

**BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE:
Getting Clear on the Problem of Consciousness**

by

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ABSTRACT

A new name for an old problem, the “hard problem of consciousness” is perhaps the most controversial issue in the contemporary philosophy of mind. The problem, posed by non-reductivists like Chalmers, is: how do the phenomenal qualities of our conscious experience stand in relation to a physical world that seems logically compatible with their absence? But there is no agreement over what precisely this question is asking *about* (viz., “phenomenal qualities”), or whether the apparently non-physical explanandum is a real one. At the root of the intractability is the particular way that we have come to think about the question, presupposing i) that the conscious explanandum is an ontological one and thus ii) that the sense in which it exists (as an *inner entity*) should be straightforward. These assumptions are overturned in the following account in which I argue that the qualitative contents of our experience are in the world, not the ontological mind. I argue that neither the non-reductivist nor the eliminativist, on analysis, need disagree about *this*. In Chapter Two, I argue that what the non-reductivist really wants to preserve are the qualities of the world that are invisible to an ontological picture made in terms of scientific unobservables, or trans-experiential physical structures and processes. The eliminativist, on the other hand, is merely interested in denying the ontologization of these qualities as properties of the ontological mind. On this interpretation, non-reductivists and eliminativists can be seen to mutually support a solution to the traditional mind-body problem in the form of the non-reductive, non-ontological account of consciousness that I will offer in this thesis: non-reductive, because the properties of our experience are not illegitimately denied (or reduced), and non-ontological because they are not thereby hypostatized (or ontologized). Rather, they are left in the “neutral” public realm where—

from a Wittgenstein perspective—the meanings of the problematic terms of mind-body discourse are fixed.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In his introduction to the anthology *Conscious Experience*, Thomas Metzinger writes:

Today, the problem of consciousness – perhaps together with the question of the origin of the universe – marks the very limit of human striving for understanding. It appears to many to be the last great puzzle and the greatest theoretical challenge of our time (Metzinger 1996; pg. 3).

There is, he goes on to say, an “increasing restlessness” in the sciences, as well as among the general public, over questions concerning the relationship of the mind to the brain—questions that have become pressing in light of the relatively recent advances in neuroscience, cognitive science and artificial intelligence. Increasingly, it seems, we are accepting a new picture of ourselves, as the inner elusiveness of our minds is replaced by the impersonal mechanics of neuro-processes and cognitive functions. But against this picture, an old one persists as “a bulwark against creeping mechanism” (Dennett 1988): consciousness, the inner mental realm of our experience. Unsurprisingly, the problem of consciousness (though a very old problem) has re-emerged in recent philosophy with vigour, in new forms and as a “hot” topic—the latest fad, inspiring new journals, organizations and conferences (Metzinger 1996; pg. 4). The problem is all the more significant because it is, in an important sense, we ourselves who are the explanandum. And this is also what makes the problem all the more intractable—for as we will see, we do not know quite what it is about ourselves that needs explaining.

Of course, all sorts of questions might be included as *problems* of consciousness. David Chalmers famously distinguishes between the hard and easy ones. Easy problems

are essentially questions about function—for example about “the ability to discriminate and react to the environment”, the “reportability of mental states”, the “deliberate control of behaviour”, etc. (Chalmers 1995; pg. 2) They are, as Chalmers puts it, “straightforwardly vulnerable” to scientific explanations, or explanations in terms of the functions and structures of cognition. The so-called “hard problem of consciousness”, on the other hand, is supposedly quite different. The hard problem is the problem of conscious *experience*: of the subjective or phenomenal *way that things seem* to a conscious organism, and how this is related to a world of physical functions that seem logically compatible with their absence.¹ But the really hard problem in the philosophy of mind is that there is so little agreement over whether there *is* this hard problem of consciousness—whether there is anything of *this* sort that needs to be explained. A great many philosophers deny that anything of the above sort requires explanation.² They even argue that the thought that there is more to explain than the easy problems is delusion—the pre-reflective and unwitting expression of ancient “folk” or religious theories of the mind that have no real ontological or scientific stock at all.³

In most disciplines, by contrast, there is little debate over the *status* of the explanandum, over whether there is something to be explained or not. But “consciousness”, even once separated into “hard” and “easy” components, is elusive and ambiguous. It is not, like the explicanda of the hard sciences, something knowable intersubjectively—something researchers can, in a broad sense, *point* to. Supposedly it is

¹ This is the “epistemic gap”, the question of why physical processes should be accompanied by experience, to be considered in Chapter Two.

² For example: Feyerabend 1963; Rorty 1965; Cornman 1968; Churchland 1981; Dennett 1991; Wilkes 1988.

³ See especially: Sellars 1956; Rorty 1965; Churchland 1981; Dennett 1991.

known only in the private case; and even then, its infinite closeness to the observer seems to eliminate the possibility of scientific detachment, of the ability for the observer to stand apart from the observed. In this case, what one wants to point at is the pointer itself—a task no less difficult than seeing the eye that sees. The fact that the pointer is the pointed at is double-edged; it ensures that consciousness exists as an explanandum in some sense, but leaves that sense ambiguous.

This thesis is concerned with the “really hard” problem of consciousness—the apparent disagreement between philosophers called non-reductivists and others called eliminativists over the existence of consciousness, and the question of how such disagreement could be possible. The received wisdom has it that an insuperable difference exists between these two camps. But we should actually call it a misunderstanding, in the sense of a “failure to understand correctly; a mistake as to meaning or intent” (from Random House 2006). For the problem with the non-reductivist and the eliminativist is not that the one says something that the other cannot in some sense (the most important one) agree with. The problem is that what the one means by some disputed term or form of expression is unclear as regards its ontological significance. One says “consciousness exists” and the other says “consciousness does not exist”, and we are meant to think that both cannot be correct—but they are, in a sense that I aim to establish.

By developing my own account, I aim to disambiguate the sense in which consciousness exists, aware of how the word “exists” here may well throw us off. It is a good enough word as applied to lots of things, but its sense when applied to something as diaphanous as consciousness is, I will show, unclear. My own position disagrees with the notion that consciousness is a sort of inner stuff or process that transcends immediate

experience—as, for instance, the Cartesian *res cogitans*⁴—and in this sense argues that consciousness does not exist. But it does not deny what no reasonable person could deny, which is that there is experience, composed of the rich qualitative contents of perceptions and sensations. It only asks that we understand these contents as the familiar properties of the world rather than those of the mind that philosophers have long posited to solve other puzzles: namely, about the nature of representation.⁵ There is no need, I will show, for the systematically elusive “qualia”, or inner mental objects or properties, that are thought necessary to make experience qualitative. In the end, my account agrees very closely with what American philosopher William James had to say about consciousness:

It is the name of a nonentity, and has no right to a place among first principles. Those who still cling to it are clinging to a mere echo, the faint rumor left behind by the disappearing “soul” upon the air of philosophy. [...] [F]or seven or eight years past I have suggested its non-existence to my students, and tried to give them its pragmatic equivalent in realities of experience. (James 1904)

Like James, I am also after the “pragmatic” equivalents to what philosophers have and continue to refer to as consciousness, or the mind—and which equivalents turn out quite innocuously to refer to what we mean by consciousness in an everyday, pre-philosophical sense. In this respect, the account I offer is in line with a long heritage of pragmatic, empirical philosophy, from Berkeley to James and (especially) more recently to Wittgenstein. Such an account argues that we do not mean by consciousness anything more than what we directly experience, which is neither genuinely inner mental objects

⁴ This refers to Descartes’ conception of the “I” as the immaterial “thing that thinks”, or the transcendent ego. (Descartes 1641; Second Meditation).

⁵ Such puzzles include how our experience can be directly of the world given phenomena like illusion and perspectival variance.

nor the physical⁶ entities inferred *beyond* the contents of direct experience, and which cannot be reconciled into a single ontology. This account may perhaps be considered some variety of neutral monism⁷ insofar as it leaves the qualitative content of our experience “neutral”, as neither illegitimately denied nor illegitimately hypostatized (or ontologized) as private mental content. I refer to it (perhaps less attractively) as a non-reductive, non-ontological account: non-reductive because the qualitative content of experience is preserved, and non-ontological because it is not thereby made into inner mind-stuff. In this respect, it rejects that “mental” and “physical” name ontologically significant types of properties or substances.

In the end, this account will deny the traditional mind-body problem and its modern variant, the hard problem of consciousness; it is a philosopher’s fiction, corresponding only to philosophical conceptions and not any schism in nature that we experience, or have any good reason to posit. This position tends to hold, with Searle, that we are “entranced” with the problem and have come to erroneously expect a solution in the form of a grand theoretical discovery (Searle 1992). Or with Wittgenstein, who would say that we are “bewitched” by a truly ordinary and unproblematic state of affairs and beguiled into asking nonsensical questions (PI, I, s.109). Pace Metzinger, my account holds that consciousness is not, as an ontological explanandum, a “theoretical challenge”; it must therefore regard most attempts to “solve” the problem of consciousness—for example, scientifically by identifying its “neural correlates”, or philosophically by postulating consciousness as a basic ontological category alongside matter—as

⁶ The sense of “physical” here will be elaborated in more detail next chapter.

⁷ By neutral monism I refer to the set of views which hold, minimally, that mind and matter, or mental and physical, are to be taken as ways of describing a single reality which is not pre-theoretically and ontologically divided in such a way. “Neutral monism” is further qualified on page 31.

misguided: as beguiled. Consciousness is not *this* kind of mystery—the kind that keeps us grasping after it as some kind of *thing* that stands in the way of a genuinely one-world ontology. It may, however, turn out to represent a different kind of mystery, albeit one that we have always countenanced and taken for granted as a certain limit of our ability to know the intrinsic qualities of the “mind-independent” world. But first things first.

