is often assumed), then many philosophical programs dealing with the mental are profoundly off track.

Another important component of Strawson's framework is his rejection of radical emergence, the idea that consciousness can emerge from utterly non-conscious matter. If matter is not experiential, then the phenomenon of conscious experience poses a significant problem for philosophers and scientists concerned with the mind. But it would only pose a problem if one held that matter was categorically non-experiential. Strawson claims that it is implausible that conscious experience could emerge if the constitutive stuff of the universe—matter, i.e. that

---

<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that there is nothing scientifically and philosophically interesting about the neurobiological and the brain more generally; rather, it is to say instead that these brain processes are themselves wholly physical *and experiential*, and thus reductionism, which attempts to reduce experiential categories to non-experiential ones, is unsound.

which is physical—was not also, at a basic level, experiential. For Strawson, since it is implausible that radical emergence is a sound explanation of the existence of conscious experience, any explanation that relies on radical emergence is at a significant disadvantage. Strawson writes that he does not think that radical emergence is impossible, but “the postulation of radical emergence must always be a huge black mark against a theory” (Strawson 2019b, 332). Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the move to propose radical emergence breaks with methodological naturalism, according to Strawson:

“[T]here appears to be no reason to posit radical emergence anywhere else in science. It is to that extent solely *ad hoc* to posit it just and only in the case of experience. It’s directly contrary to the dictates of sound methodological naturalism” (Strawson 2019b, 332).

This is one of the reasons why Strawson opposes the idea that inquiry into the mental ought to start from the assumption that the constituent parts of nature are non-experiential. This is Strawson’s main disagreement with functionalist/behaviourist accounts of the mental, for this assumption is a precursor to reductive programs.

#### 4. *Strawson on the Mental*

The basic assumption that enters into Strawson’s investigation of the nature of the mental is that the mental is a genuine, non-illusory object of inquiry. This assumption is undergirded by his conception of the physical, natural world as being essentially experiential. Thus, Strawson is exceedingly skeptical about programs that attempt to reduce mental categories to behavioural or non-experiential physical categories.<sup>8</sup> categories or mental categories to non-experiential physical categories; in fact, he believes that such programs do not even make the first step toward an adequate explanation. Strawson’s principal target in the philosophy of mind is the neo-behaviourist view—which he maintains plagues a good deal of functionalism in the philosophy

---

<sup>8</sup> Such programs might say, respectively, that a term like ‘understanding’ refers to an inclination to act in a particular way or that conscious experience is really just a matter of brain goings-on that are utterly non-experiential.

of mind. For Strawson, neo-behaviourism places undue primacy on reference to non-mental, particularly publicly observable behaviour.

Because of Strawson's commitments regarding what it means for something to be physical, he holds that reference to non-mental phenomena or publicly observable phenomenon, notably behaviour, is not an essential component of an explanation of the mental (Strawson 1994, 291). The tendency of functionalist philosophies of mind is to understand mental categories simply as physical categories of the brain. A mental category like 'experience', which Strawson takes to be the fundamental mark of the mental, is understood in terms of neural goings-on in the brain, which are non-experiential. Thus, I will briefly outline why non-mental terms supposedly play an essential role in an explanation of the nature of the mental and why Strawson rejects them. Conversely, I will demonstrate what *does* play an essential role in an explanation of the mental for Strawson.

Reference to the non-mental—in traditional behaviourism and certain strands of empiricism, including functionalism—plays a central role in an explanation of the mental. Strawson argues against explanations of the mental in terms of something non-experiential—like publicly observable behaviour. Strawson does not give “other-observability,” by which he means *publicly observable*, the kind of pre-eminence that it is often given in much of contemporary philosophy of mind. “Recent philosophy of mind,” Strawson writes, “has evolved in the context of public-domain positivism,” which held that sensical statements must be observable and verifiable, “and given public-domain positivism, behavior *must* be [...] other-observable if the notion of behavior is to play a central role in a satisfactory account of mind” (Strawson 1994, 309). But it is not obvious why something other-observable—behaviour—is given pre-eminence,

when the mind—which is not other-observable—is what is under investigation (Strawson 1994, 309).

This highlights Strawson’s contention that although it is often held that “philosophical *naturalism* somehow supports the view that the standard category of behavior should be given special importance,” there is no cogent reason to accept that naturalism entails an acceptance of behaviourism (Strawson 1994, 313). First, ‘behaviour’ is not well-defined enough to have a central place in an explanation of the mental—in other words, it does not, given its vagueness, supply a well-delineated criterion of application and thus cannot have the kind of central place in an explanation of the mental that it purports to have. Furthermore, the problem with the criterion of other-observability is that it begs the question: “observable by who?” (Strawson 1994, 307). It is conceivable that relevant physical, behavioural activities of an organism are not observable by us, given that these other-observable activities are not commensurate with our perceptual capacities (Strawson 1994, 307). But if we then say that the other-observable, mental change in an organism is *in principle* observable by some being, then the condition of other-observability becomes vacuous, for then *anything* is conceivably other-observable (Strawson 1994, 307).

The fundamental mark of the mental is conscious experience, Strawson claims. “All truly *mental* phenomena are intrinsically mentally *contentful* phenomena,” and, as such, if brain processes are considered to be merely computational or informational, then the brain “has no intrinsic (mental) content at all” (Strawson 1994, 163, 166). That is, computational processes are not strictly speaking mental processes insofar as these processes are non-experiential. If one maintains that the brain is computational and that these computational procedures are non-experiential, then brain states are not mental states. For instance, we can consider the following example:

“It is no more true to say that there are states of the brain, or of Louis, that have intrinsic mental content, when Louis is in a dreamless and *experienceless* sleep than it is true to say that there are states of a CD that have intrinsic musical content as it sits in a box” (Strawson 1994, 167; italics added).

Thus, brain states are not ipso facto mental states, given that there are brain states that do not have intrinsic mental content. On this view, mental states are predicated on “neural physical activity [that] consists, literally consists, of experience” (Strawson 2012, 139). The mark of the mental—conscious experience—consists of “spatiotemporally located events, neural electrochemical goings-on” (Strawson 2012, 140). We have, then, a conception of the mental in which mental phenomena are literally physical phenomena but where the physical is understood experientially.

#### 5. *Dennett’s Naturalism*

Like Strawson, Dennett maintains that he operates according to the dictates of naturalism, both ontological and methodological, although his interpretation of them is fundamentally different from Strawson’s. However, Dennett is, like Strawson, a materialist, and he maintains that an account of consciousness must be appropriately embedded in a materialist conception of the world. In the present section, I will outline Dennett’s naturalistic assumptions and principles that enter into his account of consciousness.

First, Dennett decidedly accepts the methodological naturalist principle as it was put forward by Quine. Investigation into the mental, for Dennett, ought to be continuous with the relevant sciences (Dennett 1991, 40). In fact, Dennett’s interpretation of philosophical naturalism leads him to propose an account of the mental whereby mental categories, such as ‘experience’, do not play the kind of role that they play in Strawson’s account. This is so because experiential predicates do not have a place in contemporary physics, biology, and other areas of relevance for the study of the brain.

Dennett states clearly what he aims to do in an explanation of consciousness or the mental and how his naturalism undergirds his investigation thusly:

“There is only one sort of stuff, namely *matter*—the physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology—and the mind is somehow nothing but a physical phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain. According to the materialist, we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth” (Dennett 1991, 33).

Dennett is concerned, then, with the problem of “how living physical bodies in the physical world produce such phenomenon [i.e. consciousness]?” (Dennett 1991, 25). That is, Dennett wants to explain consciousness while maintaining that all that exists is matter.

Dennett outlines a few assumptions that he maintains are required for a sound investigation of consciousness. First, Dennett holds that his investigation of consciousness and the mental ought to be consistent with current physical science (Dennett 1991, 40). Second, if there is some aspect of consciousness the existence of which one wants to deny, one must explain why it is illusory (Dennett 1991, 40). Third, related to the first, selective picking of details, leaving out facts that question one’s account, is not permitted (Dennett 1991, 40). We have here essentially a Quinean outline of how to proceed in a scientific spirit in matters of philosophical concern. Baldwin puts Dennett’s approach here well: “Dennett’s reference to philosophy’s continuity with the natural science suggests a family tree of explanations: physics [and the physical stance]<sup>9</sup> occupies the fundamental level” (Baldwin 1993, 172).

Dennett’s conception of the natural world is deeply embedded in contemporary science, and he maintains that an investigation of consciousness ought to be informed by the relevant sciences (Dennett 1991, 40). Given this starting point, Dennett holds that any significant change

---

<sup>9</sup> At the physical stance, to be discussed in Section 6, “we use whatever we know about the laws of physics and the physical constitution of the things in question to devise our prediction” (Dennett 2009, 340).

in a conception of the physical or material, as it is held in contemporary physics, ought to be avoided, except as a last resort (Dennett 1991, 40). We immediately have a point of contrast, and contact, between Dennett and Strawson. They both accept that the physical is the subject of physics, but Strawson argues that the material as it is understood by contemporary physics may be off track insofar as it holds that the physical is non-experiential, given that conscious experience is a natural fact (Strawson 2003, 52; Strawson 2012, 125). Dennett explicitly writes that this move breaks with one of his methodological commitments, namely, to remain consistent with contemporary science, in this case physics (Dennett 1991, 40).

For Dennett, any explanation that hinges on a fundamental reinterpretation of the physical world must be avoided until there is no other choice but to do so (Dennett 1991, 40). Initiating a “revolution in materialism” is a last resort, and thus one ought to remain consistent with the contemporary, relevant sciences in one’s explanation of consciousness (Dennett 1991, 40). Thus, terms of folk psychology, like ‘belief’, ‘desire’, and (although Dennett does not mention it specifically), ‘experience’ or ‘understanding’, do not have a role in a naturalistic explanation of consciousness. These terms have a place in what Dennett calls the ‘intentional stance.’ They do not have a role in an account of consciousness, however, since an account of consciousness is given at a different level of analysis (a different explanatory *stance* toward the agent, to use Dennett’s terminology). I will shortly outline Dennett’s different stances, as they nicely illustrate how he thinks consciousness should be investigated, but I will first elucidate what he thinks is at stake in an investigation of consciousness.

Dennett holds that a primary concern is how consciousness arises from matter, which is inherently non-conscious or non-experiential. The problem of consciousness is thus how “living physical bodies in the physical world produce such phenomena” (Dennett 1991, 25). In other

words, how does consciousness—and the feeling of a sensation or some other conscious experience—arise, or result, from “information-processing events in [...the] brain” (Dennett 1991, 27). Dennett maintains here that consciousness is simply a matter of informational/functional “brain happenings,” and there is nothing over and above these functional brain processes: These functional states are the objects of investigation (Dennett 1991, 27).

Dennett notes that a contemporary, scientific investigation of consciousness requires that one abandon dualism, whereby the mind is a substance distinct from matter that constitutes the brain (Dennett 1991, 42). Dennett writes that dualism has a number of flaws that distance it from contemporary, physical science and that it must therefore be abandoned (Dennett 1991, 35). There is an incongruity, Dennett claims, between what dualism holds and what is known about the physical world. To take one example, there is the question about how signals from the *mind* might be directed to the *brain* such that the brain can play the relevant causal role in moving the body (Dennett 1991, 35). The “mind stuff” does not have, in the Cartesian system, “physical energy or mass [...] associated with them,” and thus it breaks with the law that “any change in the trajectory of any physical entity is an acceleration requiring the expenditure of energy”; it is not clear where this energy comes from if “mind stuff” is not physical (Dennett 1991, 35).

Dennett outlines this program:

“Unless we can come to see in some detail how this is possible [that is, how the brain can be the mind], our materialism will not explain consciousness, but only promise to explain it, some sweet day. That promise cannot be kept [...] until we learn how to abandon more of Descartes’s legacy” (Dennett 1991, 42).

These are all classic objections to Cartesian dualism, and they have not been adequately answered since their inception. We have, then, a clear set of research problems and relevant assumptions that enter into their investigation.

Dennett argues for a functionalist approach to consciousness, whereby the *functional role* of a system's parts—a brain, a heart, or a computer—is the relevant target to build an explanation of that system. Let us take an example that shows what Dennett means by this. The phenomenological experience that one may call 'enjoyment', such as when one tastes something pleasant, could be reproduced on something other than a human brain, insofar as the *functions* of the component parts are the same. "If all the control functions of a human wine taster's brain," Dennett writes, "can be reproduced in silicon chips, the enjoyment will ipso facto be reproduced as well" (Dennett 1991, 31). Although it may seem unlikely that a machine could have consciousness, Dennett notes that consciousness is a property of the brain, and the brain is simply a machine (Dennett 1991, 31). Unless one wants posit dualism—with its host of problems—one has to maintain that the functional properties of the brain is the object of investigation.

To give a vivid example, Dennett writes:

"If we were to find real goings-on in people's brains that had enough of the 'defining' properties of the items that populate their heterophenomenological worlds, we could reasonably propose that we had discovered what they were *really* talking about" (Dennett 1991, 85).

Here, then, it is clear what kind of explanation would count in an account of consciousness or the mental. Items of the phenomenological realm—the realm of experience—do not have primacy or give us insight into the nature of consciousness or the mental. The appropriate mode of explanation is at what Dennett calls the *physical stance*, and mental terms are appropriately dealt with only at the intentional stance.

#### 6. *Dennett's 'Stances'*

Dennett introduces the notion of different stances, that is, different levels or modes of explanation regarding some phenomena. These different levels of explanation are appropriate for different phenomena, and, for Dennett, it is important that they are not confused. That is, it is

crucial to ensure that one is using the appropriate stance in one's investigation, lest one make a category error. This analytical tool that Dennett introduces figures neatly in the question of what is the status of the mental, for he maintains that many of the concepts that Strawson accepts as being fundamental to an account of the mental are in fact appropriate only at the intentional stance. They are not appropriate at the physical stance, where an investigation into the nature of consciousness belongs. I will elucidate the relevance of the concept of a stance, but first I will outline what each of the stances is and what objects and categories are amenable to the different stances.

