

‘Why is all this processing [of the brain] accompanied by an experienced inner life?’¹⁰ Whereas the explanatory gap debate focuses on the relation between consciousness and non-conscious brain states, the hard problem consists of the question why there is consciousness at all, i.e. why there is an ‘inner aspect’ to experiences in the first place. Even though I will discuss experiences to a great extent in the second chapter, I will not address the question why we have them.

Second, what does this project contribute to its field? This project contributes to the literature in at least two ways. First, this project aims to clarify notions in the debate that are often used but that are nonetheless not very clear. I am thinking mainly of the term ‘subjectivity’, the meaning of which usually remains quite vague, and the term ‘naturalism’, which, for all its popularity, seems rather misunderstood. I think that the conceptual analysis that I offer in the first, third and fourth chapters can add to our understanding of these terms which are crucial in all the debates mentioned above. In addition, this project aims to clarify just how the subjectivity of experience and naturalism are incompatible, which is often touched upon but not often analyzed in depth. Hopefully, this knowledge will add to the understanding of this issue and contribute to its solution – if there is one.

¹⁰ Chalmers 1996: xii.

The Subjectivity of Experience

It is often assumed, as well as argued for, that subjectivity is a problem for naturalism. It is nevertheless not clear what the phenomenon of subjectivity exactly is, or, to put the same point differently, what it is that makes something subjective. Nor is it obvious what the thesis of naturalism exactly is. In order to be able to establish whether or not subjectivity is a problem for naturalism, it is thus first necessary to get clearer on the notions of subjectivity and naturalism. In this chapter I will discuss the former and in Chapters 3 and 4 the latter.

The terms 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' (and 'subjective' and 'objective' as well) play a role in many different domains. One is daily life, where we characterize judgments and attitudes as subjective or objective: 'subjective' in this respect usually means something close to biased or opinionated, whereas 'objective' has the connotations of being well-informed or impersonally evaluated. Another domain is philosophy, where the terms 'subjective' and 'objective' are used in many different areas. For example, in ethics it is often discussed whether morality is subjective or objective, and in epistemology the subjectivity or objectivity of truth is at stake. The terms are especially central to some of the main issues in philosophy of mind, where it is often asserted that there is something 'subjective' about the mind. It is this mysterious subjectivity of the mental that many claim is a problem for naturalism. However, what it means for the 'mind' or the 'mental' to be subjective is very obscure.

The etymology of the terms 'subjective' and 'objective' is unfortunately not very helpful; 'subjective' and 'objective' have a Latin origin and can literally be translated as 'thrown under' and 'thrown against', respectively. Taken literally this etymology is rather uninformative. As Lycan suggests, perhaps the terms 'subjective' and 'objective' derive from the grammatical distinction

Now, what does it mean for the phenomenal character of experience to be essentially connected to a single point of view? Well, this means that it is only possible for experience to have phenomenal character iff it is connected to a single point of view. It also means that experience could not lack phenomenal character exactly because it is essentially connected to a single point of view.

We have thus been able to extract two subjective-making properties from Nagel's classical text about the subjectivity of experience. The second subjective-making property of experience is 'being essentially connected to a single point of view'. We could classify this subjective-making property as an ontological property. I will understand an ontological property to be the kind of property that either specifies an ontological category or that mentions a relation that obtains between entities. The property of 'being essentially connected to a single point of view' is an example of an ontological property. This is important to note since there is a lot of confusion surrounding the term 'subjectivity' and part of the confusion is constituted by the fact that it is not clear whether subjectivity is an ontological or an epistemological notion.

Now, experience's subjective-making property of 'being essentially connected to a single point of view' raises a number of questions. First of all, what is a point of view? And, second, who can take up the same point of view? In the next section I will address these questions. I will consider, generally, how we should understand a point of view and I will discuss various interpretations of who can take up the same point of view, most of them based on Nagel (though not all endorsed by him). This discussion will hopefully yield a better and more specific understanding of definition (S2).

1.1.2 Point of View and Knowing What It Is Like

From Nagel's paper we have been able to extract, among more, the property of 'being essentially connected to a single point of view' as a subjective-making property. We know what it means for something to be essentially connected to something else, but what is 'a single point of view' to which experience is so connected? What does Nagel mean by 'a single point of view'?