In the next chapter, I will set up the discussion by giving an account of the non-reductivist and eliminativist positions—each in the terms of an innocuous interpretation that preserves the importance of their core arguments. I cannot claim to represent the vast bulk of either of what occurs under the headings of non-reductivism or eliminativism. I can only hope to show that, with regards to the arguments of its principal exponents, an interpretation is available that casts much doubt on the supposition that non-reductivism and eliminativism cannot be reconciled into a true account of the mind: an account that preserves what is important for both camps. Having set the stage in this way, I will in Chapter Three, with the help of Wittgenstein, explore the ontological mistake that in fact keeps non-reductivists and eliminativists locked in an intractable conflict of intuition. This will also make explicit the grounds for my own account of a non-reductive, non-ontological account of consciousness.

CHAPTER TWO

Cross-Talk on Consciousness

The eliminativist wants to deny the existence of a private mental ontology, the so-called “two-worlds myth”, and all that might ultimately reduce to Cartesian soul-substance. The non-reductivist merely denies the validity of a certain instance of explaining away—the vanishing act by which reductive accounts seem to render ontology exclusively in the physical terms of trans-experiential structures and processes. When put this way, both are right. I argue that what the non-reductivist wants to preserve is in no way incompatible with what the eliminativist wants to reject—there is a kernel of truth in each position that is often lost in the cross-talk. Making my case must first involve setting out the respective positions with a view to exposing these kernels. The task of this chapter is to frame the debate in this way, starting with an account of non-reductivism.

I

One can state non-reductivism as a negative position: it says that physicalism about the mind is false or (as others argue) strictly unintelligible, where physicalism holds that only that which is physical (is reducible to the entities postulated by physics) exists. Given a positive formulation, non-reductivism is the thesis that consciousness, with all of its apparently non-physical properties, exists: a view that might seem (outside of the philosophy of mind at least) to trivially affirm the obvious. As the vastness of the debate indicates, the positive thesis is not obvious. Indeed, there is much that goes on under the heading of non-reductivism that is genuinely not obvious, and that I will later argue is false. However, I intend to argue now that what the non-reductivist really wants to say—

or all that they need to say, at least—is something that actually *is* obvious. Put another way, the sense in which non-reductivism is true, understood in terms of what it properly denies, is the sense in which it is obvious.

It is often said by non-reductivists that there is *something it is like* to have an experience of a particular kind.

[T]he fact that an organism has conscious experience at all means, basically, that there is something it is like to be that organism. (Nagel 1974)

In this central sense of “consciousness”, an organism is conscious if there is something it is like to be that organism, and a mental state is conscious if there is something it is like to be in that state. (Chalmers 1995; pg. 3)

Much like the terms “conscious experience”, “phenomenal content” and “qualia”, phrases like “what it’s like” or “how it seems” do not tell us how to think about the ontology of what we take them to designate. Getting clear on what, precisely, we mean by them is crucially important for moving forward with the problem of consciousness. It will be shown as we proceed that these notions have both a pernicious and an innocuous interpretation. An innocuous interpretation merely draws our attention to what is absent in a physicalist approach to consciousness, construed in a certain way. Taken perniciously, on the other hand, these notions lead us prematurely to undesirable ontological conclusions. And the same ambiguity is true also of the non-reductive arguments that tread on such notions. It is in the innocuous sense that the non-reductive position on the whole is obviously true.

Non-reductive arguments have a common form. In one way or another, they attempt to show that there is a gap between the phenomenal, or qualitative content of our

experience, and the world conceived in purely physical terms. In general, they reject a certain kind of deducibility, of phenomenal truths from physical truths, of why the latter should go to explain the existence of the former. From the basis of this explanatory gap (or *epistemic* gap, as the issue is a lack of a certain necessary epistemic entailment [see Chalmers 1995; pg. 7]) they then infer an ontological gap, often expressed in its essence by a question: why should there be conscious experience at all? Why should it “arise” or “emerge” along with mere physical structures and processes? “Why do not these processes take place ‘in the dark,’” asks Chalmers, “without any accompanying states of experience? This is the central mystery of consciousness.” (Chalmers 2003; pg. 3)

The notion of the explanatory gap focuses our attention on the centrally important contrast between the world we experience, with all of its qualitative properties, and a physicalist ontology framed in the exclusive terms of what I will refer to as scientific unobservables: trans-experiential entities (structures and processes) that we can in principle never directly experience but which take place “in the dark”.⁸ It will be shown that the language of physical explanation, considered in this way, does not entail our “mental” experience. On the other hand, I will argue, denying this sort of deducibility does not automatically deliver us to an ontological gap—that is, to a realism about the mental and the physical conceived as ontologically significant types of properties or substances. With this in mind, let us review two important non-reductive arguments.

⁸ A useful way of considering these entities is as “mind-independent”, though for purposes which will become clear, we should refrain from invoking the “mind” here and instead think of them as physical, or material entities that would transcend the possibility of direct experience. Henceforth, when I speak of “scientific unobservables”, I refer to the “physical” entities that would be transcendent in this respect.

Consider, first, the conceivability argument. According to the conceivability argument, “it is conceivable that there be a system that is physically identical to a conscious being, but that lacks at least some of that being’s conscious states.” (Chalmers 2003; pg. 5). Such a system would be a philosophical zombie. There is nothing it is like to be a philosophical zombie. Zombies are behaviourally indistinguishable from normal people, and their physical make-up is identical. However, there is nothing going on “inside” them, no conscious experience—only physical processes taking place “in the dark”. The non-reductivist admits that zombies are probably not a physical possibility, given the nature of this world and its laws (Chalmers 2003; pg. 5). We can conceive of the philosophical zombie, however, and the non-reductivist argues that this alone shows something important—namely, that the physical facts alone do not entail the phenomenal facts, or the inner facts as to what my experience is like: or that the content of our experience is manifestly not the content of the world figured in terms of physical processes taking place “in the dark”.⁹

There are two ways that we might understand the conclusion of this argument. The first is that by arguing for the logical independence of phenomenal facts from physical facts, it objects to the type of reductivism broadly known as identity theory, which holds that the mental simply is the physical. If the conclusion of the conceivability argument is true, this interpretation holds, then fixing all the physical facts does not by itself fix all the phenomenal facts; more facts (and of a different ontological kind) are needed. This is sometimes expressed by saying that once God created the physical world,

⁹ “On the most common conception of nature,” says Chalmers, “the natural world is the physical world” (Chalmers 2003; pg. 1): presumably, that is, the scientific world of physical processes taking place “in the dark”. It remains to be seen whether this is indeed the most common conception of nature.

he had more work to do to fill it also with the phenomenal properties, or qualitative contents of conscious experience (presumably, along with the psycho-physical laws that would relate the two). Or as Chalmers puts it: “[i]f there is a metaphysically possible universe that is physically identical to ours but that lacks consciousness, then consciousness must be a further, nonphysical component of our universe.” (Chalmers 1995; pg. 6) And for reasons that will become clearer as we proceed, this is not a conclusion that I find congenial. The conceivability argument, though a non-reductive one, does not require an ontological duality between types of properties (mental and physical) or facts (phenomenal and physical).

We can understand the conceivability argument along the following (non-dualist) lines. If physicalism is true, it says, then the world could contain only zombies—zombie people, zombie dogs, etc. However, from the premise that we are not zombies, that there is something it is like to be us that disappears in the physicalist world-view (of physical processes taking place “in the dark”) it follows that physicalism, in this sense, is false. This interpretation gives us the true import of the argument’s conclusion. It makes explicit the difference between the world conceived purely in the trans-experiential terms of scientific realism (the zombie world) and the world that we actually experience—and what greater difference could there be? In the zombie world, perceptions and sensations have no qualitative content. It would be as though we were blind and deaf, because seeing and hearing would refer merely to behavioural responses to invisible stimuli, rather than the qualitative character of seeing or hearing something in our world. In this general respect, the argument holds that for physicalism to be true is for us to be totally anesthetized, or dead—a position made false by *modus tollens*, say non-reductivists,

given that in some important sense (and not necessarily a dualistic one) we are conscious and enjoy a rich phenomenology.

We can look at Jackson's famous knowledge argument in the same way (see Jackson 1986). Like the conceivability argument, the knowledge argument is generally understood to show a certain lack of entailment, from physical truths to phenomenal truths. And it too has a conclusion that is metaphysically ambiguous, crying out for innocuous interpretation. The argument is based on a thought experiment involving Mary, who has been brought up in a black and white room and who has never experienced what it is like to see colour. Mary is also a brilliant neuroscientist, and knows all the physical facts, including facts about what happens when electromagnetic waves of a certain wavelength impact the retina and are processed in the brain. But, the argument goes, no amount of physical information will tell Mary what it is like when, released from her room, she experiences colour for the first time. Physical truths do not, therefore, exhaust all there is to know.

There are different ways of characterizing Mary's discovery (for a selection, see Nagasawa and Stoljar 2003; pg. 14-18). The argument is often constructed in terms of the learning of new facts. Upon having her first colour experience, on this view, Mary learns a new fact that she did not previously know (see, for example, Chalmers 2003; pg. 7). Mary knows all of the physical facts, but it turns out she does not know *all* of the facts—for example, certain subjective or phenomenal facts—and so physicalism is false. What Mary discovers, upon release, is that there are indefinitely more facts to be learned, about what her own experience *is like*, or *how it is with her*.