It is in the *intentional stance* that we attribute beliefs, intentions, desires, etc. to a thing. In this stance, we are dealing with mental categories, but these categories are not categories of relevance for consciousness.<sup>10</sup> Operating at this level is appropriate when one is concerned with the behaviour of rational agents, for instance. Dennett is quick to emphasize that when we are operating in the intentional stance, we are tacitly admitting that we are ignorant of the processes going on in the other person's brain from which their actions stem (Dennett 2009, 341). We instead assume that the agents to which we ascribe these terms—belief, desire, etc.—are rational, and this allows us to predict, with reasonable accuracy, how they are going to act given certain conditions (Dennett 2009, 339). If one is trying to predict the move that a computer will make in chess, we assume that the computer will act *as if* it is rational, rather than trying to make a prediction based on the computational processes going on (Dennett 2009, 340). We would not be afforded the same accuracy in our predictions if we did not allow ourselves this stance as a

---

<sup>10</sup> This is a striking point of difference between Strawson and Dennett. First, consciousness is not under the category of the mental, for Dennett, whereas for Strawson the characteristic feature of the mental is consciousness—conscious experience. Moreover, Dennett handles mental terms in a behaviouristic fashion, whereby we attribute states of understanding or belief, etc. to people in order to predict their behaviour, but this does not have a role in an account of consciousness.

predictive tool for certain phenomena and categories. Attributing conscious experience to someone is appropriate for this level of analysis, this stance, but it is not so for a stance concerned with the processes of the brain, for instance—i.e. the physical stance.

The *physical stance* is the stance used in the physical sciences, where laws of physics and other scientific knowledge about the world is applied to something in order to make a prediction (Dennett 2009, 340). If one is predicting that a rock will fall to the ground when it is released from one's hand, one is engaging at the level of the physical stance (Dennett 2009, 340). The intentional stance would be inappropriate here, for attributing rationality or beliefs or desires to a rock would not allow for fuller predictive capacity. It would, moreover, be a category error to ascribe these properties to the rock. There is also the *design stance*—which holds that we can make predictions based on the design of something, such that an alarm clock will beep in the morning if we press certain buttons on it in a definite way—but this is less important for this discussion (Dennett 2009, 340). The distinction between the physical stance and the intentional stance is crucial, for confusing them leads to inauspicious theorizing, Dennett maintains.

The physical stance is the appropriate level for an account of consciousness. In the same way in which it would be inappropriate to apply the intentional stance to the happenings of a rock, it is inappropriate to bring categories from the intentional stance into an account of consciousness. An account of consciousness requires the physical stance, where physical laws and scientific explanation is given primacy.

Because of this, Dennett maintains that it is a mistake to think that consciousness is anything over and above functional brain processes. The categories of the intentional stance may lead one to think that consciousness could not merely be brain processes, but this is a category error, so Dennett maintains. The intuition that one may have is that one's conscious experience

“is all but unimaginable as a ‘mere’ physical activity of the brain” (Dennett 2013, 285). But this mistake stems from a category error whereby one takes a term and applies it where it does not belong. Consciousness is dealt with in a functionalist framework at the physical stance, and traditional mental categories are dealt with in a behaviouristic fashion at the intentional stance.

### 7. *The Nature of the Dispute*

We have a clear dichotomy between Strawson and Dennett’s accounts of the mental. They have each discussed the other’s views in print, and I think it is useful to say something about this before concluding. In order to precisify the ways in which Strawson and Dennett are at odds, I will discuss where exactly they disagree and why. Although I will deal with the dispute more directly in Chapter 2 by characterizing what I think a substantive naturalism consists in and then arguing for the plausibility of panpsychism over functionalism/behaviourism, it is useful to highlight exactly where they disagree and what the reasons are for this disagreement.

First, Strawson and Dennett often simply talk past each other because of a radically different vocabulary for talking about the mental. In fact, this is one of Strawson’s main problems with Dennett’s work on certain issues in the philosophy of mind: Dennett denies that consciousness exists because when he claims that consciousness certainly exists, “he *reversifies* or *looking-glasses* the ordinary meaning of the word ‘consciousness’” (Strawson 2019a, 33). Dennett, Strawson claims, “uses the word [‘consciousness’] in such a way that what he means by it excludes what it is standardly (almost universally) used to mean” (Strawson 2019a, 33). In other words, Strawson and Dennett are using the word ‘consciousness’ in a fundamentally different way, such that they are not talking about the same thing when they use the term.

Strawson wants to maintain the standard, everyday meaning of ‘consciousness’, which crucially includes experience in all of its variety: seeing colours, hearing sounds, understanding, etc. Dennett’s “looking-glassed” notion of consciousness does not include such experiential terms or traditional mental categories (they are, as I have written, only appropriately applied at the intentional stance). Dennett thus holds that there is an important separation between what consciousness actually *is*—functional/informational brain processes—and how it *seems*—(illusory) experiences of seeing red or understanding, etc. As a point of departure, there is no such *is/seems* distinction, for Strawson.

To draw this point out further, let us consider the philosophical concept of a zombie,<sup>11</sup> which both Strawson and Dennett touch upon to explicate what they mean by consciousness. Strawson says that a zombie is categorically, metaphysically impossible, for anything that perfectly duplicated the brain of a living human being would ipso facto have consciousness. Moreover, for Strawson, this consciousness is characterized by rich, qualitative experience. By contrast, Dennett holds not that only are zombies possible, but that “they’re actual. We’re all zombies” (Dennett 1991, 406; quoted in Strawson 2019a, 34). There is nothing over and above brain processes for functionalists of Dennett’s variety, and these brain processes are non-experiential.<sup>12</sup> Zombies have the informational/functional properties of humans, they are indistinguishable from us, but “there is nothing it is like to be a zombie” (nor does Dennett think that there is, in fact, anything it is like to be a human, experientially speaking) (Dennett 1991, 405; quoted in Strawson 2019a, 34). Furthermore, Dennett says that insofar as something is

---

<sup>11</sup> A zombie is a philosophical concept used to describe a PPD (Perfect Physical Duplicate) of a human being—but is not conscious. It is behaviourally exactly alike, but it has no qualitative experience.

<sup>12</sup> When Dennett suggests that if the functional processes of a wine taster’s brain could be reproduced on silicon chips, then the enjoyment would ipso facto be reproduced as well, he means enjoyment in terms of functional or dispositional properties, rather than experiential ones.

behaviourally indistinguishable from a person, then it has all of the mental properties of that person (Strawson 2019a, 35). These comments lead Strawson to conclude that Dennett denies the existence of consciousness—“actual consciousness” (Strawson 2019a, 35).

Another pivotal point of disagreement between Strawson and Dennett is their points of departure regarding the nature of matter or the physical. As such, their conceptions of consciousness—and the place of the mental in a naturalistic worldview—face an impasse. Given that matter is non-experiential, for Dennett, and consciousness is simply a matter of functional/informational brain processes, experience and other mental terms do not figure in an explanation of consciousness. Human beings are conscious not in the sense that Strawson claims is essential to consciousness, where rich, qualitative experience is given primacy, but we are conscious instead in the sense in which something that “behaviourally indistinguishable from a normal human being, but is not conscious [in the standard sense of the term]” (Dennett 1991, 405; quoted in Strawson 2019a, 34). We see this fundamental divide between Strawson and Dennett’s accounts of the mental as a product of their differing points of departure regarding the status of the physical world when Dennett writes that there is “plenty of room for inner processes” (like pain) but “only so long as these are understood to be physical (‘informational’ or ‘computational’) processes” (Dennett 2003, 31; quoted in Strawson 2019a, 36).

#### 8. *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have outlined two approaches to and accounts of consciousness and the mental that claim to be operating according to naturalistic principles and assumptions. These approaches have provided a clear point of contrast between two opposing views of the mental. What these approaches take to be a fundamental mark of the mental are at odds, as are their criteria for valid evidence in an account of the mental and thus what constitutes a cogent

explanation of the nature of the mental. One of the starkest differences between them is the primacy or reduction of conscious experience in their respective accounts of the mental. Strawson maintains that conscious experience is absolutely fundamental in any account of the mental, whereas Dennett does not, given his functionalist approach whereby the mind is just the brain, and brain processes are non-experiential, computational processes. As I emphasized, Dennett does not eliminate mental terms like ‘experience’ or ‘understanding’ entirely; rather, he proposes that instead these terms are dealt with at a certain stance or perspective: the intentional stance.

To briefly summarize, Strawson is a staunch realist when it comes to conscious experience, and he is exceedingly skeptical of arguments that aim to show that conscious experience is illusory. For Strawson, even if one were to assume, for sake of argument, that consciousness was illusory, then the *seeming* to have conscious experience remains as a natural fact—and the *seeming* just *is* to have conscious experience (Strawson 2012, 137). Again, there can be no *is/seems* distinction regarding the reality of conscious experience. The fundamental mark of the mental is conscious experience, and, to maintain a monistic, physicalist framework, Strawson holds that consciousness literally is physical, “spatiotemporally located events, neural electrochemical goings-on” (Strawson 2012, 140). In this way, Strawson is able to maintain that all that exists is the physical world without any kind of reductionism: Those “neural electrochemical goings-on” constitute the rich, qualitative experience that we have, and we need not hold a reductionism of any sort (Strawson 2012, 140). I will return to this and provide a way to understand this point in Chapter 2.

For his part, Dennett maintains that conscious experience is illusory and that it does not give any insight into the nature of consciousness. Terms like ‘experience’ are relevant for a

certain level of explanation, namely the intentional level—but they are not fundamental for an account of consciousness. That is, these terms are not appropriate for the level of explanation at the physical stance, where the nature of consciousness is to be dealt with.<sup>13</sup> Rather, these terms are dealt with in a behaviouristic fashion; that is, they are terms used at the intentional level of our everyday life and interactions, but they do not enter into an explanation of consciousness at the physical stance. The experience of consciousness does not give insight into the essential nature of consciousness, and this assumption leads Dennett to conclude that conscious experience is illusory. It is illusory in precisely this sense: Experience is a term that is relevant for our everyday life and interaction with others, but it does not enter into an account of the nature of consciousness. It may, in other words, be relevant for our understanding of people's actions and conduct, but it is a category error to place the term in an account of consciousness.<sup>14</sup> The qualitative character of experience—qualia—is illusory, and it is inappropriate to include the *seeming* of conscious experience in an account of its fundamental nature.

In Chapter 2, I will address the problem of how to mediate between these two opposing approaches to the mental. To do so, I will characterize a substantive naturalism by drawing out what is allowed by a simple, uncontroversial definition of naturalism discussed above and then show that panpsychism falls well within its range. That is, it is a viable, naturalistic conception of the world. Through considering a number of problems at the foundation of the thought of

---

<sup>13</sup> Dennett says explicitly that “[t]he familiar mentalistic language of knowing and seeing, noticing and recognizing, and the like [...] is anchored in the manifest image, not the scientific image, and cannot avail itself of the resources of the scientific image” (Dennett 2017, 350). Consciousness ought to be accounted for within the scientific image, and the concepts of the manifest image—like experience—are to be dealt with at the intentional stance. An important point to be made is that the conscious experiences that we *seem* to have stems from our applying the intention stance to ourselves (Schwartz 2012, 304). Again, this *seeming* is an illusion, for Dennett. Dennett notes elsewhere that he “from the outset [...] worked from the ‘third-person point of view’ of science, and took my task to be building—or rather sketching the outlines of—a physical structure that could be seen to accomplish the puzzling legerdemain of the mind” (Dennett 1994, 236–37).

<sup>14</sup> See note 13.

Strawson and Dennett, questions about the nature of the world and the place of the mental in it—such as the nature of matter, whether reductionism is an acceptable hypothesis, etc.—I ultimately argue in favour of a panpsychist (or neutral monist) position. Most importantly, however, this position allows for a theoretical vocabulary that is more auspicious in dealing with a number of problems at the heart of the philosophy of mind, such as the plausibility of radical emergence, reductionism, the place of the mental in a monist conception of nature, etc. In short, Chapter 2 will address whether panpsychism or functionalism/behaviourism—the positions of Strawson and Dennett, respectively—is the most plausible approach to these problems in the philosophy of mind.

## Chapter 2

### *1. Introduction*

In the first chapter, I broadly characterized two conceptions of consciousness and the mental, one by Strawson and one by Dennett. Each claim to operate according to the dictates of naturalism. Their notions of consciousness and the mental differ sharply, and the nature of their dispute centres on the different assumptions that they hold regarding what inquiry into consciousness properly consists in. The end or goal of inquiry is radically different for both of them, and this stems from their respective points of departure: panpsychism/pan-experientialism<sup>15</sup> for Strawson and functionalism/behaviourism for Dennett.

How, then, are we to mediate between these opposing conceptions of the mental? It is difficult to immediately see how to do so, for they each have an internally consistent explanation of consciousness and such mental categories as experience, etc.<sup>16</sup> I have two goals in this

---

<sup>15</sup> I use these two terms interchangeably.