To start, we need to determine whether Nagel understands a single point of view to be that of an individual (a token point of view) or of a certain kind of individual (a type point of view), for example a species of organism. Although the phrase 'single point of view' might seem to suggest the former, Nagel insists that he means the latter:

I am not adverting here to the alleged privacy of experience to its possessor. The point of view in question is not one accessible only to a single individual. Rather it is a *type*.¹⁸

And later:

It is often possible to take up a point of view other than one's own, so the comprehension of such facts is not limited to one's own case.¹⁹

So, in short, Nagel thinks that the phenomenal character of an experience is essentially connected to a type point of view, not a token point of view. That means: the point of view Nagel is interested in is not a point of view that only one individual can take up; rather it is a point of view that more than one individual can take up. But which individuals are able to take up the same point of view? Given Nagel's examples of bats, humans and Martians, one might think that he means that individuals of the same species can take up the same point of view. That is, on this simple reading, Nagel thinks that:

(PV₁) 'A single point of view' is the point of view of *individuals of a species S*.

However, this can't be right, because there seems to be no reason to think that individuals of very similar species – for example, individuals of closely related species of birds or even human beings and higher level primates – cannot have experiences with the same phenomenal character and so know what it is like for individuals of the other (closely similar) species to have experiences with that phenomenal character.²⁰ Thus, this taken into account, Nagel might mean:

(PV₂) 'A single point of view' is the point of view of *individuals of sufficiently similar species*.

However, there is another problem. In addition to being too narrow, the original formulation (PV₁) is also too broad, and so is the revised formulation (PV₂). It seems that, even within a species, as Nagel admits, certain individuals

¹⁸ Nagel 1974: 441.

¹⁹ Ibid.: 441-442.

²⁰ Another problem is that species aren't rigorously individuated, but I cannot go into this problem further here.

What about the second and third option? The second option is to declare the proffered sentence false; the third option is to find a paraphrase for the sentence that is not ontologically committing. Now, interestingly, one can see eliminativism and behaviorism, respectively, as precisely such attempts. According to eliminativism, folk psychological sentences, such as the sentences we have seen about experiences, are false and mental concepts should be eliminated. According to behaviorism, mental terms should be replaced by behavioral terms to achieve a paraphrase that does not commit one to there being the things to which mental terms would refer. In the next two sections, I will discuss both these options and see if they provide the naturalist with a way out of the ontological commitment to experiences.

We have just seen that simply paraphrasing sentences about experiences in terms of events does not work, but a different paraphrase strategy, such as behaviorism, might work. Behaviorism as a paraphrase strategy is worth discussing since it is a prominent movement that has tried to give paraphrases of these sorts of sentences, and it is more involved and sophisticated than the paraphrase strategy we discussed in this section.

2.4 FIRST REPLY: BEHAVIORISM

In section 2.2 we already discussed arguments for the claim that there are no experiences. In this section and the next section, we will discuss replies to the argument from the previous section that there are experiences. Even though the arguments from this and the next section are also arguments for the conclusion that there are no experiences (just as the arguments in section 2.2), these are arguments against an argument for the existence of experiences.

As we have just established, there are only two respectable ways to avoid the result of the application of Quine's methodology, which means that there are two replies to it:

1. To say that ordinary claims should be paraphrased so as not to quantify over experiences, which is what the theory of behaviorism aims to do.
2. To say that ordinary claims, in which we quantify over experiences, are false, which is attempted by eliminativism.

In this section I will discuss the first of these two options, which is the paraphrase strategy we can find in behaviorism and see if it presents the experience-denying philosopher with a good reply against Quine's metaontology.

What is behaviorism exactly? To start answering this question, let's first look at the following description of behaviorism from Graham:

Behaviorism, the doctrine, is committed in its fullest and most complete sense to the truth of the following three sets of claims.

1. Psychology is the science of behavior. Psychology is not the science of mind.
2. Behavior can be described and explained without making reference to mental events or to internal psychological processes. The sources of behavior are external (in the environment), not internal (in the mind).
3. In the course of theory development in psychology, if, somehow, mental terms or concepts are deployed in describing or explaining behavior, then either (a) these terms or concepts should be eliminated and replaced by behavioral terms or (b) they can and should be translated or paraphrased into behavioral concepts.⁴⁶

For our purposes, the third assumption is the most important. Unfortunately, this passage is at the same time a little confusing, since there does not seem to be a principled difference between (a) and (b): in case of (a) the mental terms should be eliminated and replaced by behavioral terms and in case of (b) the mental terms should be translated and paraphrased into behavioral terms.⁴⁷ Now, replacing, translating and paraphrasing are not the same verbs, but the result for the mental terms is the same: they will not be part of the newly constructed sentence.

Philosophical behaviorism thus does not present a positive theory with regard to mental states; it is rather a theory about the language we use to talk about mental states. More specifically, behaviorism is a theory that aims to replace all reference to experience and mental states with behavioral references. Sentences containing mental concepts will thus need to be paraphrased such that the paraphrase does not contain any 'mental concepts'.⁴⁸ If this could be done for all sentences, then this would show that we are not committed to the existence of mental concepts. It should be noted that behaviorism is a theory about language and is, as such, in theory, compatible with ontological

⁴⁶ Graham 2007.