But talk about subjective, and in this sense phenomenal facts may easily lead us to the wrong conclusion; and in trying to make sense of how a fact could be subjective, we become entangled in thorny epistemological and metaphysical issues. Talk about private, inner facts, known only through introspection, seems to imply a category of the “objectively subjective” (Dennett 1991; pg. 132), which, I want to say with Dennett, is not only bizarre, but worse, Cartesian in its implications. Eliminativists reject the idea of introspection as a higher-order process of “inner observation”, intervening between the subjective “fact” reported, and the expression of the report—and there are good “anti-Cartesian” reasons for doing so (to be explored in greater detail later). Thus, what is ultimately problematic about this characterization is that it lends itself too easily to an ontologized conception of Mary’s subjectivity in terms of “facts” that occupy a metaphysically inner mind-space. This distracts us from the real point, put simply by Jackson here:

Nothing you could tell me of a physical sort captures the smell of a rose, for instance. Therefore, Physicalism is false. (Jackson 1982; pg. 127)

Rather than knowledge of facts, Mary’s discovery is sometimes characterized in terms of the having of a new experience, or knowledge by acquaintance. This is closer to the metaphysically innocuous interpretation I am after. I want to say that the knowledge argument makes explicit the categorical difference between the world of our qualitative experience and the abstract world conceived in the physicalist terms of scientific realism (and which could not contain the qualitative smell of roses). There is something it is like to smell a rose, a quality that is categorically absent from the kind of physical information that *describes* this experience (for example, as the workings of receptors in the nose). As with the conceivability argument, we can understand the true import of the knowledge

argument as bringing out the obvious falseness of an account of the mind made in terms of an ontological picture that is abstracted away from the manifest qualities of our experience.

Let me now go back and say a few things about non-reductive arguments in general. First, as I have attempted to show by way of two examples in particular, non-reductive arguments disambiguate “conscious experience” or “what it’s like-ness” (in terms of its qualitative content) in a way that does not immediately deliver them to an ontological conclusion: the need, that is, for a mental ontology of the kind suggested by Chalmers (to be considered in the next chapter). All they really do is reject the validity of a certain philosophical vanishing act. In the same vein, the explanatory, or epistemic gap—the gap of entailment, that is, between the qualitative content of our experience and an ontological picture made in the trans-experiential terms of scientific unobservables—does not necessarily commit us to an ontological gap between categories of objects: dualism, that is, either of substances or properties. It does not necessarily say anything about the metaphysics of the qualitative content, and it does not necessarily affirm the ontological picture given by scientific realism. The epistemic gap only need show false a certain sort of realism applied to both inner minds and the processes of scientific unobservables that would, as Chalmers puts it, take place “in the dark”.

It should be noted how this realism, about scientific unobservables specifically, figures into the philosophy of mind in an under-recognized way. I refer throughout to scientific realism, the view that there exist entities that we can in principle never directly experience through any sensory mode, but which we infer to take place “in the dark” on various scientific or methodological bases. I have argued for an innocuous interpretation

of the non-reductive position in which what is denied is an ontological picture made exclusively in such terms, on which view anything real is ultimately “nothing but” the trans-experiential entities described by such terms. For the problem with being a realist about “unobservables” in this sense is that it lends itself to only one of two kinds of solutions to the mind-body problem, neither of which are getting us very far in the philosophy of mind. One is to say that the content of experience, rather than qualitative (or “phenomenal”, understood innocuously) is really physical processes taking place “in the dark”. This would amount to denying the qualitative phenomena—for example, Mary’s experience of red—altogether (eliminativists are sometimes understood as taking a view like this). Much more plausibly, one could deny that an ontological picture made in these terms can capture the manifest existence of “observables”—that is, the qualitative content of our experience. However, if one is committed to a realism about unobservables, then the only possible non-reductive move is to add to the metaphysical mix a mental ontology—the “extra explanatory ingredient” (Chalmers 1995; pg. 10) as figured in any basic variety of property or substance dualism—which would give Mary and all non-zombies their due. And this, indeed, would constitute a bona fide ontological gap.

However, to anticipate the view to be offered in full next chapter, this move to dualism (figured simply as a distinction between the mental and the physical as ontologically significant types of properties or substances) is unfounded. On the account offered here, the mind-body problem, or the hard problem of consciousness, presupposes certain philosophical conceptions and is not to be found when we attend to what we really mean, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, when we use the contested vocabulary of

mind-body discourse. Meaning in general, on this view, does not fix to the trans-experiential entities that would be grounds for such a problem. Rather, as I argue in Chapter Three, the meanings of certain terms or forms of expression are seen in the practical uses we make of them to handle our everyday experience of the ordinary properties of the world—colours, sounds, etc.—the qualitative contents of our experience.

But first it remains to consider the materialist views that, by denying the reality of the ontological mind—and so the hard problem of consciousness—have been taken to deny that there is conscious experience, and that this experience has qualitative contents. The task of this next section is to consider just what the contemporary materialist rejects.

II

The first thing to do is clarify the kind of materialist view that is of concern in this paper. Materialist accounts are usefully considered as tending towards one of two different forms. On the one hand are those that go under the heading of identity theory.¹⁰ Identity theorists do not deny the reality of the mental altogether. They concede that certain subjectively describable phenomena (such as the qualities of perceptions or sensations), seeming real of our conscious experience, cannot be altogether eliminated as entities requiring some sort of account. What they argue is that these phenomena simply *are* objectively describable physical processes in the brain. Identity theorists thereby recognize an epistemic, but not ontological gap in the physicalist worldview. On the other hand are those approaches that go under the heading of eliminative materialism. This set of views, now famously associated with Rorty, Feyerabend, Dennett and the Churchlands,

¹⁰ Identity theory found its principle expression in Place 1956, Feigl 1958 and Smart 1959.

denies the mental (at least as an ontological, if not psychological explanandum) altogether by arguing that there is nothing above cognitive function (discriminating, reporting, etc.) to be explained or accounted for. The supposed need for an added explanatory ingredient—an ontological account of the purported non-functional, subjective properties of experience—is thought misconceived.¹¹

Nominally at least, identity theory and eliminative materialism are both monistic and materialist approaches to the mind-body problem. However, the case of identity theory is by no means clear-cut. Something will always remain mysterious about the claim that the mental *is* the physical, so long as the mental is conceived in the ordinary manner as an inner phenomenological realm whose proper sense is diametrically opposed to the physical (see, for example, Rorty 1970; pg. 402). By affirming a mental ontology in *some* sense, identity theory preserves the letter of materialism while sacrificing much of its spirit (says Chalmers 2003; pg. 17).

This paper is principally concerned with the claim that consciousness does not exist (and not, pace identity theory, that it exists but turns out empirically to be identical with brain processes). It was said earlier that there is a kernel of truth in this seemingly radical claim, although it depends on what, precisely, one means by consciousness, and therefore takes as the target of elimination. As with non-reductivism, the “essence” of the eliminative position is best expressed in terms of what it denies. This is any view that is forced to give mental notions an ontological account as referring to entities inside the

¹¹ For more on the difference between identity theory and eliminativism, see Chalmers 2003, p. 9. For an extensive classification of a variety of theories of mind, see Chapter 14 of Broad 1925.

metaphysical mind-space of something, perhaps, like a Cartesian *res cogitans*: a transcendent ego, that is, and the non-physical medium of its subjective experience. Also like non-reductivism, what it denies has the elements of a *picture*—a sort of background image that cognitively frames how we think about an issue. In this case, the picture is of the Cartesian Theater, the inner sanctum in which the objects of consciousness occur.¹²

It sometimes seems a matter of general perception that eliminativism, in an anti-Cartesian fervor, throws the baby out with the bathwater—our very experience along with a certain “folk” theory of mind. The notion that eliminativism denies obvious facts about our experience appears all over in the writings of major philosophers—especially in Chalmers, but also, for example in Searle:

[I]n the philosophy of mind, obvious facts about the mental, such as that we all really do have subjective conscious mental states and that these are not eliminable in favor of anything else, are routinely denied by many, perhaps most, of the advanced thinkers in the subject. (Searle 279)

But I would like to be more generous. I aim to show that it can be given an innocuous interpretation in which what is denied is not our experience itself, the truly “obvious facts”, but only those notions about it that would represent a mental ontology of the sort described above. It will be shown (especially with reference to Dennett) how the eliminativist denies that consciousness refers to the sort of non-functional,

¹² It deserves to be said that few people, non-reductivists included, argue explicitly for this antiquated picture of the mind. Nevertheless, the picture of a metaphysically inner mind-space still systematically figures into the way that we think about various mental notions. “The persuasive imagery of the Cartesian Theater”, says Dennett, “keeps coming back to haunt us” (Dennett 1991; pg. 107). Non-reductivists are not fairly called Cartesians tout court, though it will be shown that the non-reductivist postulation of phenomenal consciousness as an inner realm, known primarily through introspection, perhaps implicitly endorses or presupposes what is fairly called a Cartesian Theater view of the mind.

“epiphenomenal” substance or process that would metaphysically outstrip what appears as the behavioural functions of the organism.

We can start by using a familiar point of departure—the notions of the epistemic gap, and the qualitative character of “what it’s like” to experience something. We have seen how non-reductivists employ the notion of the epistemic gap to make explicit the categorical difference between phenomenal, or qualitative truths about “what it's like”, and physical truths. But as we have seen, “phenomenal truth” and related notions are metaphysically ambiguous—and they carry a pernicious sense of dualism. Consider, for example, how the notion is exemplified by Descartes, who took as his philosophical bedrock the thought that the existence of everything except the immediate qualities of his own mind could be thrown into skeptical doubt. While everything conceived as “outer” (existing in the physical world) might be a chimera, Descartes held, one can be absolutely certain about the inner phenomenal truths (or “subjective facts”) of what my experience is like, or how things seem for me (see *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Second Meditation).