<sup>16</sup> There is nothing within these frameworks themselves to allow us to mediate between them in a meaningful way; that is, there is no confirming or disconfirming evidence that could be amassed to allow us a key to determine whether one or the other is correct. By this, I mean something not dissimilar to the idea that there are cases in which we find two systems that are, as the German Romantic philosopher and poet Schelling put it, internally consistent and accommodate the relevant phenomena in question within their own vocabulary (Schelling 1997, 210–12). Increasing the abstraction or advancement of one system does not demonstrate its superiority, for the other system will do the same—and it will do so in such a way that maintains the integrity of its own vocabulary. Schelling was emphatic that there will exist incompatible systems, and, although it is not my purpose here to pursue a meta-philosophical project regarding philosophical disagreement, I think that this could be pursued. What I wish to say, however, is that although Schelling maintains that there is no way in which to mediate between competing systems on their own merits, I think that we may mediate between opposing systems by isolating something that both systems agree upon—something that they maintain as a point of departure, for example—and then to extend and broaden it by exploring what naturally follows from this assumption. The task is then to see whether, and which parts of, the systems under dispute are not excluded by this analysis. Then we must substantially analyze what follows from this, that is, we must determine which system is most plausible. I discuss in more detail how I think this ought to be done in the case of the accounts of the mental of Strawson and Dennett in the body. But I should spell out here how I think that this ought to be done in general. Suppose that we have two incompatible accounts of genetic transmission, where if one is strictly true, then the other is strictly false. We may find that these two theories hold similar points of departure regarding biology and genetics. We may then ask what can follow, in terms of possible theoretical construction, from the assumptions in question. At this point, we may find that one account has not even got off the ground on its own terms—it may violate an assumption that has been accepted at the outset. But we may also find that one of the possible constructions is simply far more plausible; it is this that I will consider in the case of Strawson and Dennett, or panpsychism and functionalism/behaviourism, respectively, for both are allowed by the naturalist assumptions that (1) the natural world is all that exists, and (2) only natural causes are at work in the world.

chapter. I will first outline what I think can be drawn from the characteristic tenet of naturalism, which stipulates that all that exists is the natural world. That is, I will outline what sorts of theoretical constructions could be allowed given this definition of naturalism in the hope of slightly extending the definition in such a way that further characteristics of naturalism follow logically. Second, I will argue in favour of a panpsychist approach to consciousness, which is suggested by the substantive conception of naturalism that I will characterize.

Thus, my task is first to characterize a substantive naturalism and then argue in favour of a particular account of consciousness and the mental, namely, panpsychism. I will also touch on a few issues of central importance for an approach to the mental, which will serve to strengthen my argument in favour of panpsychism, as opposed to functionalism/behaviourism. I have in mind such topics as radical emergence, reductionism, the question of whether it is possible to eliminate mental categories, etc. I briefly touched on some of these topics in Chapter 1, and I will focus in more detail in the present chapter. This will have a secondary purpose: to motivate Chapter 3, where I will argue in favour of a particular kind of naturalism—one that is non-reductive and that maintains the integrity of traditional mental categories, such that they do not fall prey to a reductionist program. As I have shown, first-personal conscious experience is essential to the mental for Strawson, which is to say that it has a primary role in any genuinely naturalistic conception of the mind. A genuine naturalism cannot exclude the fact of conscious *experience* from its account of consciousness—to say that consciousness is simply a matter of non-experiential, functional states of the brain is not going to satisfy naturalists of Strawson's bent. As such, given the primacy of conscious experience, Strawson accepts pan-experientialism as a point of departure. Strawson is keen to defend the view that experience is an essential component of any genuinely naturalistic theory of consciousness; consciousness is real (as

opposed to Dennett's sense of 'illusory'), and any naturalistic account of consciousness must not eliminate or reduce it to a non-experiential reduction base.

Dennett, by contrast, operating in a functionalist/behaviourist framework, argues that consciousness is to be explained through reference to *functional/informational* states of the brain, as I made clear at the end of Chapter 1. By this view, we are interested in the functional states of the brain in an explanation of consciousness, and thus, contra Strawson, Dennett maintains that conscious experience is *not as things appear*. Another way to put this is to say that conscious *experience* does not figure in an explanation of consciousness (as it is, in fact, illusory), for conscious states are simply non-experiential functional/informational states. These states are the object of inquiry. This commitment leads to a program that is antithetical to Strawson's: Dennett wants to explain consciousness without reference to experience, and it is a category error to place experience in an account of the nature of consciousness.

Whereas experience is fundamental for Strawson—so much so that he draws the panpsychist conclusion that matter is itself experiential—Dennett argues that experience and other terms associated with the mental are dealt with at a different level of analysis than is appropriate for an understanding of consciousness. For consciousness simply is a functional/informational state of brains (and presumably anything else that could replicate those functional/informational states), and these processes are non-experiential.

## 2. *A Substantive Naturalism*

My first task is to briefly sketch a simple, uncontroversial definition of naturalism that all those who call themselves naturalists would agree upon. This will show what falls inside and outside the boundaries of naturalism or a naturalist account of some phenomenon. Again, the naturalist conception of nature holds, quite simply, that there is only one world—the natural

world—and nothing non-natural exists, or, put another way, only natural forces are at work in the world. Whatever peculiar properties we might find in the world are entirely natural properties. If such properties are not explicable by or through the means of a contemporary scientific vocabulary, we do not conclude that the properties were therefore non-natural; rather, we say that there is more to the natural world than was initially thought. For instance, we may find that the brain is even more complex and that it has more peculiar properties than were initially captured in preceding scientific theorizing and models, but we do not let this discovery force us into a dualist conclusion. For example, if there are experiential properties in the world, then it is reasonable—and allowed by this component of the substantive naturalism that I am characterizing—to conclude that phenomenal properties are actually fundamental constituents of the world. It could be the case that such properties are not fundamental constituents of the natural world, but, in either case, their relative plausibility needs to be addressed, and neither position is disallowed by a naturalist framework.

Furthermore, building from the definition of naturalism that says that all that exists is the natural world, we may allow for a vocabulary that consists in part or in whole of terminology that is not scientific in the sense in which the language of contemporary physics takes precedence. For this may exclude a vocabulary that would be appropriate to account for various natural facts about the world. Thus, we may discover that there are properties in the world that call into question the theories of contemporary physics and that therefore the picture of nature that is espoused by the relevant components of contemporary physics may have to be ameliorated and changed. At present, there is nothing in the definition of naturalism itself that demands that the nature of the world is non-experiential, that is, that the fundamental constituent of the world is *inert* matter.

### 3. *The Stuff of the World*

Now that I have briefly explicated what is allowed in a naturalistic framework, I will turn to elucidating a few conceptions of the nature of the world in favour of neutral monism, specifically a panpsychist conception, as a viable and cogent account of the nature of the world. In order to make sense of the relationship between non-experiential reality—a brain’s particular physical state, say—and experiential reality, Strawson argues that we need to maintain a *monist* position with regard to the composition of the fundamental constituent stuff of the world. Monism is the most appropriate approach to answer the question of the relationship between “conscious experience and physical phenomena” or between experience and matter (i.e. the *physical*) (Strawson 1994, 44).

Just as I have drawn out above what we can say a naturalistic framework may consist in, Strawson elucidates what kind of monist positions can be held, given the definition of monism. Monism is the view that there is, “in spite of all the variety in the world, some fundamental sense in which there is only one basic kind of stuff” (Strawson 1994, 43). From this, we have four possibilities at present:

- “[1] There is a fundamental sense in which reality is only physical.
- [2] There is a fundamental sense in which reality is only mental.
- [3] There is a fundamental sense in which reality is neither mental nor physical, *as we understand these terms*.
- [4] Reality is, in its essential single-substanced nature, both mental and physical, both experiential and physical” (Strawson 1994, 46; brackets in original; italics added).

The most prominent monist conception of the world is the first outlined position. This is a *materialist* conception of reality, and, barring positions number 2, 3, and 4, it assumes that the nature of matter is non-experiential.<sup>17</sup> This is to say that those who maintain this kind of monism

---

<sup>17</sup> Certainly not all materialists hold that matter is non-experiential—Strawson is a materialist. However, Strawson is more properly deemed a neutral monist, since matter does not, for him, have the status that it is normally held to have, namely, that it is non-experiential. It is standardly assumed that matter is non-experiential, and if one

assume that matter is void of all experiential and mental properties. The second view is *idealism*, the opposite of materialism; the third position is *neutral monism*; and Strawson calls the fourth position is called “*mental and physical monism*” (Strawson 1994, 47; italics added).

All of these positions are preferable to dualism. As I see it, we run into quite serious conceptual problems if we maintain that there are incompatible but mutually existing substances. Put very briefly, I am persuaded by Spinoza’s line of reasoning on the matter. Spinoza’s argument against dualism is predicated on the idea that the definition of substance is all-encompassing—nothing is excluded from the definition of substance. As such, the position that there are two, mutually existing substances is not a viable option, for then they would limit each other, and substance would ipso facto not be all-encompassing. This definition of substance is, I think, what we have in mind when we are asking what the nature of the world is made of.

I will here briefly explicate positions number 2 and 4 before turning to 1 and 3 in more detail. Position 2, put simply, is just the view that there exists only mental phenomena and that therefore nothing non-mental (non-perceptual, non-experiential, etc.) exists. Position number 4 says that reality is “*both* mental (experiential) and physical [non-experiential] while being substantially single in some way” (Strawson 1994, 47; italics added). This position categorically rules out positions number one and two, for the way to understand the idea that the stuff of the world is mental and physical while being “single in some way” does not “involve any sort of *asymmetry* between the status of claims that reality is physical in character and claims that reality is mental or experiential in character” (Strawson 1994, 47).

The first position outlined by Strawson is materialism. Contra position number 4, materialists are committed to the asymmetry thesis, that is, the idea that “there is a crucial

---

thinks that matter is experiential, then one is accepting position three: that the world is neither material nor mind as those terms are understood.

asymmetry in the status of the mental and physical phenomena given which it is correct to say: [1] that the mental is based in, or realized by, or otherwise dependent on, the physical” (Strawson 1994, 56; brackets in original). Moreover, materialists maintain that it is incorrect to say “[2] that the physical is based in, or realized by, or otherwise dependent on, the mental or [3] that they coexist in such a way that neither can be said to be based in, or realized by, or in any way asymmetrically dependent on, the other” (Strawson 1994, 56; brackets in original).

Position number 3 is a neutral monist position that says that as we understand the terms mental and physical—where the mental is experiential and the physical is not, to put it simply—it is incorrect to say that the fundamental nature of reality consists of either (Strawson 1994, 46). The first thing to note is that this position maintains that the terms ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ have been defined in such a way that we are bound to run into problems, simply given the terms of the debate that have been accepted. Instead, it holds that there is only one kind of stuff, but its fundamental nature does not fall under any limiting category of substance.

This position also holds that it is infelicitous to conceive of the mental as being totally juxtaposed with the nature of the physical is infelicitous. To draw out the fact that the way in which the ‘physical’ and the ‘mental’ are usually understood is inadequate to deal with the question of how matter is related to experience and other mental categories, Strawson presents the following case: Consider a creature “that has a pattern of electrical impulses to its brain with the result that it has color experience *and nothing else*” (Strawson 1994, 50; italics added). In this case, one might be tempted to say that the creature does not have the resources by which it could attain an “adequate conception of the *nature* of the reality with which it has to do” (Strawson 1994, 50). That is, given that the creature does not have any understanding of the electro-chemical physical processes that are occurring in its brain, but does have the colour experience,

it would seem as though the creature cannot be said to have a full understanding of the experience, for this would be stated, according to materialists, in strictly physical terms.

There is no clear way for us to connect the experiential—the seeing colour, for example—and the non-experiential—the brain processes that occur in the brain of a person who is having colour experience. This does not mean that there is no such relation between the experience of seeing red and the brain being in a particular state—there is an intimate connection between the two, for a neutral monist. The point is simply that as the physical and the mental are understood, where the physical is categorically different from the mental, there is no clear way to make sense of the idea that certain brain states entail various kinds of experience. This is something that poses a great problem for standard materialists.

Before I say what I think we can conclude about how certain brain states (that is, physical states) relate to various kinds of experience, a comment on monism and the experiential is in order. According to one kind of monism—materialism—the experiential arises from the non-experiential. Thus, materialists, especially those who take as primary the vocabulary of physics, want to say that there is both experiential physical reality and non-experiential physical reality. Materialists thus accept the asymmetry thesis, whereby the mental (which is physical-experiential) is ultimately dependent on the physical (that is, the physical non-experiential).

When I say that the mental is the physical-experiential for materialists—materialists who do not deny the existence of consciousness—what I mean by the mental is just the experiential, but the experiential must be understood as being wholly physical, given that all that exists is physical. But there is also the non-experiential physical for such materialists, and I wish to draw attention to the fact that the mental here is an aspect of the physical, but the physical has the

properties that are usually placed under the category of the mental, notably, experience.<sup>18</sup> For example, Joseph Priestley, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century polymath, maintained not that everything reduces to matter, “but rather that the kind of matter on which the two-substanced view is based does not exist”—as such, “[w]e have to think of a complex organized biological system with properties the traditional doctrine would have called mental *and* physical (Yolton 1983, 114; quoted in Chomsky 2016, 113). This is one of the reasons that leads Strawson to conclude that a physicalist or materialist must be led to some variety of panpsychism. In particular, we do not know enough about the physical to say that the physical is non-experiential, and we run into enormous problems when we try to maintain that everything is physical (where the physical is non-experiential) *and* that there is experience.