⁴⁷ Since the term 'elimination' is used here, the question is raised how eliminativism and behaviorism relate to one another. In both eliminativism and behaviorism mental concepts are eliminated. In the case of behaviorism, however, this happens by translating or paraphrasing these concepts into other concepts, which is a crucial interest for the behaviorist. After all, the behaviorist does not simply think that mental concepts should be eliminated, but that anything usually called 'mental' can be explained in behavioristic terms. The eliminativist would be satisfied with and aims for elimination simpliciter – since he thinks that mental concepts do not refer at all, not even to behavior.

⁴⁸ I'm using the term 'mental concept' for any concept that refers to a mental state.

as their only criterion for leading us to ontological truth. For our purposes, we can therefore leave it unresolved whether methodological naturalism is, or should be seen as, a methodological view or as a methodological research program. We will build on their common ground, which is the fact that naturalism as a view and naturalism as a research program both are methodological and that either a weaker disposition to accept, or a stronger commitment to accept, the scientific method, is the central assumption of both accounts of naturalism.

I will now turn to Van Fraassen's position on this matter. Van Fraassen also thinks that materialism (our methodological naturalism¹⁶) is not a thesis, or a view, but he does not think that it is a research program either. Instead he thinks that it is a stance. His main motivation for this is Hempel's dilemma, which we will discuss in the next section. Here is what Van Fraassen writes:

If the "physicalist" or "naturalist" part of this philosophical position is mainly the desire or commitment to have metaphysics guided by physics, then it is something that cannot be captured in any thesis or factual belief. If the position does not mainly consist in such a desire or commitment, then what is it? This knowing how to retrench cannot derive from the substantiative belief which is (at that time) identified with the view that all is physical. So what does it derive from? Whatever the answer is, that, and not the explicit thesis, is the real answer to what materialism is.¹⁷

In the next section, we will discuss Hempel's dilemma in depth. For now, it is sufficient to notice that, according to Van Fraassen, materialism should not be identified with a thesis about what there is, but it should instead be taken as an 'attitude' or 'a cluster of attitudes', or 'a stance'. Instead of trying to get a grip on these notions in an abstract way, let's look at the characteristics this 'cluster of attitudes' or this 'stance' has according to Van Fraassen. The cluster of attitudes in question has the following characteristics:

- (i) A strong deference to the current content of science in matters of opinion about what there is¹⁸,
- (ii) An inclination (and perhaps a commitment, at least an intention) to accept (approximative) completeness claims for science as actually constituted at any given time.¹⁹

¹⁶ The terms can be confusing, but 'materialism', as Van Fraassen uses it, is our methodological naturalism.

¹⁷ Van Fraassen 2002: 59.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

It should be clear that (i) is very similar to methodological naturalism as we formulated it at the beginning of this chapter. Sentence (i) as well as the thesis of methodological naturalism is an ontological thesis according to which science tells us which things exist. The obvious difference is that, while methodological naturalism expresses a view or a thesis, sentence (i) does not since it does not express a commitment to science, but ‘a strong deference to’ science.

Just as is the case where methodological naturalism is considered to be a view, and just as in the case where methodological naturalism is taken to be a research program, also in sentence (i) the sciences and the scientific method play a crucial role. Again, the relation to the scientific method is different for each of these ‘kinds’ of naturalism; whereas the ‘view-naturalist’ is flat-out committed to the scientific method, the ‘research program-naturalist’ has the disposition to accept this method and the ‘stance-naturalist’ is *inclined* to accept the scientific method. Despite these differences in epistemic attitudes, the scientific method is of crucial importance to all of them. This means that we can leave the question whether or not naturalism is a thesis or a research program or a stance behind, and we can focus on naturalism being methodological and characterized by, minimally, an inclination to accept the scientific method.

In this section, we have considered whether we need to make an additional, possibly major, distinction, namely the distinction between the position that naturalism is a view and the position that methodological naturalism is not a view. In this case, we have found that the considered distinction did not need to be made, or rather, that the distinction can be made *within* methodological naturalism. Naturalism as a research program and as a stance can be distinguished, but they remain sub-groups of methodological naturalism. After all, a reference to the scientific method is sufficient for these definitions to qualify as definitions of methodological naturalism.

4.3 HEMPEL’S DILEMMA

Methodological naturalism, like any other view, faces all kinds of issues. I will not address all of these issues and not all of them are relevant here, but there is at least one problem which is unavoidable and needs to be addressed, as it seems to arise as soon as one tries formulating the view. This first and biggest problem that methodological naturalism faces is ‘Hempel’s dilemma’, which is a dilemma noticed by Hempel as well as by others. As Stoljar writes: ‘Hempel’s

Nagel thinks that the fact that experience is subjective in the sense that (S2) spells out causes the subjectivity of experience to be incompatible with physicalism.¹² Nagel formulates an argument against physicalism based on this incompatibility and in the following I'll discuss Nagel's argument and then see if it is the same argument as the argument from perspective.