Eliminativists grant that this is an intuitive thought. On the one hand, it corresponds to a venerable and persuasive set of images and ideas about the mind. In another sense, this way of thinking about the mind may be built into our language. Richard Rorty has argued that the mind-body problem would never have come to exist were it not for a certain convention that came to feature in the linguistic practice of first-person reports: the convention of taking such reports (about private thoughts and sensations) as incorrigible, or beyond correction. It is this, he argues, without which the belief in a separate, Cartesian realm could never have arisen (Rorty 1970; pg. 408). The

notion of the Cartesian Theater, after all, is one in which the *res cogitans*, by virtue of the special introspective awareness of the “mind’s eye”, is infallible with regards to what is inwardly observed (and where what is observed would be the objects of a mental ontology).

Eliminativists, however, deny that people are actually incorrigible in this way. All that bears the true mark of the mental—for Rorty, incorrigibility—is dismissed as antiquated *folk theory*, built up around the ingrained habits of a certain linguistic practice. Mental talk is myth, says Rorty, like talk of “demons”—talk without reference (Rorty 1970; pg. 422). In this way, it should be noted, eliminativism is straightforwardly verificationist (see, for example, Dennett 1991; pg. 406-407). It is not that we are confronted with a certain set of phenomena that we have an agenda to eliminate—the claim is rather that we have no evidence (not even introspectively) for a supposed dimension of our experience that is mysteriously subjective, and systematically elusive to functional explanation. This point about verification will become important again in the next chapter. It also corresponds to something we have already mentioned and that we can now flesh out: that is, the rejection of a certain understanding of introspection.

As mentioned earlier, eliminativists reject the idea of introspection as a higher-order process of “inner verification”, intervening between the subjective “fact” reported and the verbal expression of the report. This is therefore a denial both of the subjective facts (or the “objectively subjective”) and of the sort of genuinely higher-order self-reflexivity that, according to “higher-order theories of consciousness” (for example, see Rosenthal) is constitutive of subjective consciousness. For the eliminativist, there are the verbal expressions of the reports, but they do not “report” (in any standard sense) the

observed “inner facts”. Consider Dennett’s rejection of the simplistic “looking and seeing” model of phenomenological report:

We don’t *first* apprehend our experience in the Cartesian Theater and then, on the basis of that acquired knowledge, have the ability to frame reports to express; our *being able to say* what it is like *is the basis for* our “higher-order beliefs.” (Dennett 1991; pg. 315)

I suspect that when we claim to be just using our powers of inner observation, we are always actually engaging in a sort of impromptu theorizing—and we are remarkably gullible theorists, precisely because there is so little to “observe” and so much to pontificate about without fear of contradiction. (Dennett 1991; pg. 67-68)

Just as Rorty rejects mental talk as “myth”, Dennett rejects phenomenology as fiction—a system of judgments that, we might say, exploit the convention of incorrigibility. These judgments do not confirm an inner, subjective ontology—the only subjective “facts” are those that we tell ourselves (or others) about how it *seems* with us (Dennett’s “heterophenomenological” testimony [Dennett 1991; pg. 72]). Nobody is privy to how things are with them “objectively subjectively” (or *ontologically*), as it were, but only with how things seem (“subjectively subjectively”, if you like), and this however much there is a temptation to think “*that my thought (or belief) about how it seems to me is just the same as what my experience actually is.*” (Dennett 1991; pg. 318—italics his.) The good news is that this is only a problem seen against a metaphysically bogus, Cartesian standard of infallible self-knowledge. In reality (argues Dennett), our talk *always has* been about the “seemings”, rather than the inner realities, for there *is* no inner realm, no metaphysically inner mind-space in which the “objectively subjective”—the “subjective facts” about what my experience is like—could reside. It therefore follows trivially that the way we talk about our subjective, “inner” experience does not mirror the

actual structure of that experience itself—there is nothing ontologically for the verbal reports to mirror.

All this is to state what the eliminativist rejects in rather general terms. Perhaps the reader finds him or herself sympathetic to the story so far; the picture of the Cartesian Theater, and the kind of introspection it would allow, is a relatively easy one to eschew. Perhaps, with a little less ease, one is able to accept that the way we talk about our inner experience reflects much less than how that experience is supposedly pre-configured, before the formation of the report, into subjective facts that constitute, in an ontologically significant way, *how it is with me inside*. But the upshot of all this is that there is, according to Dennett, nothing more to conscious experience, or the subjective way that things seem to me, but “the sum total of all the idiosyncratic reactive dispositions inherent in my nervous system as a result of my being confronted by a certain pattern of stimulation.” (Dennett 1991; pg. 387) Put in these affirmative terms, the view is harder to swallow—and to understand the claim innocuously (as I consider next chapter) “reactive dispositions” must be cashed out in terms of behavioural functions that are themselves qualities of experience. But Dennett is convinced that by a meticulous analysis of the supposed non-functional properties, one properly arrives at nothing substantive left to wonder about—nothing but “an imaginary dazzle in the eye of a Cartesian homunculus” (Dennett 1988). Subtract the “functional differentia”, says Dennett,

and nothing is left beyond a weird conviction (in some people) that there is some ineffable residue of “qualitative content” bereft of all powers to move us, delight us, annoy us, remind us of anything. (Dennett 1988)

In “Quining Qualia”, Dennett takes up an “intensified” verificationism (Dennett 1988; pg. 6) meant to demonstrate that our notion of qualia—the mysteriously subjective character of the *inner feel* of experience (“qualitative content” in the sense Dennett mentions above)—is hopelessly confused. Examining a series of examples of purported qualia experience, he aims to deliver us to the weirdness of our conviction by showing, through thought-experiments and “intuition-pumps”, that there is nothing *purely* “subjective” to such experience that survives a functional analysis with any coherence or substance. “The qualia that hide forever from objective science in the subjective inner sancta of our minds” (Dennett 1988; pg. 5) lack the two essential properties that would make them so.

For one, qualia are supposed to be directly apprehensible. It is because we know our qualia directly, *from the inside*, that we are incorrigible regarding the question of their existence and qualities. This corresponds to the imagery of the Cartesian Theater. But Dennett argues that we do not actually have direct apprehension in this way, or at least not in a way that is independent from our reactive dispositions in the way that qualia experience is supposed to be. One of the examples he uses to make this point is of two coffee tasters, Chase and Sanborn. Both Chase and Sanborn report that the subjective quale associated with the particular taste of Maxwell House coffee has changed, but for different reasons. Chase reports that the coffee tastes the same to him as it always did (the quale remains constant), but that his standards of taste have become more sophisticated. Sanborn reports that his standards have remained the same, but that because of minor physiological changes in his taste buds, the coffee itself has a different taste (there is a new coffee-quale). To make the general point, both assert *knowledge* about the subjective

way that *that taste* seems to them, or about a particular quale in their subjective inner sancta.

Dennett suggests that there is no reason why we must assume that Chase and Sanborn have genuine knowledge about any purportedly subjective, non-functional aspects of their gustatory experience. Dennett argues against the “infallibilist line” that in principle there are straightforward empirical tests that could go to confirm or disconfirm their knowledge claims. He describes how taste tests and the like could gradually determine whether the changes in taste have occurred at the brute perceptual processing end of the spectrum, or at the level of the reactive judgement. Either way, Dennett argues, to grant that Chase or Sanborn could in principle come to *learn* about why coffee seems to taste different to them is to concede a major point about the direct, or immediate apprehension that we are supposed to have with the special properties of the ways things seem to us. It is to say that we only actually gain a tractable hold on the properties of experiences (tastes, etc.) when we ourselves take a third-person perspective towards them (for example, in terms of how we react or have reacted to them). On the other hand, the epistemically “privileged” access of the first-person perspective provides nothing but guesses as to subjective seemings. To “know” inwardly is indeed to be incorrigible about the seemings, but only *because* the seemings are empty.¹³

This is of course not to deny (with respect to Chase and Sanborn) that things taste differently, or that “tastes change”. It is to deny that the way we commonly talk about

13 Making this general point in *Consciousness Explained* (pg. 396), Dennett quotes Wittgenstein: “The very fact that we should so much like to say: ‘This is the important thing’ – while we point privately to the sensation – is enough to shew how much we are inclined to say something which gives no information.”

how tastes *seem* implies a subjective quality to taste (as an inner *something*—a quale) that metaphysically outstrips what Dennett calls the “sum total of our idiosyncratic reactive dispositions”. It is the reactions, the behaviours, that qualia would have to tread on: as mentioned earlier, without functional differences (Dennett argues) we would not even be able to identify the subjective properties in question (for example, by how they move us to react).