To say that the mental is the “experiential physical” and that the physical is the “non-experiential physical” does not dissolve the conception of the mental and the physical as diametrically opposed, and therefore it does not help us to understand the relationship between the physical and the experiential. In fact, the whole notion of the physical as something categorically non-experiential has been a catalyst for these problems and leads to mistaken theorizing about how to understand the mental. It demands either that one try to get the

---

<sup>18</sup> There is still the problem of how to understand the idea that the physical has properties that are usually associated with the mental if the physical is essentially non-experiential. Strawson has sometimes maintained that in addition to experiential phenomena, there may exist non-experiential phenomena (Strawson 2003, 73). Strawson’s argument is as follows: “(1) Experience [...] certainly exists; (2) Experience [...] is impossible without a subject of experience; (3) a subject of experience cannot itself be an entirely Experiential [...] phenomenon; so (4) the existence of Experience [...] entails the existence of non-Experiential phenomena” (Strawson 2003, 73). However, Strawson has expressed some skepticism regarding the cogency of this argument; premise three immediately jumps out as suspicious, for it is not obvious why a subject of experience cannot itself be an experiential phenomenon. We may say that the non-experiential being of the subject of experience, if we accept the idea that there is non-experiential being, is actually “the Experience of some other [...] subject or group of subjects, and so on down” (Strawson 2003, 73). I am not satisfied with this reply to save the existence of non-experiential being, for reasons that will make sense when I discuss radical emergence and reductionism. Nevertheless, it is not my purpose here to argue in favour of a particular kind of panpsychism—say, micropsychism, which says that at least *some* of the fundamental constituents of reality are experiential versus *pure panpsychism*, which says that *all* of the fundamental constituents of reality are experiential. Rather, my aim is to conclude that at the very least micropanpsychism is true, for the notion that the physical is entirely and wholly non-experiential is untenable, in my view.

experiential from the non-experiential or to deny the existence of experience or consciousness altogether. However, I assume that some form of monism is true, given Spinoza's remarks on substance and also because of the long-standing conceptual problems associated with dualism.

When the physical and the mental are opposed in the way in which they traditionally have been, we may be tempted to draw the conclusion that the mental (or the experiential) arises out of the categorically non-experiential physical. Furthermore, we may be drawn to the conclusion, given how the terms of the debate have been laid out, that the mental or the experiential can be reduced to the vocabulary of physics or even eliminated wholesale.<sup>19</sup> I think that Strawson is quite right when he writes that “materialists who persist in talking in terms of the difference between the mental and the physical perpetuate the terms of the dualism they reject” (Strawson 2003, 51). Experience or consciousness is literally physical, then, and it is actually a dualistic move to conclude that the physical cannot be experiential.

The neutral monism—what Strawson calls “Realistic Monism”—of this variety is quite right in its approach: We take ‘physical’ to be a natural-kind term but allow that we may be wrong about its nature. Here ‘physical’ just means the stuff of the world, whatever characteristics it might turn out to have. If we begin from the starting point that some version of monism is correct and that the stuff of the world is captured by the natural-kind term ‘physical’, then we are ultimately led to some version of panpsychism.<sup>20</sup> This is still a neutral monist position, however, since the physical is not conceptualized as it normally is, that is, as something utterly non-

---

<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the reduction base is here understood as being non-experiential, and since the fundamental nature of reality is non-experiential, the way in which to understand the mental is to translate it into the vocabulary of physics, where these mental terms ultimately lose the experiential character that they have. Another alternative is the one that Dennett takes, where mental terms are understood behaviourally—they are terms applied and used to understand the behaviour of rational agents, and they are therefore at home in the intentional stance—which is another kind of reductionism, since the terms of a mental vocabulary can be spoken of in terms of a behavioural vocabulary.

<sup>20</sup> This is implied by the subtitle of Strawson's paper from 2011, “Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism.”

experiential. Most importantly, physicalism is not “*physicSalism*, the view [...] that the nature or essence of all concrete reality can be in principle be fully captured in the terms of *physics*” (Strawson 2011, 261). All of reality is physical, but this does not at all imply that “the terms of physics can fully capture the nature or essence of experience” (Strawson 2011, 261).

We are certainly entitled to draw the conclusion, as physicalists, that “mental (experiential) phenomena are physical phenomena” and that “experience is ‘really just neurons firing,’” but we need not attempt to reduce the vocabulary of experience to that of physics. Since “experiential phenomena ‘just are’ physical,” we should conclude instead that “there is a lot more to neurons [and the brain generally] than physics and neurophysiology record” (Strawson 2011, 262). Consciousness is a purely physical phenomenon. To put it schematically: (1) Only one kind of stuff exists; (2) everything that exists is grouped under the natural-kind term ‘physical’; (3) conscious phenomena (i.e. experiential phenomena or mental phenomena) exist; (4) therefore, conscious phenomena are purely physical phenomena. I wish to emphasize that this does not imply a reductionism of any sort—we still have a conception of consciousness that does nothing to downplay the reality of conscious experience.<sup>21</sup>

Before I turn to the problems of radical emergence and reductionism, I should note why they are problems at all. I have suggested that there is a problem with the way in which the ‘physical’ and ‘mental’ have been conceptualized, and a number of pictures of the natural world have demanded that there be a strict separation between them; it is this that leads to puzzlement, I think, in particular when we ask how we can understand the relationship between them. Materialists want to say that everything that exists is physical, and the problem thus arises where we have to explain the phenomenon of experience as well as the place of mental categories in a

---

<sup>21</sup> C.f. with the way in which Dennett wants to say that consciousness is a purely physical phenomenon. For him, this does imply a reduction of the experiential to the non-experiential.

philosophical framework that has no obvious place for them.<sup>22</sup> Idealists want instead to say that all that exists is experiential (mental) phenomena, and the opposite problem thus arises, for we have to then explain the place of what seems to be non-experiential phenomena, such as a brain's particular physical state. I would like to suggest that the neutral monist position is an appropriate framework for dealing with these problems, as I hope will be made clear as I discuss radical emergence and reductionism.

#### 4. *Radical Emergence*

The hypothesis of radical emergence proposes that consciousness *emerges* from matter, and matter is understood as being entirely non-experiential in character. The doctrine of radical emergence depends upon this conception of matter—for if matter was experiential, then the phenomenon of consciousness would not need to be explained as an emergent property of matter. As the terms that materialists who accept radical emergence have been understood, radical emergence is a hypothesis that is required to explain the existence of consciousness. There are a number of problems with the doctrine of radical emergence, but the problems stem from certain pictures of the world, the vocabulary of which seems to demand that the phenomenon of consciousness be dealt with in a particular set of ways—ways that are unfruitful, in my view. That is, radical emergence is put forward as a way to explain how there can be consciousness, and behaviourism is proposed as a way to understand mental terms while maintaining the integrity of a particular materialistic conception of the world in which such mental terms do not have a fundamental role. However, an attentiveness to the commitments implicit in the vocabulary of materialism—i.e. a materialism that supposes that matter is entirely non-

---

<sup>22</sup> Materialists need not be puzzled about this, however, for, as I have suggested above, if materialists accept that all that exists is physical, then consciousness must be wholly physical. This does not mean that the vocabulary of consciousness and the mental need be reduced to the vocabulary of the physical, any more than we need to reduce the vocabulary of psychology to biology or literature to psychology.

experiential—will reveal precisely why the “problem of consciousness” arises and thereby point to a more fruitful, alternative approach to such questions.

Radical emergence has as its characteristic feature the idea that consciousness arises from something that is entirely non-conscious or non-experiential. To put it formally, take  $c$  as consciousness and  $m$  as matter (material, physical, etc.). The doctrine of radical emergence says that  $c$  somehow arises or emerges from  $m$ . But if  $m$  is not amenable in any way to  $c$ , how do we get  $c$  from  $m$ , given that they are mutually exclusive or have mutually exclusive properties? The conclusion that  $c$  is categorically separate from  $m$  and has entirely different properties raises the obvious problem of how  $c$  could emerge from  $m$ .

To this, one may be tempted to reply that  $m$  is somehow suited to  $c$ , such that there is no great problem of how we get  $m$  from  $c$ . But being *suited* to the emergence of something that has properties that the thing from which it emerges categorically lacks is implausible, especially when there is no account that is given as to how this emergence happens. Moreover, to be *suited* to the emergence of something presupposes that whatever emerges from  $y$ , we can call it  $x$ , has the relevant characteristics, properties, relations, etc. of the thing that it emerges from. Put another way,  $y$  must have relevant characteristics of  $x$  if  $x$  emerges from  $y$ .

Radical emergence thus proposes that there is a phenomenon emerging from something that does not have the qualities of the emergent phenomenon (for if it did, then there would be no need to posit radical emergence). Although there are seemingly cases in which there is this kind of emergence—where the emergent thing has none of the properties of the thing from which it emerges—there is really no radical emergence in other areas of science, where radical emergence is understood as I have characterized it above. Strawson has said that he thinks that radical

emergence breaks with methodological naturalism, for “there appears to be no reason to posit radical emergence anywhere else in science” (Strawson 2019b, 332).

Consider the case of liquidity arising from molecules that are themselves not liquid. If we are to avoid the puzzling problem of how this can be the case, we must conclude that “the properties of the liquid can in some reasonable sense be regarded as inhering in the molecules” (Chomsky 2016, 115). Thus, although liquid arises from molecules that are themselves not liquid, there must be some sense in which the nature of those molecules allows for the property of liquidity to arise, and this must mean that liquidity inheres in the molecules.

In the case of consciousness, something of the same sort must be true, unless we wish to assert by fiat that matter is non-experiential but that consciousness somehow arises from it. Of course, this might turn out to be the case, although, as I have said, it is not clear how it can be the case unless the properties of  $c$  in some sense already inhere in  $m$ .<sup>23</sup> Strawson takes the view that radical emergence is something that any theory ought to try to avoid, given that we have no idea how it might be the case and because it is not the kind of thing that is posed in the normal workings of science. Moreover, Strawson thinks that another reason why radical emergence is implausible is because “[i]t is built into the notion of emergence that emergence cannot be brute in the sense of there being no reason in the nature of things why the emerging thing is as it is” (Strawson 2011, 268).

---

<sup>23</sup> Dennett takes a different take on this problem, which I will discuss in detail in Section 7. In short, he argues that the characteristic qualities that we associate with the mental—particularly conscious experience—are literally illusory and that therefore we have no problem of explaining how consciousness can exist in a world that is characterized completely by inert matter. For consciousness is not as it seems, and mental categories (such as qualia) are only appropriately applied at the behavioural level. Dennett is an eliminativist regarding qualia, and other mental categories are really just terms that are useful for predicting and understanding the behaviour of others. We say, for instance, that someone *understands* a theorem if we want to understand their behaviour in particular circumstances, but there is nothing that it is like, experientially speaking, to understand something, perceive a colour, hold a belief, etc.

Accordingly, Strawson endorses the *no radical emergence thesis*. Emergence cannot be *brute* in the sense described above. When we speak of radical emergence—which many materialists, given the terms of the debate that they have adopted, accept as a plausible proposal—we must be talking of emergence that is totally *dependent*. By this, Strawson means that the emergent thing, *x*—whatever it is—is totally dependent on *y*, but *x* does not in any way inhere in *y*. Again, one could not posit *radical* emergence if it did.

If one accepts that matter is categorically non-experiential, then the idea that radical emergence is a viable account of the existence of consciousness is a natural move. There are other ways in which we can account for the existence of consciousness, namely, a neutral monist, specifically a panpsychist conception, whereby consciousness is a fundamental constituent of matter—matter is experiential. That is, there is no reason to suppose that matter is non-experiential, and we can thus maintain that consciousness is literally a spatio-temporal physical process. I will discuss this in detail in Section 6, where I argue that panpsychism—a particular interpretation of neutral monism—is a viable conception of the nature of the world and allows for a more plausible conception of how consciousness emerges while also guarding against the problems that trouble certain conceptions of materialism that say that matter is non-experiential.<sup>24</sup> Instead of saying that consciousness emerges from categorically non-conscious or non-experiential matter, we say that matter itself has experiential qualities, such that consciousness can reasonably be said to inhere in it.

---

<sup>24</sup> This conception of the world also provides a more fruitful framework for an account of mental categories, since it does not demand that these categories be reduced to physical terms that do not have the properties of the mental terms. That is, we can maintain in this framework that there are such things as qualitative experiences, beliefs, understandings, etc. and that they do not need—and I will argue in Chapter 3, *cannot*—be reduced to the vocabulary of physics or the vocabulary of behaviour. Nevertheless, we can still say that these processes are all *literally physical* while maintaining that we can have no reduction from a mentalistic vocabulary to a physicalist one.

### 5. *Reductionism*

In the philosophy of mind, reductionism stipulates that the terms that are a part of a mentalistic vocabulary can be reduced to terms of a materialistic vocabulary. Reductionism is thus related to radical emergence in the sense in which they both maintain that it is possible to translate from one vocabulary (the mental) to another (the physical). I will first consider materialist reductionism—which says that mental terms can be reduced to a vocabulary of physical terms, where talk of having a particular experience can be reduced to talk of particular brain processes, which are non-experiential—and argue that it is unsound. It is fraught with a number of conceptual problems and, moreover, I will argue that there is no clear sense in which there is a reduction base for the mental. Another kind of reductionism, where mental terms are reduced to behavioural terms, will be discussed in Section 7.

Materialist reductionism is predicated on the idea that the fundamental constituent of reality is physical—it is the only substance. As such, it is maintained that terms concerning the mental ought to be reduced to the physical, lest we sustain a lingering dualism. I do not think that this is sound, nor do I think that it gets rid of any kind of dualistic tendencies (in fact, I think that this kind of program encourages a sort of dualism, where the mental is conceived strictly in terms of behavioural categories).

Richard Rorty is quite right when he writes that “the difference between dualism and materialism would vanish” if we were to say that “to describe an organism as in pain is simply one way of talking about a state of its parts” (Rorty 1979, 19). To abolish the divide between dualism and materialism, that is, the divide between the view that there is a genuine split between the ‘mental’ and the ‘physical’ or that there is no such divide, respectively, we must say that “describ[ing] an organism as in pain is simply one way of talking about a state of its parts”

(Rorty 1979, 19). Moreover, these parts “must be,”—if we are to break the divide between dualism and materialism thus defined—“physical parts” (Rorty 1979, 19). If we wish to maintain a naturalistic philosophy, which is to say a philosophical program that takes on board a naturalistic conception of nature as a guiding assumption, then this is precisely the sort of thing that we ought to conclude. Various mental categories that we use are to be understood as physical states of an organism. Perhaps more precisely, we conclude that consciousness is a property of organized matter. All that exists is physical, so the naturalist-materialist says, and thus consciousness, which clearly exists, is a property of matter.