In short, Nagel's argument is that the physicalist cannot fully grasp or understand experiences, since the program of physicalism is committed to achieving an objectivist view on reality, which necessarily leaves any particular point of view behind. Since experiences can only be fully grasped from a particular, subjective point of view, the physicalist will never be able to include subjective experience in its account of reality. Here is Nagel's argument reconstructed in a more formal form.

Nagel's Argument

1. The physicalist view of reality is an objective view of reality. [assumption]
2. An objective view of reality cannot include particular points of view. [assumption]
3. Therefore, the physicalist view of reality cannot include particular points of view. [1, 2]
4. An account of experience can be given only from particular points of view. [assumption]
5. Therefore, the physicalist view of reality cannot give an account of experience. [3, 4]

In order to be able to answer the question whether this argument is the same argument as the argument from perspective, which we discussed in section 5.2.1, we need to understand each premise of Nagel's argument and the terms that he uses in it.

The first premise is that 'the physicalist view of reality is an objective view of reality'. What does Nagel mean by an 'objective view' of reality, which he sometimes also calls 'an objectivist view'? An objective view of reality, or an objectivist view, is a view of reality that leaves behind any particular point of view. According to Nagel, objectivity is a 'method of understanding':

¹² I will discuss whether Nagel's physicalism is sufficiently similar to methodological naturalism below.

To acquire a more objective understanding of some aspect of life or the world, we step back from our initial view of it and form a new conception which has that view and its relation to the world as its object.¹³

And:

A view or form of thought is more objective than another if it relies less on the specifics of the individual's make-up and position in the world, or on the character of the particular type of creature he is.¹⁴

According to Nagel, physicalism is a view that aims to achieve an objective understanding of the world. Since Nagel uses the term 'physicalism' and we have been talking about methodological naturalism, we need to pause for a moment to see what Nagel's claim means in our terms. Is Nagel's physicalism sufficiently similar to our methodological naturalism? According to Nagel, physicalism is 'committed to achieving an objectivist view on reality, which necessarily leaves any particular point of view behind.' Is this kind of physicalism similar to our methodological naturalism? We can clearly see that it is. After all, our methodological naturalism requires, in similar fashion, that for anything to exist it has to be intersubjectively available. This can be put differently, but meaning the same, as a view that is 'committed to achieving an objectivist view on reality.' So, according to Nagel, methodological naturalism is committed to leaving behind any particular point of view, whereas experience is very much connected to, and dependent on, a particular point of view. Experience and its phenomenal character can therefore not be understood from a methodological naturalist's perspective and cannot be part of a methodological naturalist's account of the world.

The second premise of the argument is: An objective view of reality cannot include particular points of view. We have just seen what an 'objective view of reality' is, but what is a point of view again? In the first chapter, we established that by a 'point of view' Nagel does not mean a token single point of view, i.e. the point of view of one individual, but a type point of view, i.e. a point of view that can be taken up by several individuals. The definition according to which subjective experience is connected to a token point of view, which would mean that experience is private, will be discussed in the next section. A type point of view can be taken up by more than one individual. Just which individuals are able to take up the same point of view is a question we have

¹³ Nagel 1986: 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 5.

that 'materialism' and 'physicalism' are versions of naturalism, which can be divided into two different kinds: 'metaphysical' and 'methodological'. There are a number of versions of metaphysical naturalism: 'classical materialism', 'spatiotemporal materialism', 'causal materialism' and 'anti-supernaturalism'. Since none of these versions of naturalism are tenable we have to reject metaphysical naturalism. The question of this dissertation then becomes if the subjectivity of experience is compatible with methodological naturalism.

In the fourth chapter, I go on to consider what methodological naturalism is. After considering a number of possible definitions, I conclude that it is best understood as the view that science tells us which things exist. Although a number of problems can be raised against this form of naturalism, none of them are fatal. Given the fact that the things that science tells us that exist are public or intersubjectively available, it follows that methodological naturalism is committed to an ontology of public and intersubjectively available entities.

Finally, armed with the analyses of these terms, the fifth chapter addresses the main question of this dissertation. I conclude that three of the five senses in which experience is subjective are incompatible with methodological naturalism as we have defined it. I then discuss objections the naturalist might have to these arguments and conclude that they fail. I also consider three alternative approaches, which could possibly avoid the problem; however, I show that the methodological naturalist could not adopt these for a number of different reasons. I conclude that naturalism and the subjectivity of experience, at least in some senses, are incompatible.

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