This relates to the rejection of another property that Dennett supposes essential to any coherent notion of qualia: intrinsicity. The thought here is that the particular subjective quality of “that taste” must (as non-functional) be independent from whatever functions, reactive dispositions, etc., that it leads to or produces. Chase and Sanborn claim to apprehend something about the particular quality of “that taste” (which has remained constant) that is independent from their various reactions to the taste that have changed over the years. One problem with this is the simple inability to know whether Chase and Sanborn’s memories are reliable—whether, that is, they correctly remember “that taste”. What sort of criteria could objectively determine whether they do or not?¹⁴ All they really have to go on are their reactions to the supposed quale; and included in their reactions are the ways that they claim to identify (apprehend or recollect) the quale as against their reactions to it. But Dennett argues that if such reactions are in any way constitutive of the qualities of the purported quale, then these qualities are not intrinsically bound to the experience. They are effectively reduced to the various reactive dispositions, such as how

14 The reader may note the general similarity of this to Wittgenstein’s “private language argument”. Dennett seems to say that one needs a standard for identifying supposedly private sensations that is independent from sheer inner ostension. Simply put, the purported “inner object” cannot itself provide such a standard. "Imagine someone saying: 'But I know how tall I am!' and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it." (BB; pg. 96) This point will be considered in greater detail in the next chapter.

the qualities are verbally expressed. Rorty makes roughly the same, broadly Wittgensteinian point when he said that “to become aware of qualia is the same thing as learning how to make judgements about qualia.” (Rorty 1993; 189)

Dennett argues that Chase and Sanborne, for all their apparent introspective acumen, are really doing something like rhetoricizing when they describe how their subjective relationship to the taste of the coffee (the qualia of “that taste”) has changed. The important point is that the introspective resources do not exist to identify “that taste” as it would supposedly stand in a metaphysically inner mind-space, independent from functional dispositions (reactions to the taste), and as directly or immediately apprehended. And of course, the lesson we are meant to draw from this is that there *are* no special facts about the subjective experience of “that taste”, *and hence no “that taste”*. This, to reiterate, is not to deny that there are tastes. Dennett grants that conscious experience has properties: “first-order” properties, we might say, in virtue of which an experience has the individuating content that it does, or is one way rather than another. But, says Dennett,

these properties are so unlike the properties traditionally imputed to consciousness that it would be grossly misleading to call any of them the long-sought qualia. Qualia are supposed to be special properties, in some hard-to-define way. (Dennett 1988; pg. 1)

The claim, therefore, is that conscious experience lacks certain “second-order” properties—those, we might say, that would *ontologize subjectivity* as a “hard-to-define” dimension of our experience, possessed by non-functional (or epiphenomenal) properties. We might also say that these properties would owe their mysteriousness to the special sort of relationship that would obtain between a transcendent *res cogitans* and the first-order

contents of its experience. It is in this sense, for the eliminativist, that there is no “what it’s like” or “how it seems”, where these terms, simply put, would indicate that which appears in the Cartesian Theater, or that which resides in the inner sanctum of the ontological mind. And it is in this way that the eliminativist rejects the sort of mental ontology that non-reductivists like Chalmers posit on the basis of the epistemic gap.

III

To conclude my account of eliminativism: I began by stating that there is a kernel of truth to the eliminativist position that we ought to take seriously. Put simply, the eliminativist denies a mental ontology. We ought to take seriously this rejection for the basically verificationist reasons that have been considered. But in the course of this rejection, we came to the uncomfortable consequence, so forcefully put by Dennett, that it would also require rejecting the mysterious air of subjectivity that surrounds our experience. My view is that Dennett does show that, in an important sense, how we talk about our subjective experience does not correspond to any *ontological* facts of the matter. There is no mental ontology of the sort implied by certain second-order properties like direct apprehensibility and intrinsicality. However, it deserves to be said here that this only by necessity “mythologizes” a certain sort of ontology, and not, contra certain reductivists (of which Rorty and Dennett might be included), mental (or phenomenological) talk in general. Mental talk is only myth if we try to understand it on an object-designation model: but this confuses how the language-game of mental talk works. Dennett, however much he claims to be following a Wittgensteinian line on the mental (see Dennett 1991; pg. 462-463), is thus seriously at odds with Wittgenstein when he says that “[we] normally think in a confused and potentially incoherent way when we

think about the ways things seem to us.” (Dennett 1988; pg. 16) Here, my Wittgensteinian sympathies tell me that some important insights have gone off the rails. Mental talk may not pick out inner objects on the Cartesian stage, but it does not follow that mental talk is therefore confused. (For more on this, consider Hutto 1995). Phenomenology is a sort of fiction for Dennett: Wittgenstein, on the other hand, once remarked: “If I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a *grammatical* fiction.” (PI, I, s.307) In other words, the problem has to do with how we philosophically construe ordinary mental talk (that is, on the model of object-designation).

Now to conclude the chapter. It was stated at the beginning that what the non-reductivist wants to preserve is not incompatible with what the eliminativist wants to reject. Recognizing this compatibility required the distinction of innocuous and pernicious interpretations of the non-reductivist conclusion, corresponding in turn to how we understand the ontology of what we aim to preserve. For on the one hand, we can understand non-reductive arguments, premised on the notion of the epistemic gap, as merely pointing our attention to the manifest falseness of an ontological picture made exclusively in terms of scientific unobservables—that is, in terms of physical structures and processes that do not strictly entail any corresponding qualitative content of conscious experience. For all does not take place “in the dark”, as Chalmers observes, and there is more to our experience than behavioural reactions to *invisible* stimuli. (The “stimuli”, we might say, are straightforwardly the qualitative contents—colours, sounds, etc.—of our experience.) And these contents are not to be thought of as metaphysically inner mental objects—those things that would pose a genuine hard problem of consciousness, and which eliminativists reject. The contents of our experience are in the

world, not the ontological mind. This is the view that I will explore and defend in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Do We Experience Our Experience?

In the last chapter, the non-reductivist and eliminativist positions were framed around the kernels of truth contained in each one. The task of this chapter is to put these kernels together to develop the following solution to the mind-body problem: the qualitative content of our experience that the non-reductivist rightfully wants to preserve (as considered through the conceivability and knowledge arguments) is the content of the world, not the ontological mind. We have no need for the systematically elusive qualia, or realm of inner mental objects thought necessary to give our experience its phenomenal or qualitative character.

This, it will be shown, is a broadly Wittgensteinian view. It resembles other broadly Wittgenstein views, such as those of Hacker (2002) and Hanfling (2003), which hold that the qualitative contents of experience (colours, etc.) are properties of objects in the world. Perhaps somewhat differently (depending on how one understands the aforementioned “objects”), this thesis argues for an empirical ontology whose objects *are* the qualities—of sight, sound, taste, etc.—that we hitherto did not know how to consider (e.g., as intrinsically “mental” or “physical”). We might think of this as a non-reductive, non-ontological account of consciousness, since the qualitative content of our experience is neither illegitimately reduced to underlying physical processes (taking place “in the dark”, as Chalmers puts it) nor hypostatized (or ontologized) as private mental properties. Rather, they are left as the metaphysically neutral features of a world that is not itself cleft into the sort of two-world ontology that would have “mental” and “physical” be the

names of ontologically significant types of properties or substances. This position is therefore close to the loose set of views called neutral monism (as held, for example, in Mach, James, at various points by Russell and, perhaps, Wittgenstein) which minimally hold that the notions of transcendent mind and matter are in some sense constructions out of immediate experience, and not, in this way, the basis for any type of ontology.¹⁵

Though, we will see that for the later Wittgenstein (as opposed to the earlier), the mental and the physical need not be logical constructions (for example, out of Tractarian objects) but rather language-games: innocuous ways of talking, rooted in the real-world, practical uses we make of them.

On the account to be offered here, the mind-body problem, or the “hard” problem of conscious experience, rests on two philosophical mistakes—each one, on my interpretation, corresponding to the non-reductivist’s and eliminativist’s respective target of criticism. On the one hand, we have considered in some detail how the non-reductivist says something true about the inability to make a certain sort of reduction or elimination (of the world of our experience to an ontological picture made in the trans-experiential terms of underlying physical structures and processes). On the other hand, we have also considered that eliminativists are correct to deny a mental ontology. Put together, these criticisms add up to an account that preserves what is important for both parties: the manifest content of our experience without an ontological notion of consciousness that

¹⁵ This thesis is not a defense of neutral monism but of a position that I think must be very much like it. One reason for not framing it as a neutral monist position *per se* is that neutral monist views, though popular from 1900-1940 (Cook 1996; pg. xviii) and held at various points by pre-eminent philosophers, never came to form a well-defined philosophical system. As Stubenbug states, neutral monism on the whole “never got much beyond the programmatic stage, and did not draw large amounts of criticism.” (Stubenbug 2005) As such, and considering its relative obscurity in today’s philosophical climate, calling my account a neutral monist one would be needlessly anachronistic—it would not really help to illuminate it as the contribution to the contemporary debate that it aims to be. For more on neutral monism, see Stubenbug 2005.

would, says Chalmers, pose “the most baffling problems in the science of the mind” (Chalmers 1995; pg. 1).

First, it remains to be seen just why the the situation in the contemporary philosophy of mind is in fact so intractable. Far from mutually supporting each other in a dual attack on the sources of the mind-body problem, non-reductivists and eliminativists continue to engage in a battle of intuition with no resolution in sight. On the analysis to be given here, the ultimate question in the philosophy of mind is not whether there is conscious experience with individuating properties, but rather how we are best to think about the ontology of these properties (e.g., as properties of the world, or inner properties of the mind). This, I aim to show, in turn comes to a question that no combination of introspection and valid conceivability arguments can determine: do we *experience* our experience as inner? Considering this question from a Wittgensteinian, meaning-centered approach will not only make explicit the grounds for a non-reductive, non-ontological account of consciousness, but will also shed much needed light on the non-reductivist’s mistake, viz. the hypostatization of the inner.

I

I begin as I did in the previous chapter—with non-reductivism, considered principally in terms of its major proponents (especially Chalmers). It was important in the last chapter that the sense in which the non-reductivist is right be made explicit. The non-reductivist, interpreted innocuously, is right to preserve what has been referred to as the qualitative content of our experience. Centrally important to understanding the innocuousness of this interpretation is to understand what the qualitative content is being

preserved *against*. It is much too broad to say physicalism, where this would presumably render our experiential contents as things that are non-physical (and where we do not yet know what “physical” means). Rather, as argued in the previous chapter, the innocuousness of the non-reductive position is brought out by understanding it as merely pointing out what is absent from an ontological picture made purely in terms of trans-experiential (sometimes considered “mind-independent”) physical entities or processes. No ontology defined in terms of scientific unobservables—those entities or processes that we cannot in principle experience but instead infer on various scientific or methodological bases—entails or explains the manifest existence of all that is “observable” (or all that can be experienced). All does not take place “in the dark”, as Chalmers rightly observes (Chalmers 2003; pg. 3), and it is in this (almost truistic) sense that, I have argued, the non-reductivist has a justified intuition that they are saying something obviously true.