But then Rorty goes on to say, from the standpoint of the mind-brain identity thesis, that “talk about how one *feels*”—such as the experience of perceiving red— “is just an alternative way of reporting on how suitable portions of one’s anatomy (presumably neurons) *are*” (Rorty 1979, 19). Rorty argues here that this is an appropriate way for the person who holds the mind-brain identity thesis to rid oneself of the neo-dualist contention that there are “alternative descriptions” of talking about the mind. This identity thesis that says that mental states are identical with certain physical states is correct, if, as physicalists, we concede that there are no immaterial or otherwise non-material substance. But this can be misinterpreted, and it is thus important to say what the token-token identity does and does not entail.<sup>25</sup>

Rorty suggests here that saying that the experience of seeing red, to take the classic example, is simply an *alternative description* of a description of one’s neuro-physiological state

---

<sup>25</sup> The ‘token-token identity thesis’ holds that mental terms are identical with physical terms, where we understand physical terms as being those terms of the physical sciences relevant for the study of the mind/brain (physics, psychology, neuro-physiology, biology, etc.). William Seager defines a “mental-physical identity thesis” thusly: “This theory asserts that while one cannot identify mental states with physical states in the sense that for mental state M, say, there is a physical state P such that for any x, x is in M if and only if x is in P, one can, for any instance of being in a mental state, find a physical state such that being in it at that time is identical to being in the given mental state at that time” (Seager 1983, 176). This position is maintained in functionalist conceptions of the mind, Seager notes.

and perpetuates a kind of dualism (Rorty 1979, 19). The tempting move here is to say that the experience of seeing red *really is* just the configuration of one's physiology at a particular point in time. The implication is that conscious experience can be reduced to a description of a particular brain state. Experiential states—states of understanding or belief or perception—are to be reduced to brain states, which have none of the aforementioned experiential properties. The problem with this—the problem with any kind of reduction—is that the integrity of the vocabulary being reduced is compromised. But the problem is particularly acute here. We can say that we can reduce the vocabulary of the experiential—of seeing red—to the non-experiential—a particular brain state—but when we do so, the experiential vocabulary has lost its defining feature. There is a loss of experiential predicates if the vocabulary is reduced to a non-experiential vocabulary, for this vocabulary does not allow for them.

This is why I suggested that reductionism is importantly related to radical emergence, for they are both predicated on the idea that experience exists but that the nature of reality is utterly non-experiential. The task is then to determine how there can be experiential qualities in a world that at the bottom of things has no place for them—matter is the fundamental constituent of the world, and it is non-experiential. The doctrines of reductionism and radical emergence also face a similar problem: How can we get (or reduce) the experiential from (to) the non-experiential? The conclusion that a brain state *is* the experience of red does not make sense if we also say that brain states (physical processes or configurations) are non-experiential. Yet, the stubborn problem of reconciling the experience of perceiving red and a scan of the brain in the state of seeing red does not go away when we approach the problem this way. In the name of maintaining a materialist picture, we have only claimed that experience reduced to the non-experiential, which is fundamental.

However, I think that a monist position is the correct way to approach this question. Although I have no doubt that there is an intimate connection—barring dualism—between the brain in a particular state and the experience of perceiving red, the problem of understanding the connection cannot be dealt with by saying that a brain state *is* or *causes* a certain experience. Some sort of identity thesis between mental terms and physical terms is the correct way to approach this question, but this does not mean what it is often meant to mean in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science.

Take the classic example that questions the cogency of the connection between physical terms and mental terms: There is a person who knows everything about the brain of a person perceiving red but has never perceived red themselves. The question that is posed to the materialist—but that could equally be posed to monists generally, since it concerns the relation between what seems to be non-experiential phenomena, the brain in a particular state, and what seems to be experiential phenomena, such as the experience of red—is this: Does the person learn something new when they are shown the colour red?<sup>26</sup> If we are realistic about conscious experience, there is no problem with the conclusion that the person learns something new. Although monism holds that everything is fundamentally the same kind of stuff, a monist position should not conclude that the person unequivocally *did not* learn something new since the brain in a certain state must be the experience of red and the person had knowledge of the brain in that particular state. Simply knowing the characteristics of the brain of a person when they are perceiving red does not mean that one also has knowledge of the qualitative experience of seeing red.

---

<sup>26</sup> This example comes from Frank Jackson's (1982) famous paper, "Epiphenomenal Qualia."

There is an important distinction to be made here, and it is one way to approach the puzzle of how, in a monist framework, one can have knowledge of a person's brain while they are perceiving red but not ipso facto have knowledge of redness: knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance. There are all sorts of things that one could find out about the brain of a person who is perceiving red, but knowing these things about the brain is not the same thing as the perception of red. This sort of knowledge cannot be achieved by description—in whatever particular vocabulary that is popular in the sciences concerned with the brain—of the brain in a particular state. Instead, one's brain must be in a certain state to have knowledge of the qualitative experience of perceiving red, and this is not the case when one is simply *describing* the brain of a person who is perceiving red. Certain brain states *are* literally experiential states, but one's brain is certainly not in the state of a person perceiving red when one is looking at a brain scan of a person perceiving red or is elucidating the properties of the brain of the person who is perceiving red.

There is no reason to be drawn to the idea that there is a problem with the conception of consciousness as being wholly physical because of such examples of a person learning something new when they perceive red for the first time even though they have full scientific knowledge of the brain of a person who is perceiving red. The brain in a certain physical state *literally is* the experience of seeing red, say, but a description of the brain in such a state does not equal the experience that one would have if one's brain was in that particular state. This is what I mean when I say that consciousness is literally a physical phenomenon *and* that we should have no problem with this idea since knowledge of a brain state—which is couched in a non-experiential vocabulary—is not ipso facto knowledge of the experience of the person whose

brain is in that state. Moreover, I am not suggesting that the vocabulary of brain science should be couched in experiential terms—even though I do think that experience is literally physical.

It is true that a person who has biological or neuro-physiological knowledge of the brain of someone perceiving red does not ipso facto have the experience of seeing red. But the experience of seeing red is still literally physical, and one only has that experience when one's brain is in a certain state.<sup>27</sup> There is no problem with the relation between what we take to be the non-experiential and the experiential, then. The physical stuff of the brain, when organized in a particular, sophisticated way, literally is experience, and there is no great puzzle about how this can be the case once we elucidate what that means. To briefly reiterate, consciousness is wholly physical, and it is simply a matter of brain goings-on. However, this does not mean that a description of the physical state of the brain of someone perceiving red is equal to the conscious experience of actually seeing red. The experience of seeing red just is having one's brain in that particular state, but one's brain is not in that state when one is describing what that state is like in biological or neurophysiological terms.

#### 6. *An Alternative View: Quining Qualia*

The problems that I have discussed thus far—radical emergence and reductionism—are predicated on two ideas: the *NE (non-experiential) thesis* and the *RP (real phenomenon) thesis*. NE says that “physical stuff is, in itself, in its fundamental nature, something wholly and utterly non-experiential”; RP says that “experience is a real concrete phenomenon and every real concrete phenomenon is physical” (Strawson 2011, 265). I have argued that the RP thesis is correct and that consciousness is literally a spatio-temporally located phenomenon and that the

---

<sup>27</sup> The point is that the brain of the person who has knowledge of the neural goings-on of the person who is perceiving red is not ipso facto in a state that issues the experience of red. I would also like to note here that I am not suggesting that multiple realizability is an unsound possibility, for I think that it is not implausible that multiple, different physical states could issue the same experience.

NE thesis is mistaken. What other options are there for physicalists who want to hold on to the picture of nature as something non-experiential? Given the plethora of problems with maintaining a monist picture where matter is completely non-experiential, another option is to deny the reality of conscious experience—the RP thesis. This is so because radical emergence proposes that there is conscious experience but that matter—the fundamental stuff of the world—is completely non-experiential. Hence we have radical or brute emergence.

Reductionism of the variety that I have been discussing—where experiential terms are reduced to non-experiential terms—is also predicated on the NE and RP theses because it holds that experience can be reduced to a non-experiential base, namely, matter.

This alternative position is the main target of Strawson’s attack. Strawson maintains that Dennett is the main proponent of this view—“The Denial”—and we ought to therefore consider the reasons that he gives against the existence of conscious experience, where this means an experiential ‘what-it-is-like-ness.’ As already discussed, Dennett’s position is that consciousness is just a matter of informational/functional states and that there is nothing it is like to be in a functional state, experientially speaking. This is plainly clear when Dennett writes that “[t]he idea that there is something like a ‘phenomenal field’ of ‘phenomenal properties’ *in addition to* the informational/functional properties accommodated by my theory” is an illusion (Dennett 1993, 891; quoted in Strawson 2019a, 34). Regarding the status of consciousness being as things seem, Dennett says, in the same vein, that “[*t*]here seems to be phenomenology [...] but it does *not* follow from this undeniable, universally attested fact that *there really is* phenomenology” (Dennett 1991, 366; quoted in Strawson 2012, 137). These remarks are particularly infelicitous, and it is perfectly plausible to say that particular states of the brain *just are* conscious experiences of consciousness. In order to maintain otherwise, one must hold either that

consciousness emerges from or can be reduced to non-experiential matter or that conscious experience does not really exist.

Dennett's first move is to argue that 'qualia'—a term that denotes the qualitative experience of consciousness—is exceedingly vague and thus cannot play a role in an account of the phenomenon of consciousness. That is, qualia are ultimately illusory. This alternative way of approaching question of consciousness and the mental is important to consider since it provides a way in which to maintain a particular kind of materialist worldview that does not face the problems that plague materialists who maintain both the NE and RP theses. However, the reason that this can be done—namely, the denial of conscious experience—is precisely the reason that leads to other problems that need to be dealt with. For instance, it certainly *seems* as though there is conscious experience—how is this accounted for? I will consider this alternative view here and demonstrate that it does not undermine the panpsychist position that I have argued in favour for.

Dennett first wishes to tease out our intuitions on the topic of qualia with an 'intuition pump,' that is, an example that serves to incite our intuitions from which he aims to draw a conclusion. Here Dennett begins by giving an example of one person eating cauliflower and another person wondering how the other "could possibly relish *that taste*" (Dennett 2013, 296). One may be drawn to the hypothesis, Dennett suggests, that the way that the cauliflower tastes for one person is different from how it tastes to the other person—for things often taste different to us at different times (Dennett 2013, 298). This picture suggests that qualia—tastes, smells, sounds, etc.—are essentially subjective qualities of how "*things seem to us*," and this is where Dennett is in disagreement (Dennett 2013, 297).

Qualia, definitionally speaking, can be isolated "from everything else that is going on," and therefore qualia are what is left after one has stripped down everything non-essential and one

is left with “the essentials” (Dennett 2013, 296). If this is what is meant by the term ‘qualia’, then qualia are independent of how individuals “are stimulated or non-perceptually affected” and “of how they are subsequently disposed to behave or believe” (Dennett 2013, 296). It is not that this exercise of “purification”—that is, sharpening down the way things seem to a more precise description—cannot be done, but rather the point is that there is no “residual property to take seriously” after this is done (Dennett 2013, 297). One can fool oneself into thinking that there are such properties, but this is a mistake.

Dennett argues that there are four characteristic features of qualia: They are “1. ineffable, 2. intrinsic, 3. private, and 4. directly apprehensible ways things seem to me” (Dennett 2013, 298). These are untenable, however, and thus qualia—the qualitative character of conscious experience—do not exist. Let us consider primarily the idea that qualia are intrinsic, that is, the quality that qualia have if they are what one arrives at if one sharpens down smells and sounds to their essentials. Dennett compares this feature of qualia to a naïve view that dollars, as opposed to other currencies, “have *intrinsic value*” (Dennett 2013, 299). The tendency of Americans to think that dollars have some sort of intrinsic value that is “logically independent of the *functional* exchange powers it shares with all other currencies in circulation” (Dennett 2013, 300; italics added). This is the sort of thing that qualia are proposed to have, Dennett maintains: intrinsic qualities that are “considered in isolation from all their causes and effects” and hence “elude all functional analysis” (Dennett 2013, 299). However, qualia only have a role in terms of a functional analysis of their *dispositional* properties.

This is precisely what Dennett means when he writes that there is no phenomenological experience over and above functional/informational states. Dennett wants to say that qualia cannot have a role in an account of consciousness, since there is no clear answer to the question

of (1) whether qualia includes all changes in one's subjective response to a particular taste, say, or (2) whether a change in one's judgment about a smell or a taste is also a particular kind of quale (Dennett 2013, 308). There is no object of investigation here, and, most importantly, there is nothing that it is like, experientially, to see a colour or hear a sound. A robot that responded appropriately to colours and sounds in the way in which we do—where, in other words, the robot would use the term 'blue', etc. as we do—is as conscious as we are, since consciousness is a functional phenomenon and not an experiential one. Strictly speaking, qualia are illusory, and we are just like the robot who responds appropriately to sounds and colours—they have a certain *functional* role in our lives—although there is nothing that it is like to see blue, etc.

The *phenomenon* of consciousness is predicated on applying the intentional stance—which includes such concepts as *experience*—to oneself. But the phenomenological experience is strictly an illusion, for consciousness is just a matter of functional brain states—which are non-experiential.

### 7. Conclusion

In arguing for a panpsychist account of the mental—in particular, an account of experience—I have also outlined one route that a naturalist approach can take. I believe that this approach is a felicitous one that avoids the problems of radical emergence, reductionism, or the denial of conscious experience. In the next chapter, I will argue in favour of a kind of naturalism called liberal naturalism, which seeks to maintain that the mental can be approached naturalistically without embarking on a reductionist program. This framework, I will argue, is the most auspicious framework for accounting for the mental.

## Chapter 3

### *1. Introduction*

In Chapter 2, I argued for the cogency of a panpsychist/pan-experientialist account of consciousness and the mental, arguing that this approach auspiciously deals with a number of questions and problems in the philosophy of mind. Notably, I argued that the problem of how to understand the relationship between the physical and the mental is most fruitfully approached in a panpsychist framework. I also considered, and ultimately argued against, the possibility of radical emergence as a viable account of the existence of conscious experience and, conversely, the cogency of reductionist programs in the philosophy of mind. In this chapter, I argue in favour of a particular kind of naturalistic framework called *liberal* naturalism, as opposed to *restrictive* naturalism. Liberal naturalism is the kind of naturalism that I take Strawson to be operating in, given his approach to the mental that maintains the integrity of traditional mental terms, where such terms are not reduced to a scientific vocabulary that does not include any of these terms.<sup>28</sup>

### *2. Restrictive and Liberal Naturalism*

John McDowell begins his intriguing and insightful paper “Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind” by saying that “[m]odern epistemology is beset by distinctive anxieties” (McDowell 2009, 257). These anxieties that are captured well in the following remark by Wilfrid Sellars: “In characterizing an episode or state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons” (Sellars EPM §36; quoted in McDowell 2009, 257). The anxieties that beset *modern* epistemology have their basis in the conception of nature “that yields this contrast” between the space of reasons and “logical space, the space of placement in nature” (McDowell 2009, 257). Modern epistemology is, in

---

<sup>28</sup> A reduction of mental terms might say, for instance, that experience really is just a matter of non-experiential, functional brain processes.

other words, susceptible to a naturalistic fallacy—something that would not have concerned an Aristotelean or mediaeval philosopher (McDowell 2009, 257–58). The implication is that for something to be “placed in the space of reasons is not to give an empirical description of it,” a move that McDowell thinks is an infelicitous one. Although it is true that questions of knowledge “can be in view only in the space of reasons,” McDowell suggests that we can avoid the anxiety of committing a naturalistic fallacy when we say that we can give an empirical description of knowing (understanding) “if we can [...] count thinking and knowing as natural phenomena” (McDowell 2009, 260).

There are two ways in which we can count ‘thinking’, ‘knowing’, and, by extension, mental terms more generally, as natural phenomena. The first approach is *restrictive* naturalism. This sort of naturalism “aim[s] to naturalize the concepts of thinking and knowing by forcing the conceptual structure in which they belong into the framework of the realm of law” (McDowell 2009, 261–62). ‘Restrictive’ thus denotes an approach that reduces thinking and knowing to a causal realm. The second approach, which I think is the preferable one, is *liberal* naturalism. The term ‘liberal’ serves to incorporate into this naturalism the idea that we need not reject the vocabulary of the mental in favour of a scientific vocabulary in order to say that thinking and knowing are natural. In short, we need not “integrate into the realm of law the frame within which the concepts of thinking and knowing function,” which restrictive naturalism maintains is precisely the way in which we count knowing as natural (McDowell 2009, 262).

In other words, the liberal naturalist does not attempt to translate the terms and categories of the manifest image into the scientific image, for the “frame” of the former does not function in the frame of the latter. Any attempt to do so will result in a loss of the integrity of the terms that constitute the former, where mental terms have their home. The liberal naturalist would not be

satisfied with the idea that in order to count understanding and knowing as natural phenomena we need to force these concepts into a conceptual vocabulary of, say, behavioural psychology.<sup>29</sup>

McDowell suggests, rightly, that we need not conclude that we are not giving an “empirical description of it” (i.e. a state of knowledge) because a “state [of knowledge, for example] is placed in the space of reasons” (McDowell 2009, 257). Of the two ways to count knowing and thinking as natural restrictive naturalism seems to me to be the most problematic. Dennett’s position on the status of conscious experience stands out as lying squarely within this conception of naturalism. Regarding the mentalistic language of knowing, believing, experiencing, etc., Dennett writes that the problem with such terms (i.e. the terms that fall within the descriptive category of the mental: understanding, perception, belief, intentionality, etc.) is that they have a conceptual place only in “the first-person point of view,” which is “anchored in the manifest image, not the scientific image, and cannot avail itself of the resources of the scientific image” (Dennett 2013, 350). McDowell’s target in his paper is precisely this view: the idea that the concepts of traditional epistemology can only be understood by a restrictive approach where we ultimately force mental categories (which fall within the space of reasons) into the space of causes, where the mental categories lose their character.<sup>30</sup>

McDowell also explicates this point when he says that Dennett falls within a restrictive camp because of his comments in *Consciousness Explained* that “the brain must be the mind,” where the brain is just a syntactic engine and hence not a thinking thing (Dennett 1991, 41;

---

<sup>29</sup> One way in which the concepts of thinking and knowing can be moved from the space of reasons to the space of causes—the goal of the restrictive naturalist—is to reduce the vocabulary of the space of reasons, where terms like ‘understanding’ have a place, to a causal vocabulary of a behaviourist psychology. Although I will not focus on where Dennett fits in with the distinction between restrictive and liberal naturalism in this chapter—focusing instead on the merits of liberal naturalism as a guiding framework—Dennett lands neatly in restrictive naturalism.

<sup>30</sup> Dennett’s remark that consciousness exists but that it is not as things seem is emblematic of precisely this view.

quoted in McDowell 2009, 274). Dennett makes this move to avoid dualism—where the science of the brain cannot explain experiential predicates within its own vocabulary—but we need not say that the brain is not a thinking thing in order to do so; we simply need to refrain from postulating “something immaterial to be the thinking thing” (McDowell 2009, 274). The reductionist program is characteristic of restrictive naturalism, where, notably, “the structure of the space of reasons can be *reduced* to something else” (McDowell 2009, 260).

Moreover, one may also, according to the restrictive naturalist, “aim to reveal concepts that work in the space of reasons as themselves [...] directly serving to place things in the realm of law” (McDowell 2009, 261). McDowell then suggests that it does not matter whether one takes the first approach in a restrictive naturalistic framework—where the space of reasons can be reduced to the space of causes—or the second approach—where reasons simply serve the realm of law. For both approaches are predicated on the idea that Sellars’ remark—that “[i]n characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons”—is a mistake (Sellars EPM §36; quoted in McDowell 2009, 257).

The liberal naturalist also maintains that this is a mistake, but this framework takes a different approach to count thinking as natural. In order to avoid the naturalistic fallacy by saying that there is an intimate connection between “how something is placed in the space of reasons” and how something is “placed in nature,” Sellars wishes to contrast them by saying that “concepts that belong in the space of reasons [...] cannot be captured in terms of concepts that belong in the contrasting logical space, the space of placement in nature” (McDowell 2009, 257).

I take it that Strawson’s approach to the phenomenon of conscious experience and the category of the mental is squarely in the realm of liberal naturalism; Dennett’s naturalistic

framework is certainly more closely aligned with restrictive naturalism. Now, Dennett's naturalism is distinct from many restrictive naturalistic frameworks in that he maintains mental categories at the level of the intentional stance—they are not reduced to a non-experiential base. However, Dennett's naturalism is still reductive insofar as he wants to reduce the experiential to the behavioural and that therefore conscious *experience* is an illusion. Moreover, Dennett thinks that consciousness is to be dealt with at the physical stance, a part of the scientific image where mental and experiential categories are absent. Questions of the mental and consciousness, therefore, are natural for Dennett but only because they are absorbed into the realm of law in a particular way. According to this view, we can count the phenomenon of consciousness as natural because consciousness does not include experience and other mental categories—those categories are dealt with at a behavioural level or stance.

In Dennett's framework, mental categories are dealt with at a behavioural level—and in this way he claims to preserve the integrity of mental categories or at least to not eliminate them. But these categories are eliminated from an investigation of consciousness, for consciousness is dealt with at the physical stance, which is void of these categories. Strawson, by contrast, maintains a physicalist worldview but does not hold that we need to reduce mental categories to physical, non-experiential ones for them to count as natural. Furthermore, Strawson does not hold that for the mental to be a genuine object of inquiry, we need to speak of it in terms of the behavioural. For Strawson, we can still maintain that the mental is natural and ought to be considered on its own merits, not reduced to something else.

In Chapter 2, I proposed that a panpsychist conception of nature is an appropriate way to accommodate the phenomenon of consciousness within a naturalistic worldview. Taking on the idea that the stuff of the world has experiential being allows us to maintain that conscious

experience is natural without having to reduce it to a reduction base that is non-experiential. Hillary Putnam expresses the same skepticism of reductionism when he writes favourably of liberal naturalism, emphasizing that it is “contrasted with familiar scientific versions of naturalism and their project of forcing explanations in every field into models derived from one or another particular science” (Putnam 2015, 312). Crucially, a scientific or restrictive naturalism, when it reduces something into a scientific vocabulary, does so in such a way that the reduced terms lose their integrity. Again, this is the sort of thing that happens in Dennett’s account of consciousness, where conscious states are simply informational/functional states, thus leaving the experience of consciousness as an illusion.

In the framework for which I have argued, there is no problem with the idea that conscious experience is natural, since experience is in fact a fundamental constituent of the world. One need not reduce the experiential to the non-experiential or the mental to the non-mental to count the mental, and experience, as natural. Although McDowell does not accept a panpsychist conception about the nature of the world—favouring a kind of quietism about such questions—his work on liberal naturalism will serve my argument that panpsychism provides a promising framework to understand the relationship between experience and the physical world. Moreover, a liberal naturalism allows us to maintain the reality of conscious experience and other mental categories in that these categories are not reduced to either behavioural categories or a non-experiential reduction base. I have provided a way to understand consciousness as natural in Chapter 2, and it is my purpose in this chapter to provide a way to understand other mental terms as natural, such as belief, understanding, etc.

Strawson most closely aligns with liberal, as opposed to restrictive, naturalism, and I think that characterizing his framework in this way gives us some insight into the benefits of a

liberal naturalist approach. I will aim to show that Strawson's panpsychism is an account of consciousness that is superior to a functionalist/behaviourist account and that some of the reasons for its superiority stems from the character of a liberal naturalist approach to questions of the mind.

It is useful here to describe what it would mean for thinking and knowing—and the mental aspects of the world generally—to be non-natural. McDowell's proposal is telling: He suggests that it is non-naturalistic to talk only about "the social role of attributions of knowledge" and not also about an actual cognitive phenomenon that ultimately needs accounting for (McDowell 2009, 263). Citing Rorty as a proponent of this view, McDowell suggests that Rorty's position is that casting mental notions like 'thinking' and 'knowing' as natural is the "pervasive defect of traditional epistemology" (McDowell 2009, 263). The reason for this is that knowledge functions only in the space of reasons and that proposing that knowledge is a natural phenomenon supposes that knowledge makes sense only in the space of causes, where "different sort of relation [...] organize the subject matter of natural-scientific investigation do duty for the relations of justification" (McDowell 2009, 263). It seems to me that Dennett takes the same line of reasoning with his discussion of different stances, where Dennett discusses cases of attribution of a belief or rationality in terms of a behavioural vocabulary.<sup>31</sup>

I will here explicate what McDowell takes Rorty to be doing and why he discusses traditional mental categories in terms of the social role of applying those categories to others. The contrast between the space of causes and the space of reasons leads Rorty to maintain that we cannot count thinking and knowing as natural phenomena (McDowell 2009, 263). Such

---

<sup>31</sup> Dennett's handling of mental categories is not non-naturalistic on McDowell's conception, however, since Dennett is not concerned with the social roles of attributions of knowledge in Rorty's sense. Rather, Dennett is concerned with the functional/dispositional role that these terms have when they are applied to others at the intentional stance.

concepts can be understood only in the space of reasons. Therefore, a restrictive naturalism—where these concepts are reduced to the realm of causes—is not a possibility for Rorty. These terms have a place in the realm of reasons, and, since “the natural is what figures on the other side of Sellar’s contrast” (i.e. the space of causes), both restrictive and liberal naturalism are ruled out for Rorty (McDowell 2009, 263).

Although Rorty casts thinking and knowing as non-natural, he does not draw the conclusion that thinking and knowing are supernatural. Instead, Rorty switches from talking about knowledge as a natural phenomenon and switches to talking about “the social role of attributions of knowledge” (McDowell 2009, 263). Dennett’s approach to the mental strikes me as quite similar to Rorty’s, for the items of the intentional stance are understood essentially in a behaviouristic fashion, where mental terms really just are behavioural terms: terms that denote a disposition for one thing versus another, for instance.

Dennett and Rorty do not handle mental terms in exactly the same way, however. Dennett wants to say that we can account for consciousness and other mental terms naturalistically, whereas Rorty does not wish to do so, maintaining that the goal to do so is one of the many faults of modern epistemology. Still, their approaches are similar in when they both take issue with traditional mental categories. Thus, Dennett wants to find a way to account for them within a particular kind of naturalistic worldview, and Rorty simply switches vocabularies, favouring talk of the social role of attributions of knowledge.

Dennett maintains that his framework can account for consciousness and the mental by reconceptualizing them in terms of their functional properties. By this view, consciousness is really just a matter of functional/informational brain processes, and hence experience is utterly illusory. The illusion is explained by the different stances: We become fully conscious when we

apply the intentional stance to ourselves (Schwartz 2012, 304). When the intentional stance is applied to oneself, one then has the illusion that one is an experiencing thing, just as we perceive others as rational, experiencing beings when the intentional stance is applied to them. Moreover, the illusion of experience so understood must have an important functional role if Dennett's functionalism is to remain consistent.