But the non-reductivist’s intuition is also wrong in an important sense that we must now consider. When, by a surreptitious act of ontologizing, the non-reductivist turns the individuating properties of the world into properties of the mind—or qualia—the claim that only the “obvious facts” are being protected is itself no longer obvious. In an important way, moving forward in the philosophy of mind involves recognizing how a non-obvious claim (the postulation of a mental ontology) piggy-backs on an obvious one (that all does not take place “in the dark”), as exemplified by this question of Chalmers’: “Why doesn’t all this information-processing go on ‘in the dark’, free of any inner feel?” (Chalmers 1995; pg. 6) Information-processing does not go on “in the dark”, if we take this to imply an unreal ontological picture made purely in terms of scientific

unobservables. But the adjunctive claim, that the “observables” (the ordinary qualitative contents of our experience) therefore occupy a metaphysically inner mind-space, is a pernicious non-sequitor—a conflation of two importantly *different* issues into a single and misleading “statement of the obvious”.

On this account, it is eminently reasonable to shift the justificatory burden to the non-reductivists (viz. Chalmers) by asking, to begin with, what justifies making the contents of our experience a “hard problem”, as objects of the ontological mind. Pre-philosophically, and on the analysis to be given, the contents of experience seem, for the most part, to be the ordinary properties of the world: this is surely the case for the content of perception, and with some analysis, is also true for sensations such as pains (which, it will be argued, are in body-parts, not ontological minds). The qualitative contents of experience are what individuate our experience as being one way or another and, contra the non-reductivist, they are not evidently denied by eliminativists. Or at least not by Dennett who (as we have seen) grants that in this sense, “conscious experience has properties.” (Dennett 1988; pg. 1) How *could* one deny that, for instance, there are experiences of colours, of sounds, pains, etc.—the sorts of things that Chalmers describes here:

When we see, for example, we experience visual sensations: the felt quality of redness, the experience of dark and light, the quality of depth in a visual field. Other experiences go along with perception in different modalities: the sound of a clarinet, the smell of mothballs. Then there are bodily sensations, from pains to orgasms; mental images that are conjured up internally; the felt quality of emotion, and the experience of a stream of conscious thought. (Chalmers 1995; pg. 5)

It would be too hasty to say that the qualitative contents of perceptions and sensations pose no philosophical interest whatsoever. In the concluding chapter it will be

shown that the traditionally conceived mind-body problem, though itself a philosophical illusion, is not entirely empty. We will consider that for the claim that the contents of our experience are in the world (and are in this sense “mind-independent”) there may remain a certain “innocuous mystery”: a natural and expected end, that is, to the sort of justification we might (only erroneously) want, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, for the use of certain concepts. On the other hand, for non-reductivists like Chalmers who says that “[t]he really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of experience” (Chalmers 1995; pg. 3), the experiential contents of perceptions and sensations are supposed to be especially baffling for our natural worldview. “Consciousness”, says Chalmers, “fits uneasily into our conception of the natural world.” (Chalmers 2003; pg. 1) But it is not clear how qualitative contents, though irreducible in the innocuous sense described above, immediately lend themselves to any problem of *this* sort: any problem, that is, regarding how we are to explain or account for them as perfectly ordinary features of the natural world.

But we already have a clue as to why the qualitative contents of experience might *seem* baffling and in need of an ontological account. As described in the previous chapter, the crux of the mind-body problem is the view that experiential contents occupy a metaphysically inner mind-space, known by introspection on the model of “inward looking”—a view, we have considered, that corresponds to the imagery of the Cartesian Theater. Only these sorts of properties would, with respect to Rorty, bear the true mark of the mental, and hence pose the ontological problem of accounting for them as such. Naturally, then, the view that the content of experience is inside the mind (and therefore only attached to the world in a derivative sense) systematically figures into the accounts

of the most prominent non-reductivists (for example, here in Chalmers and Jackson), and thus into the general way that our understanding of the debate has been framed (for example, by Metzinger):

No amount of knowledge about Fred, be it physical or not, amounts to knowledge “*from the inside*” considering Fred. (Jackson 1982—italics mine)

Why should physical processing give rise to a rich *inner life* at all? It seems objectively unreasonable that it should, and yet it does. (Chalmers 1995; pg. 3—italics mine)

When I confront a completely alien being, and ask myself whether this being is really *conscious*, I do not only want to know, in the sense of Thomas Nagel, *what it is like* to possess the mental states of this being. I want to know whether this being has a genuine inner world [...] If we are serious about the project of a *science of consciousness*, then we must build bridges from the outside world to the inner world, that is, to where we already *are*. (Metzinger 1995; pg. 15-16)

Talk of knowledge “from the inside”, the “inner life” and the “inner world” is not just metaphorical, nor the innocuous use of a psychological language-game with different allowable “moves” (to be considered later with respect to Wittgenstein). It betrays of the non-reductivist a substantive commitment to an ontology that is cleaved between the physical properties of the “outer” world, and the qualitative mental ones that occupy a metaphysically inner mind-space.

This view has compelled solutions to the “hard problem” in the form of various non-reductive sorts of identity theory which hold that token mental events are not reducible to token physical events, but are totally dependent and constrained by them.¹⁶ Chalmers’ “naturalistic dualism”, for example, proposes that we take conscious experience itself as “a fundamental feature of the world, alongside mass, charge, and

space-time.” (Chalmers 1995; pg. 14) Chalmers suggests that the qualitative properties of experience are connected to physical processes through various psychophysical principles, the most important being the double-aspect of information, which holds that “we can find the *same* abstract information space embedded in physical processing and in conscious experience.” (Chalmers 1995; pg. 23) In this way, it is argued, the structures of conscious experience are directly isomorphic to those of physical functions. Says

Chalmers:

This principle reflects the central fact that even though cognitive processes do not conceptually entail facts about conscious experience, consciousness and cognition do not float free of one another but cohere in an intimate way. (Chalmers 1995; pg. 19)

The position, he admits “qualifies as a variety of dualism, as it postulates basic properties over and above the properties invoked by physics. [...] It expands the ontology slightly, to be sure”. (Chalmers 1995; pg. 15)

But expanding our ontology (however “slightly”) is, to my mind, an extraordinary move, warranted only by extraordinary states of affairs. But there is nothing extraordinary in this way about the ordinary contents of our experience—nothing, *pace* Chalmers, that “fits uneasily into our conception of the natural world.” On a non-reductive, non-ontological account, there is no reason why a solution to the hard problem of consciousness should require this recourse to ontology. This is because there is no good reason why the qualitative contents of our experience should be conceived as metaphysically inner, and thus “mental” in the problematic sense, rather than as the familiar properties of the world. No reason is forthcoming from non-reductivists like

¹⁶ In addition to Chalmers, see Davidson 1970.

Chalmers, at least, who seem to take for granted that the undeniable truth of our experience of such things as colours and pains is the same as the undeniable truth that this experience takes place in the metaphysically inner sanctum of the mind. But this hypostatization of the inner (once referred to by Place as the “phenomenological fallacy”¹⁷) is, as stated above, a surreptitious or at least unreflective act of ontologizing: the pernicious way to understand the innocuous conclusion that the contents of our experience are ineliminable from any ontological picture that necessarily excludes them.

Returning to the debate between eliminativists and non-reductivists, it is also what makes the central issue in the philosophy of mind seem hopelessly intractable, a sometimes vicious conflict of intuitions, each of which are simply obvious to their supporters. For where the non-obvious claim viz. the postulation of an inner, subjective ontology (or qualia) treads so easily on the obvious one, that conscious experience has individuating contents that make experience one way and not another, it is perhaps to be expected that there should be such surprisingly different answers to the question of whether there is “conscious experience”: it is likewise to be expected that the non-reductivist should be non-plussed when confronted with the claim that there is not.

How did we get into a situation where people can say things that are inconsistent with the obvious facts of their experience? ... If you are tempted to [reductive] functionalism, I believe you do not need refutation, you need help. (Searle 1992)

The obvious problem with type-A materialism [eliminativism] is that it appears to deny the manifest. (Chalmers 2003; pg. 10)

¹⁷ “The phenomenological fallacy on which the argument [for dualism] is based depends on the mistaken assumption that because our ability to describe things in our environment depends on our consciousness of them, our descriptions of things are primarily descriptions of our conscious experience and only secondarily, indirectly, and inferentially descriptions of the objects and events in our environments”. (Place 1956)

Or, likewise, with the suggestion (such as mine above) that the burden of proof should fall on the non-reductivist who postulates “conscious experience” in the problematic sense of a metaphysically *inner* substance or process:

This is to miss the point: conscious experience is not “postulated” to explain other phenomena in turn; rather, it is a phenomenon to be explained in its own right. (Chalmers 1997, in response to Dennett)

One can understand the non-reductivist’s dilemma. Conscious experience, it is thought, should not in principle be subject to doubt where “[o]ur knowledge that conscious experience exists derives primarily from our own case”, (Chalmers 1996; pg. 102) and when “[t]here is nothing that we know more intimately than conscious experience.” (Chalmers 1995; pg. 1) How frustrating that it very often is, “by many, perhaps most, of the advanced thinkers in the subject,” says Searle (Searle 1992; pg. 279). For whereas Chalmers claims that his introspection reveals a world of rich inner phenomena, Dennett, for one, claims that his introspection reveals nothing to him at all. And what recourse does the non-reductivist have when faced with recalcitrant introspective reports? Chalmers suggests that “[p]erhaps Dennett is a zombie” (Chalmers 1996; pg. 190)—by which he means to suggest that perhaps Dennett is behaviourally indistinguishable from a normal human, but with nothing going on “inside” him. And in a sense, Dennett agrees:

We’re all zombies. Nobody is conscious – not in the systematically mysterious way that supports such doctrines as epiphenomenalism! I can’t prove that no such sort of consciousness exists. I also cannot prove that gremlins don’t exist. The best I can do is show that there is no respectable motivation for believing in it. (Dennett 1991; pg. 406)

We have also seen that Dennett does not deny that, in some sense, there is conscious experience, and that it is possessed by the same experiential properties that Chalmers

claims of his own. The claim is only that the qualitative content of our experience is better considered in terms of the familiar properties of the world, as opposed to the inner mental properties of conscious experience supposedly known through the introspective power of the “mind’s eye”. As Dennett puts it:

When we marvel, in those moments of heightened self-consciousness, at the glorious richness of our conscious experience, *the richness we marvel at is actually the richness of the world outside*, in all its ravishing detail. It does not “enter” our conscious minds, but is simply available. (Dennett 1991; pg. 408—italics mine)

One might get the feeling that the real quandary of debates about consciousness is that they seem so often to come down to radically different intuitions about what is “obvious”, or “manifest” of our experience. Thinkers in the subject cannot help but make what Dennett calls the “first-person-plural presumption”: that personal introspection reveals *universal* phenomenological truths of ontological import. And granted, when it comes to *consciousness*, we like to think, there is no mistaking it if one understands the meaning of the term. As Louis Armstrong replied when asked what jazz is—“[I]f you got to ask, you ain’t never gonna get to know” [quoted in Dennett 1988])—so too, we think, with consciousness. There are two things that are naturally to be drawn, therefore, from the fact that there is so little disagreement over whether introspection reveals “conscious experience”.

The first is that in some sense Dennett and Chalmers (as champions of opposing sides in this debate) are in fact talking past each other about consciousness: things would be a lot more tractable if the disputed terms were better defined at the outset. If they were, at least one thing would have to follow: it seems that eliminativists do not (contra Searle and Chalmers) deny the “obvious facts”, or the “manifest”, so long as we take these

suspicious words to refer to the “glorious” though ordinary qualitative contents perception and sensation. It ought to be considered that eliminativists, true to their word, only deny a theory, or set of folk assumptions about the mind—that they are not necessarily revisionary metaphysicians, theoretically writing-out what is genuinely manifest. As described in detail last chapter, the eliminativist’s target is a specific picture of the mind and a certain way of thinking about mental concepts (e.g., as denoting inner objects).

Of course, it must be noted that although the paradigm cases of conscious experience tend to involve the phenomena of perception (especially vision), there might be more to what the non-reductivist finds obvious of their experience, or “manifest”, and which the eliminativist may in fact deny. (An obvious candidate for this might be the supposed inner sensation of thought or belief, or the various “folk psychological” construals of mental content.) However, as described last chapter, we do not always have to concede that a person has infallible knowledge of what is actually the case of their experience “objectively subjectively” (or, for our purposes, *ontologically*), as opposed to what is the case in a “non-ontological” (as we will see, a Wittgensteinian) way, as given by the way that we frame reports about this experience. And while the latter represent a kind of explanandum that is genuine and important in its own right, it is consciousness as an *ontological* explanandum that is the most important question in *this* debate—the question of whether a mental ontology is required to account for what is genuinely given of our experience.

The second thing to be drawn from this, and following from the first, is that the question seems, in the end, to come to: is the phenomenal richness that we experience

constitutive of the world, or the (metaphysically) inner life? And given that the question can be answered either way without illegitimate reduction or elimination of the “obvious facts”, we need to consider new methods, other than introspection, to move us past the current intractabilities. We have already considered in the previous chapter a few reasons to be distrustful of introspection, understood as the “inner verification” of “subjective facts”. And ultimately, the notion that introspection confirms the existence of consciousness as some sort of inner thing or process—or that we experience our experience as inner—begs the question: implicit in the introspective act is the assumption that one is, in fact, “inwardly looking”. But the question is whether the notion of the metaphysically inner is sound to begin with, such that there is not only something to look into, but also something to look *with* (a “mind's eye”, for instance); and this is certainly a question that introspection itself (whatever process it may actually be) cannot answer.

It is my position that the qualitative contents of experience are not metaphysically inner. They are straightforwardly the individuating qualities of the world: the redness of an apple, the sound of a trumpet, and every other entity of what we might call an empirical ontology—an ontology that does not transcend the sorts of things that we actually experience. We might say that the phenomenal or qualitative character of the world differs in ordinary sorts of ways and that our experience is of these differences, rather than of the systematically elusive inner *some things* that would merely represent these differences. This is just to say that we directly experience the world, and not our own experience of this experience.

It is in this sense that consciousness does not exist, where consciousness is taken to mean something substantive as the name for a metaphysically inner substance or

process. Like eliminativism (or its progenitor, logical behaviourism) this position holds that the inner content of the mind is completely definable in terms of the behaviours and functions of the body. But it holds also that these behaviours and functions are themselves defined by the qualities that have traditionally been imputed to the mind (for instance, as reified impressions or sense-data) but which I have referred to as the individuating, qualitative properties of the world.¹⁸ “Physical” and “mental”, on this view, do not name two different kinds of entities, but rather (from the Wittgensteinian perspective soon to be considered) something, perhaps, like different descriptive language-games. There is no reason to think that the mind-body problem, or the hard problem of consciousness, is the problem of the existence and interaction of ontologically significant types of properties or substances, rather than a problem of how we have construed two different sorts of talk. The ontological issue is closed by the adoption of an empirical (perhaps broadly neutral monist)¹⁹ ontology whose objects are the qualitative contents of direct experience.

Returning now to the question, is the qualitative richness of our experience constitutive of the world or the metaphysically inner life?, we have in mind the beginning of a substantive response. To say that the content of our experience is in the world is to say that it is not inside the ontological mind. The grounds for this view, however, are not that it solves the mind-body problem. The grounds are that there is no good reason,

¹⁸ Where Dennett says that consciousness is nothing but “the sum total of all the idiosyncratic reactive dispositions inherent in my nervous system” (Dennett 1991; pg. 387), we must, in order to agree, be able to cash this out in terms of experience-able qualities. An outstanding question is how Dennett himself considers the status of these “reactive dispositions”: viz., either as the trans-experiential structures and processes to be rejected, or as a way of talking about behavioural functions that are themselves experienced.

¹⁹Neutral monism, it has been observed (Studenburg 2005 and Stace [“Russell’s Neutral Monism”] in Schilpp [ed.] 1946; pg. 354) has been primarily construed, and has the primary motive of solving the mind-body problem.

empirical or otherwise, to countenance the bifurcation of the world into inner and outer substance, and where introspection is not a form of empiricism—not, that is, a mode of verification on the model of observation. To fully establish this latter point, it was said, we need to consider a new method with which to consider (and show false) the non-reductivist presupposition viz. the hypostatization of the inner, and its attending conception of introspection. If i) traditional ontological considerations have gotten us nowhere, and if ii) we have seen how an ambiguity of meaning results in an imbroglio of intuitions, then what we need is a method that will prioritize the question of what we could (or really do) mean by certain disputed terms and forms of expressions.

II

We find such a method in Wittgenstein, who made important contributions to the philosophy of mind by exploring the implications of the insight that not all language works on the model of object-designation. “One of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment”, Wittgenstein said, “is that a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it.” (BB, pg.1) A Wittgensteinian, meaning-oriented approach can reveal a great deal about the nature of the non-reductivist's ontological mistake, while at the same time making explicit the basically empirical grounds for a non-reductive, non-ontological account of consciousness. By laying out what we already know about how the terms of mind-body discourse are ordinarily learned and used, Wittgenstein subjects the hypostatization of the inner to a sort of meaning-verificationism, putting into epistemic doubt the notion that we actually have a clear sense of the ontological uses of language that point to an ontology of private mental objects.

Certain terms and forms of expression (the contested vocabulary of mind-body discourse) are, as James put it, “double-barrelled” (James 1904; pg. 477)—they seem to have a dual-reference to things both public and private, and to this extent are dualistic. As mentioned last chapter, there is a metaphysical ambiguity to phrases like “conscious experience”. On the one hand, the grammar of this and its related and constitutive notions squarely indicates a dualism between subject and object, experiencer and experienced—the “I” of the Cartesian cogito, for instance, and the private qualities, or qualia known only to it. But the grammar is misleading—as Wittgenstein puts it, “[p]hilosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (PI, I, s.109), and “[t]here is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.” (TLP, s.5.631)

From the perspective of a “use” theory of meaning, the merely grammatical separation between subject and object does not indicate a metaphysical truth of the matter, because we do not in ordinary situations *mean* what the grammar entails. For Wittgenstein is at pains to show that we have no experience of a private, inner mental realm (that of a metaphysical, as opposed to merely grammatical subject), and as he once said: “[i]t isn’t possible to believe in [or mean] something for which you cannot imagine some kind of verification.” (PR, pg. 89)²⁰ The meaning-verificationism of Wittgenstein’s approach, then, consists in the fact that there are not two questions—one being whether we experience private qualities, and the other being whether such are what we mean by certain disputed terms and forms of expression. The import of Wittgenstein’s meaning-verificationism is that they are the same question—the question of whether we could in

²⁰ As Cook observes, the “use” theory of meaning was for Wittgenstein a way of reconciling empiricism and ordinary language—a project, Cook claims, Wittgenstein inherited from Berkeley, who first argued that we cannot mean more by a statement than its method of verification. (Cook 1996; pg. xviii)

fact *know* that we are acquainted with the private objects suggested by mental talk, or a certain ontological use of language.