In this way, Dennett is able to maintain a naturalistic account of consciousness, but only because the things that are usually associated with consciousness—like experience—are left out of the account. Moreover, I should note that it is not quite right to say that Dennett leaves out traditional mental categories from his theorizing, for these concepts do have a role in an explanation of people's everyday, commonsense beliefs. But strictly speaking, notions like experience, belief, understanding, etc. do not figure in an account of consciousness—where the functional/informational properties of the brain are the objects of inquiry—although they do play a part in our folk-psychological conception of the world. Furthermore, Dennett holds that these concepts might play a role in an account of how consciousness *seems* to us—although they do not play a role in a genuine account of consciousness since they do not get at what consciousness actually is. That is, we begin to truly think and see the world as composed of agents that think, have experience, etc. when we apply the intentional stance to ourselves; but again, this does not mean that those concepts have a place in an account of consciousness, since consciousness is appropriately accounted for at the physical stance. It is a category error to speak of traditional mental categories as having a place in an account of the nature of consciousness.

### 3. *The Mental as Natural*

In what way should we conceive of the mental as natural, then? It is not enough to simply say that the mental is not supernatural—this does not tell us anything, and it is definitionally ruled out at the outset in a naturalistic framework. What I think a panpsychist conception of nature—which says that at least some of the fundamental bits of matter are experiential—allows us is a plausible place for the mental in a naturalistic conception of the world. I think that this picture is appropriate: The mental, and consciousness, is simply a constituent of matter at a basic level or is a property of matter when matter is organized in particular ways. As I have argued, the view that consciousness and the mental are simply properties of organized matter is only intelligible if we assume that consciousness or experience is a basic constituent of at least *some* of the fundamental bits of matter.

Moreover, as I stressed in Chapter 2, it is my view that a neutral monist picture of the world is correct: Amid all the variation in the world, it remains that there is a sense in which everything is ultimately made of one kind of stuff. Whatever this stuff is, it is neither mental nor physical as the terms ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ are usually understood. To put it simply, the stuff of the world can be neither physical nor mental as, say, Descartes understood these terms. I should also note here that a panpsychist conception of the world is fully compatible with neutral monism (though they may seem at odds): A panpsychist view of nature simply says that experience is a fundamental part of the world. It leaves open the idea that at the bottom of things, there exists neither mental nor material (again, as these terms are typically understood). The panpsychist picture that I have argued in favour of says that all is physical—a natural-kind term—but that its nature may be very different from what is often accepted. That is, it is right to say that the stuff of the world is neither mental nor material, and the panpsychist point that I

want to stress is that experience is a real part of the world—and is more fundamental than assumed in many physicalist frameworks.

Many physicalist frameworks assume a reductionist program is necessary—something that plagues a good deal of functionalism in the philosophy of mind, notably in Dennett. I take a neutral monist position to be correct, and, furthermore, I think that a panpsychist picture is preferable in that it gives legitimacy to the reality of experience. I proposed that panpsychism is correct in its assertion that experience is a part of matter, and in this way one can understand the place of consciousness and the mental in a monist, naturalistic worldview. I will say more about this below, but I note it here to avoid confusion about what I take a panpsychist conception of nature to entail. I do not take this conception of nature to imply any form of philosophical idealism, nor do I think that panpsychism is a kind of reductionism.

A panpsychist picture of nature does not imply is a reduction of the non-experiential to the experiential—even a pure panpsychist picture is not a reductionist one.<sup>32</sup> A panpsychist conception of nature does not, for instance, make incoherent the notion of experience by saying that experience is a fundamental part of nature and that, in the pure panpsychist picture, all of the fundamental bits of matter are experiential. To rephrase the problem, it might look as though a panpsychist account makes incoherent the very notion of experience by denying—at least in the

---

<sup>32</sup> As I noted in Chapter 2, reductionist programs have not exclusively sought a reduction from mind to matter; some have attempted to reduce matter to mind, and I wish here to briefly explain why panpsychism does not entail this kind of program. A panpsychist conception of nature simply says that there is experience at the bottom of things, but this does not mean that everything—including mid-sized objects, artifacts, and the rest—is experiential. There is non-experiential being. The panpsychist position simply wants to suggest that this means that non-experiential is non-experiential *for us*: Matter does not look like it has experiential qualities, but at least some of the fundamental bits of matter are themselves subjects of experience, albeit perhaps of a less sophisticated sort. To put it another way, to say that experience is at the bottom of things does not imply absolute idealism. We can still say that there is the non-experiential—even if those things that are usually deemed non-experiential, such as matter, actually have experiential being at some level—insofar as there are categorically inert and non-experiential things: tables, a description of a brain scan, etc. I quite like Spinoza’s position here: There are two aspects of the world, or substance, namely thought and extension (or the mental and material), but these are not distinct substances—they are aspects of the same thing.

pure panpsychist picture—the existence of non-experiential being anywhere in the universe.<sup>33</sup>

We know what it means to have experience or for there to be experiential being because we know what it would mean for something to be non-experiential, a notion that the panpsychist is willing to deny.

The solution is reasonably simple: All we need to say is that in terms of our own experience, there are things that appear to us as non-experiential but that may be their own subjects of experience. I suggested a way in which to understand the relationship between experience and the brain in a particular state, which at the outset certainly seems to have a non-experiential status. And in the case of matter, we can say that (at least *some* of) the fundamental bits that make it up are experiential—they are themselves subjects of experience. Like Spinoza, I think that there is only one kind of stuff, and one aspect of it is experience. The panpsychist move is just to say that one component of the physical—which we take to be a natural-kind term and the fundamental stuff of the world—is experience. Those skeptical of panpsychism but not of the reality of experience want to say instead that matter is non-experiential but when organized in a particular way, there is experience.<sup>34</sup>

I would also like to stress that a panpsychist picture does not assume that such notions as ‘understanding’ or ‘thinking’—traditional mental notions—are properties of matter. I accept Dennett’s contention that it would be a category error to do so. Brains do not experience,

---

<sup>33</sup> Note that I am not taking a side on which conception of panpsychism is correct, and the concern that I am addressing here is one that concerns any form of panpsychism. That is, other panpsychist conception may also look like they are a kind of reductionism; one might think that saying that some of the fundamental bits of matter are experiential is a reduction of mind—which is not a constituent of matter, so it might be maintained—to matter. I do think that there is a possibility of that here—but only if certain mental concepts are reduced to properties of matter. ‘Understanding’ is not a property of matter like ‘experience’ would be.

<sup>34</sup> I have no doubt that the fact that we have the experiences we do, have the cognitive capacities that we do, etc. has to do with the way in which matter is organized in brains like ours and that the things that constitute matter are not experiential in the same way in which we are. Precisely how it is the case that our brains are the way they are and have the properties that they do is a further question for biology and philosophy. All I wish to stress here is that a plausible starting point is that matter is, in a simple way, experiential.

understand, etc. These are qualities that are properly attached to persons at the intentional stance, for Dennett. However, I am skeptical of the idea that the framework of functionalism can adequately account for mentalistic notions. Primarily, this is so because functionalism does not include a conception of experience in its vocabulary, and only experiential beings can be properly said to understand, desire, etc. (Strawson 1994, 156). It is right, however, to say that these categories have an appropriate conceptual place in the space of reasons, and it would be characteristic of restrictive naturalism to say that they are part of nature in the sense in which they are potential objects of physics. Indeed, Putnam writes that one of the definitive characteristics of restrictive naturalism would be to do this sort of thing, that is, to try to capture some phenomenon using a model derived from one or another science (Putnam 2015, 312).

I do not mean to suggest that the mental is not a possible object of scientific inquiry or that models from biology or psychology are categorically irrelevant—they certainly are not. But I think that it is crucial to consider precisely how we propose to use models from various sciences to aid us in an account and investigation of the mental, i.e. its properties, its development, etc. Tyler Burge has a useful comment on this that gets at the concern of this thesis (i.e. how *naturalistic* frameworks propose to account for the mental): “Promoters of ‘naturalizing’ projects are often driven, I think, by misconceptions of science. These misconceptions breed misconceptions of mind” (Burge 2010, 296; quoted in Putnam 2015, 313). Burge then goes on to say that a psychological explanatory claim need not be “twisted into the mold of biological or information-theoretic explanation” (Burge 2010, 297; quoted in Putnam 2015, 314). This, Putnam says, is in the spirit of a liberal naturalism not simply because Burge rejects reductionism (and, we might also add, wholesale eliminativism) but because of his

rejection of the project of speaking of a psychological claim in terms of “causal relations” (Putnam 2015, 314).

Given these considerations concerning various naturalisms, I want to reiterate that the picture of nature that I have presented does not imply any sort of reductionism or explanation/account of mental terms in a restrictive or causal vocabulary. However, we clearly cannot account for terms like ‘knowing’ in the same way in which the framework that I outlined accounts for conscious experience. That is, it would be inappropriate to ascribe a property like ‘understanding’ to matter, although, as I have argued, it is appropriate to do so in the case of conscious experience insofar as we wish to account for experience in a non-reductive fashion. The reason that it would not be appropriate to say that matter *understands* is trivial: ‘Understanding’ is something that we properly ascribe to a human being or something that is enough like a human being.

A remark from Wittgenstein is relevant here: “We only say of a human being and what is like one that it thinks. We also say it of dolls and no doubt and no doubt of spirits too” (*PI* § 360). The point is that, as we use the terms ‘think’ and ‘know’, they are only appropriately applied to human beings and things like them, thus leaving an ascription of understanding to matter a category error. But what of my argument that experience is a constituent of matter; does this not commit a category error in the same way in which attributing understanding to matter is a category error? I do not think so, for it is a plausible way to undergird the fact of conscious experience—I am not satisfied with saying that we use the term ‘experience’ to understand the behaviour of others, and ourselves, but that there is nothing that it is like to experience.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Before I turn to the ways in which to understand the mental within a naturalistic framework, I wish to say something about the Wittgensteinian critique, which is mirrored in large part in Dennett’s critique of panpsychism. The point that Wittgenstein makes is quite right: It would be inappropriate to say of matter that it understands, believes, etc., as these are terms that are used when we talk about human beings, or things enough like us,

I agree with the Wittgensteinean point that we ascribe these sorts of terms to human beings, but I do not think that a behaviouristic vocabulary can account for conscious experience and other mental terms. Strawson perspicaciously writes that “only an experiencing thing can correctly be said to believe anything, or like anything, or fear or hope or understand anything” (Strawson 1994, 156). Put another way, these mental terms can be ascribed properly only to an experiencing being, and we therefore cannot really make sense of these terms purely in a behaviouristic fashion, given that a behaviourist or functional vocabulary does not account for experience.

To show that behaviourist accounts of the mental are mistaken, Strawson presents a thought experiment that is meant to show that it is certainly not necessary that mental terms be understood behavioural ones. The plan forward for Strawson is a simple one: Demonstrate that a mental term’s having sense is not predicated on an analysis of the term in terms of publicly observable behaviour. This approach is essentially right, and I will thus outline Strawson’s argument here and show why I think that a behavioural understanding of such things as belief, sensation, understanding, etc. is insufficient. I then turn to demonstrating that although it looks like a functionalist approach to the mental might be able to accommodate such terms as ‘understanding’, it in fact cannot.

Strawson sketches the following case: The Weather Watchers are intelligent, sentient creatures who experience all the mental phenomena that we do—sensations, thoughts, beliefs,

---

paraphrasing Wittgenstein. However, this is not the case with something like experience—and I will ultimately argue that things like ‘thinking’ or ‘understanding’ do not make sense for an experience-less being—since a denial of the proposal that (at least some of the fundamental particles of) matter is experiential leads to concrete problems in accounting for the existence of conscious experience. If it is the case that matter is utterly non-experiential, then we have to say that consciousness emerges (radically) from the non-experiential, or, worse, we have to deny the existence of conscious experience. I have already dealt with this point at length, but the point that I would like to make about accounting for mental terms like ‘thinking’ and ‘knowing’ is that we need not say that they are a component of matter to say that they are natural.

understanding, etc.—but “they are constitutionally incapable of any sort of behavior” (Strawson 1994, 251).<sup>36</sup> If behaviourism is true, then it is not the case that this fictitious race of creatures is possible, for a being with certain beliefs, sensations, etc. (in short, mental properties) must be disposed to act in a certain way if the ascription of mental properties is to have any sense at all.<sup>37</sup> The behaviourist objection to the Weather Watchers—and to the idea that there is something over and above observable behaviour that is relevant in an account of the mental, a reductionist tendency that it shares with functionalism—is that mental phenomena are just behavioural phenomena. Therefore, it is impossible for there to exist a creature that has mental phenomena that are not in any way observable; they exhibit no behaviour, in short.

Behaviourists (and here I include Dennett) insist that if something has a particular mental property—say, a particular sensation at *x* time—then it must behave in a certain way or at least be *disposed* to behave in a certain way. This is the *dispositional thesis* (Strawson 1994, 251). I outlined the basics of this thesis above: It states that “*mental beings* [...] are necessarily *behavioral beings*” (Strawson 1994, 252). Mental beings—i.e. beings that have various mental properties like sensations, beliefs, etc.—are behavioural beings because what it means to have a mental property, according to this picture, is just to behave or to be disposed to behave in a certain way.

Arguing against this, Strawson wants to argue for the possibility of the existence of the Weather Watchers—i.e. he wishes to show that it is not in principle impossible for such a

---

<sup>36</sup> I leave out the possibility that some sort of being could be able to observe some non-standard kind of behaviour, for if it is conceivable that some kind of creature could perceive the behaviour of the Weather Watchers, then the observability criterion is rendered meaningless. We here understand ‘behaviour’ in its standard, everyday sense.

<sup>37</sup> Note that the behaviourist position is a reductionist one since it assumes a reduction of mental terms to behavioural ones: If a thing has certain mental properties, then it must be ipso facto disposed to behave in a certain way, given that those mental terms really are just behavioural terms. That is, to have a belief or sensation or to understand just is to be disposed to behave or be disposed to behave in a certain way. Recall Dennett’s remark that insofar as two things are behaviourally exactly alike, they are mentally exactly alike (Strawson 2019a, 35).

creature to exist, demonstrating behaviourism to be false—and thus that the mental cannot be translated strictly into a behavioural vocabulary. This kind of reductionism would maintain that all of the mental properties that I have been referring to can be accounted for strictly in terms of reference to certain behaviours or disposition to certain behaviours. The Weather Watchers are incapable of any action because they gradually become immobile as they age, “rooted to the ground, in which they retain their basic sensory and intellectual capacities” (Strawson 1994, 254). These creatures not only do not exhibit any behaviour—they also have no notion of intention or action.

One might object that if one desires something or believes something, then one must *ipso facto* be “disposed to act or behave in some way” (Strawson 1994, 255). But is it necessary that one be disposed to act in a particular way if one has a particular belief or understands something? Strawson suggests that if we think this, it is because we so often think in terms of action; but it is not necessary that to desire something, for instance, “that one should wish that one could bring it about[?]” (Strawson 1994, 255).

That one behaves in a particular way or has as a disposition to behave in a particular way is not obviously entailed by having a belief, understanding something, etc.—in short, by having a mental property. There are certainly occasions in which although we believe something, understand something, or have a particular sensation, we are not acting in such a way that would reveal us to have that particular mental property. If behaviourism is right, then not behaving in a particular way—or at least not being disposed to behave in a particular way—bars that person having a mental property; for having a mental property just is to behave or to be disposed to behave in a particular way.

What of the notion that in cases where we have a particular belief or sensation but do not behave in a particular way; are we at least disposed to behave in a particular way? Even if one were to concede that having a particular mental property entails that one be disposed in a particular way, it does not follow that the mental property is encapsulated wholly in terms of its dispositional properties (if this is even a coherent position). To draw again on Strawson's Weather Watchers example, we can experience pain or have a desire without necessarily behaving in a particular way. Being disposed to behave in a particular way is not what it means to have a mental property, and it is only because of a particular habit of thinking in terms of action that we might think that this is the case.

Returning to qualia, the place of qualia in an account of the mental, for functionalists, consists in their having a certain functional/dispositional role. Other mental terms have this kind of role as well, but I will here focus specifically on the status of qualia. Supposing that it is right to say that qualia simply have a functional/dispositional role but that there is nothing it is like to see red or experience pain, we are actually admitting the reality of qualia. If qualia have a particular causal or dispositional role, as Dennett says, then we might ask why it has the dispositional role that it does. Seager notes that this position would have to account for why qualia has a particular dispositional role; qualia must "have some property that accounts for the system's causal efficacy" (Seager 1983, 182). That is, qualia need to have some quality that would account for their causal role in a certain functional state, and if this is so, then it is to admit that qualia are not merely functional/disposition and that qualia therefore have a place in mental states.

Seager puts the problem with functionalism's mishandling of qualia well:

"There is no obvious entailment from x's being a certain state in a realization of a given functional system-description to x's possessing a particular—or any at all for that matter—qualitative content. Thus there is reason to suspect that functionalism leaves something out of its

account which is of singular importance—the painfulness of pain, for example” (Seager 1983, 175).

Even as functionalist programs attempt to account for qualia in terms of their dispositional/functional role—rejecting that there is a qualitative character to mental states, maintaining instead that there are only functional states—we might ask what qualia have in virtue of their ability to bring about a certain functional state? If we say that the reason that qualia can serve this role is because of their qualitative character, then we are admitting that qualia “has its place [...] at the level of the realization” (Seager 1983, 182). Hence it is unsound to say that describing the *cause* of some event as, say, painful, is “not to engage in functional explanation,” for, to reiterate, “painfulness [...] is one of the causally efficacious features of certain events” (Seager 1983, 182).

A more fruitful way to approach the question of qualia—or, put more simply, conscious experience—is to say that certain states of the brain just are experiential states. For if one says that painfulness or the perception of a colour are to be understood wholly in terms of their causal or dispositional role, then a plausible conclusion is that they have a functional role in virtue of their qualitative character. And, as Seager puts it, this is not to engage in a functionalist explanation; it admits that some mental states are not strictly speaking functional states.

Now, Strawson argues that a panpsychist picture can account for other mental terms like belief, understanding, etc. in a way in which functionalism does not seem to be adequate to do so. The way in which Strawson maintains that such terms can be accounted for does not rely on their being properties of matter. But Strawson argues, correctly, that we cannot really say that something thinks, understands, or has a belief if that thing in question is non-experiential. A functionalist approach maintains that insofar as something responds appropriately, we can draw

the conclusion that the thing in question understands. But this is unacceptable, for only an experiencing being can properly be said to understand something (Strawson 1994, 156).

Thinking and understanding are clearly—at least in large part—norm governed, and there is nothing in my account that implies a reductionism whereby I propose to reduce thinking, understanding, believing, etc. to an experiential reduction base that clearly does not have the properties or relations that adequately make sense of the mental terms just mentioned. We do not ascribe these terms to matter; this would be to take the sort of restrictive naturalist approach that I think is infelicitous.

The liberal naturalist approach to the status of the mental is appropriate in that it is not skeptical of the reality of conscious experience—it is a real occurrence in our lives, to paraphrase McDowell—and hence mental terms like ‘thinking’ or ‘understanding’ have a genuine place in an account of the mental. This is opposed to restrictive naturalism, where they do not have the same kind of role; their role in this framework is a behavioural one, a role to understand the actions of agents.

#### *4. Liberal Naturalism and the Mark of the Mental*

The liberal naturalist approach to the status of the mental is appropriate in that it is not skeptical of the notion of conscious experience on the basis that conscious experience does not have a place in a scientific, causal vocabulary. Conscious experience is an occurrence in our lives, as McDowell puts it, and hence mental terms like ‘thinking’ and ‘understanding’ have a place in an account of the mental, whereby they are not the objects of a reductionist program. To put it another way, there is a way to account for these terms within a naturalistic framework, given that only an experiential thing can properly be said to think or understand. McDowell’s simple point here that a liberal naturalism can count thinking and knowing as natural by

emphasizing that they are occurrences in our lives is helpful here. According to this sort of naturalism, we do not need to reduce the mental phenomena with which we are so intimately familiar to the vocabulary of a behaviourist psychology. Reductionism of this kind does not do service to the integrity of these mental terms since it has as its characteristic feature the goal of reducing mental terms to behavioural ones. This seems to me to have obvious problems, and I have already discussed some of them.

Notably, there seems to be more to understanding something, say, a theorem, than simply using it appropriately or responding to questions about the theorem appropriately. The normative nature of a mental term like ‘understanding’ is reason to think that only an experiencing thing could be said to understand given that normative activity is only possible—intuitively—for an experiential being. This intuition has its basis in the way in which we use such notions as ‘thinking’ and ‘knowing’. They have their sense, in other words, at the level of our lives in which we have such experiences. A non-experiential thing does not have the capacities—normative capacities, which are predicated on the thing being experiential—that could make sense of such mental notions. Dennett is right when he says that we apply the intentional stance to something to understand its actions, like, say, a chess-playing computer, but when we do this we treat the thing *as if* it was conscious or rational or had understanding—even though we know that it is not really experiential. That is, we assume when we do this that there is a difference between something responding appropriately and something that is really understanding or thinking or experiencing a sensation. The idea that our sense of having these properties stems from applying the intentional stance to ourselves faces the problem of how we can make sense of these notions at the intentional stance—traditional mental categories—in the first place.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> We can make sense of the idea that we act *as if* something were experiential even though it is not because we have a sense of what it means to be a thing that has genuine experience.

The fact that a functionalist/behaviourist framework does not incorporate the notion of experience in its vocabulary leads to concrete problems in accounting for these mental terms like ‘thinking’ and ‘understanding’. I have argued that a behaviourist approach does not help us here, and it runs into the same sort of problem that a functionalist approach faces regarding conscious experience. That is, mental categories have a place in the context of experiencing, normative beings, and accounting for them in terms of a behaviourist framework denies conscious experience, which is the very thing that gives sense to the mentalistic notions of thought, understanding, etc.

The liberal naturalist framework takes some of these mentalistic notions as a point of departure and then seeks to find ways in which the relevant sciences might help us to understand them. Rather than beginning with the assumptions that a behaviourist framework is correct and demanding that all relevant phenomena regarding human mental life and human psychology—the mind, in short—be absorbed into that frame, a liberal naturalism allows us to take our experience as a genuine object of inquiry. That is, this framework allows us to maintain as a point of departure that the concepts of our mental life can be accounted for on their own terms; they need not be accounted for in a restrictive fashion whereby we reduce them to behavioural categories. To do this is ultimately to lose the integrity of those mental terms, for it holds that ‘thinking’, for instance, is really just a term that we use to describe the actions of individuals. By this view, we ought to ask what sorts of behaviour, or dispositions to behaviour, count as thinking. But this is far too restrictive in its approach, for there is more to thinking than exhibiting certain behaviour.

Given Strawson’s argument for the primacy of conscious experience in any account of the mental, we might ask: ‘What is, if anything, the mark of the mental? What is fundamental to

the mental such that if it were absent we could not conclude that we were dealing with the mental?’ Strawson explicitly says that the mark of the mental is experience; Dennett takes an approach whereby different stances are required to understand various aspects of the mental. To grasp notions like ‘understanding’ or ‘thinking’, we apply the intentional stance. Consciousness is dealt with at the physical stance, as it is a matter of functional brain processes, and the illusion of conscious experience can be understood at the intentional stance.

I agree with Chomsky when he says that by ‘the mind’ we just mean “the mental aspects of the world,” with no concern regarding its fundamental mark or characteristic (Chomsky 2000, 75). Strawson holds that something “is a mental being [...] if and only if [...] it is an experiential being,” where “an experiencing being is one that currently possesses all the necessary equipment for experiential states” (Strawson 1994, 153). But Strawson also notes that it is conceivable to have mental properties that are not experiential, but “properties like these can account as fully mental properties [...] so long as they are possessed by experiencing beings” (Strawson 1994, 156). This is a central point of this thesis: namely, that a functionalist/behaviourist approach is not an appropriate approach to questions of the mental.

##### 5. *Conclusion*

I have been interested in this chapter, and this thesis more broadly, in how the mental aspects of the world are approached and accounted for. This chapter has served to survey two broad trends in the philosophy of mind, restrictive and liberal naturalism, and the kinds of accounts of the mental that are proposed within these frameworks. By dealing with some of the problems that I see in a restrictive naturalist approach, I have shown that a liberal naturalism is more felicitous and does not fall into the same conceptual problems that we find in a restrictive naturalism. Notably, a restrictive approach cannot adequately account for mentalistic notions like

‘understanding’, ‘thinking’, etc. because of the tendency in such accounts to seek a reduction of mental terms to behavioural terms.

Such an approach, I have argued, is inadequate. Moreover, I have provided a way to understand the claim that the mental—conscious experience and all of the other terms that fall under this descriptive category—is natural. That is, I have argued for a way that a naturalistic framework can approach and account for the mental and, furthermore, argued against a popular way of doing so in the philosophy of mind. A fuller understanding of the mental is possible if we abandon some of the inauspicious ways of approaching the mental and adopt the auspicious ones.

## References

- Baldwin, Thomas. "Two Types of Naturalism." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 80: 171–99.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2000. *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2016. *What Kind of Creatures are We?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dennett, Daniel C. 1991. *Consciousness Explained*. Toronto: Little, Brown and Company.
- . 2017. *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- . 2009. "Intentional Systems Theory." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Ansgar Beckermann, Brian McLaughlin, and Sven Walter, 339–50. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2013. *Intuition Pumps*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- . 2003. "Look out for the Dirty Baby." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10 (1): 31–33.
- . 1993. "Précis of Consciousness Explained." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (4): 889–92.
- . 1994. "Self-Portrait." In *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Samuel Guttenplan, 236–44. Oxford: Blackwell Press.
- Jackson, Frank. 1982. "Epiphenomenal Qualia." *Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (127): 127–36.
- McDowell, John. 2009. "Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind." In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*, 257–75. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Papineau, David. 2015 [2007]. "Naturalism." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/naturalism/>.
- Putnam, Hillary. 2015. "Naturalism, Realism, and Normativity." *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1 (2): 312–28.
- Rorty, Richard. 1979. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Schelling, Friedrich. 1997 [1978]. "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science," translated by Marcus Weigelt. In *German Idealist Philosophy*, edited by Rüdiger Bubner, 210–43. London: Penguin.
- Schuessler, Jennifer. 2013. "Philosophy that Stirs the Waters." *The New York Times*, April 29. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/30/books/daniel-dennett-author-of-intuition-pumps-and-other-tools-for-thinking.html>.
- Schwartz, P. Stephen. 2012. *A Brief History of Analytic Philosophy: From Russell to Rawls*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Seager, William. 1983. "Functionalism, Qualia and Causation." *Mind* 366 (XCII): 174–88.
- Sellars, Wilfred. 1997 [1956]. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Strawson, Galen. 2018. "The Consciousness Deniers." *The New York Review of Books*, March 13, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/13/the-consciousness-deniers/>.
- . 2019a. "A Hundred Years of Consciousness: 'A Long Training in Absurdity.'" *Estudios de Filosofía* 59: 9–43.
- . 2019b. "What Does 'Physical' Mean? A Prolegomenon to Physicalist Panpsychism." In *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism*, edited by William E. Seager, 317–39. Abington: Routledge.
- . 1994. *Mental Reality*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- . 2011. "Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism." In *Consciousness and the Mind-Body Problem. A Reader*, edited by Torin Alter and Robert J. Howell, 261–79. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2003. "Real Materialism." In *Chomsky and His Critics*, edited by Louise M. Antony and Norbert Hornstein, 49–88. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- . 2012. "Real Naturalism." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 86 (2): 125–54.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2009 [1951]. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Yolton, John W. 1983. *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.