With this in mind, let us consider again the non-reductivists. We have seen how, in their pernicious mode, non-reductivists hypostatize the inner as the private mental realm in which the content of experience occurs. We can now consider this in more specific terms. The non-reductivist takes reports about qualities (through the use of sensation expressions, e.g., “that’s red”) as having a dual reference—to one thing that is publically observable, and to another thing that is metaphysically inner. Wittgenstein considers this possibility:

What am I to say about the word ‘red’? – that it means something ‘confronting us all’ and that everyone should really have another word, besides this one, to mean his own sensation of red? Or is it like this: the word ‘red’ designates something known to all of us; and in addition, for each person, something only to him? [...] It is as if when I uttered the word I cast a sidelong glance at my own sensation, to tell myself, as it were: I know all right what I mean by it. (PI, I, s.273-4]

Hanfling (2001; pg. 52) has observed how this implausible view is expressed by Chalmers when he says “[f]irst-order judgement: ‘That’s red!’ . Second-order judgement: ‘I’m having a red sensation now’”. The first-order judgement is a familiar one about the perception of a quality of the world (redness) and corresponds non-problematically with the public way in which the use of the term is learned (namely, direct, public ostension). The case is not so clear with the second-order judgement, which apparently reports an inner redness corresponding to an outer redness, and which is known only by introspection.

By forgetting the public nature of meaning, this view gets things wrong in two respects. First, it is wrong to assume, as Hanfling and Hacker (2002) point out, that perception must entail a corresponding sensation on the subject-side. Perception is not always a case of sensation—not always a case of something in the world bestowing a corresponding thing-ness in the mind. But the important distinction between sensation and perception²¹ is often overlooked in discussions about the hard problem of consciousness, where it is often remarked that conscious experience has an inner *feel*: Chalmers was quoted earlier referring the “felt quality of redness”; Ned Block describes qualia as including “the ways it feels to see, hear and smell, the way it feels to have a pain” (Block 1994; pg. 514). But Hacker is right to observe the misplaced use of the sensation-term “feel” here, to indicate a supposed distinctive way that something is experienced. Seeing is not straightforwardly also a matter of feeling.

One might indeed ask a person who has had his sight, hearing or sense of smell restored ‘How does it feel to see (hear, smell) again?’ One might expect the person to reply ‘It is wonderful’, or perhaps ‘It feels very strange’. The question concerns the person’s attitude towards his exercise of his restored perceptual capacity [...] In these cases, there is indeed a way it feels to see or hear again, namely wonderful or strange. But if we were to ask a normal person how it feels to see the table, chair, desk, carpet, etc., etc., he would wonder what we were after. (Hacker 2002; pg. 4-5)

The second problem with the second-order judgement is that it is confused to describe a sensation as “red”: sensations themselves are not coloured, anymore than thoughts about trees are trees. This confusion results when, turning the content of experience into private mental content, we apply the qualitative descriptions of the former

²¹ Perceptions are intentional whereas sensations are not: perceptions have objects—are *of* things—whereas sensations can only have causes (the painful sensation of putting one’s hand in a fire is not a perception of a pain in the fire—rather, it is caused by the fire).

to the latter: the meanings of the qualitative terms do not, without an air of paradox, apply to the figments of an inner mind-space. For this, in any event, is not how such terms are learned or normally used, where the meanings of such terms appear to be constituted by the linguistic habits that form around our engagement with necessarily public objects or their qualities.

A similar point is made again by Hacker (2002), who observes that the sort of questions posed by non-reductivists such as Chalmers about the ineffably subjective “what it’s like-ness”, or qualia of the contents of experience, can occur only when we equivocate between them and the “attitudinal predicates” by which we might describe them (as, for example, pleasurable or disagreeable). “Experiences,” Hacker says,

... are possible subjects of attitudinal predicates, that is, they may be agreeable or disagreeable, interesting or boring, wonderful or dreadful. It is such attributes that might be termed ‘the qualitative characters of experiences’, not the experiences themselves. (Hacker 2002)

On the other hand, when we speak merely of the qualities themselves (the blueness of the sky, for example), we are not talking about anything like the ineffably subjective “what it’s like-ness”, or “inner feel” of our experience of them (their supposed intrinsic pleasurability, for instance) but simply about the qualities themselves, which we have no reason to think are private in this problematic sense. Both Hanfling and Hacker (with Place and the “phenomenological fallacy”) show the error of automatically assuming that a content of our experience is a subjective and mental content simply by virtue of our having experienced it. As we have seen, qualitative language about the world does not easily transpose as language about the purely subjective; given Wittgenstein’s private-

language argument (to be considered below), nothing purely subjective, disconnected from public convention, could ground the justified employment of such a language.

Must one accept the priority of meaning evinced by the Wittgensteinian method? Of course, one might think it possible that in talking about the perceived blueness of the sky one is also *referring* to something inside oneself, however one must admit the word's meaning is originally learned (through public ostension). Such must be the case with Chalmers, it seems, for whom every first-order judgement about a public quality (e.g., “that’s red”) carries an implicit second-order reference to a private-inner replica—and one of the most “obvious” introspective discoveries, Chalmers claims, is of the “phenomenal visual field itself” (Chalmers 1997). But for one, my own sensibilities incline me to agree with Wittgenstein that one could never think this independently of “philosophical intentions”—“the idea never crosses your mind [pre-philosophically] that this impression of colour belongs only to you”, Wittgenstein rightfully says (PI, I, s.275). And if, he continues, we point at anything while saying the words, we point directly at the sky; as Johnston states, in “Wittgenstein: Re-thinking the Inner”:

[T]here is nothing indirect about the experience of someone who admires a landscape; her gaze is directed outward, not inward – the source of her admiration is the field itself, not some copy of that field within her.
(Johnston 1993; pg. 55)

Moreover, it is far from clear what else we *could* point to—how, that is, we could “point inwardly” to a sensation. For what sort of pointing is this, wonders Wittgenstein, when he asks “what can it mean to speak of ‘turning my attention on to my own consciousness?’ This is surely the queerest thing there could be!” (PI, I, s.412) However we might be prepared to countenance a distinction between reference and meaning, making such a distinction does not in any event circumvent the skeptical challenge posed

by Wittgenstein's private-language argument (or, for that matter perhaps, the eliminativist derivations thereof considered in the previous chapter). The problem, simply put, is that one lacks a principled means of learning how to identify the purported private mental object, known only by attending to one's consciousness—that is, at least according to any independent standard that would determine facts about it, “objectively subjectively”, as it were (and if there are no facts about the purported private sensation, what exactly is there that should interest us ontologically?). The principle that is lacking is rule-following. If we agree with Wittgenstein that meaning is constituted by the way that certain signs are used according to publically defined rules, then it is only a question-begging set of rules that give the non-reductivist-cum-ontologist the license to speak of private cases of conscious experience, or a mental ontology.

Where the meaning of descriptions like “that's red” is fixed by our engagement with the public world—bound to the public rules that give such expressions their use—their use in a language-game of genuine descriptive report is only justified with respect to the objects of the public world. Only this world, says the private-language argument, provides a rule-based standard for the justified use of such terms and forms of expression, since “[b]eing a rule means being an instrument that is checkable, and by an agreed technique.” (WLPP, pg. 247—quoted from Johnston 1993; pg. 20) On the other hand, a supposed inner world of private mental objects could not be the justificatory standard for any real descriptions about it, since “it is not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’: otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.” (PI, I, s.202) Thus, we are, as Rorty puts it, “incurable” regarding our inner mental content, but only

because, as Dennett put it, “there is so little to ‘observe’ and so much to pontificate about without fear of contradiction.” (Dennett 1991; pg. 67-68)

If it remains metaphysically possible, therefore, that for every “double-barrelled” description (like “that’s red”) there is an implied second-order reference that points to a private, inner replica of the quality, the nature of this sort of “pointing” raises serious doubts about whether we could *in fact know* that we are actually acquainted with the quality. This suggests there is no good reason to believe in the inner qualities at all, and that the statement “I’m having a red sensation now” must, taken ontologically at least, be an elliptical way of merely expressing the perception of a red object. We know, after all, that there are red objects in the world—do we also know, in any way approaching the same, that there are red objects in the mind? Contrary to Chalmers’ private phenomenological field:

... the description of a sensation does not contain a reference to either a person or a sense organ. Ask yourself, How do I, the person, come in? How, for example, does a person come in to the description of a visual sensation? If we describe the visual field, no person necessarily comes into it. We can say the visual field has certain internal properties, but its being mine is not essential to its description. That is, it is not an intrinsic property of a visual sensation, or a pain, to belong to someone. There will be no such thing as my image or someone else’s. (WL35, pg. 22—quoted from Cook 1996; pg. 62)

Even for something like pain, Wittgenstein says, there is not beyond the grammatical subject the sort of metaphysical subject that would justify saying that the pain is inside the mind: as he says elsewhere, “[to] say, ‘I have pain’ is no more a statement about a particular person than moaning is” (BB, pg. 67) and “[i]n ‘I have pain,’ ‘I’ is not a demonstrative pronoun” (BB, pg. 68). The report of pain, in other words, makes no mention of a mind that possesses that pain. This is not as odd as it may sound.

In being asked where pain is, we never say “in the mind” or “in my head” (unless, perhaps, we have a headache). Rather, we point to the place on our body that is painful. As Hanfling points out, “[i]t is essential to the concept of pain that the question ‘Where is it?’ can have more than one answer” (Hanfling 2003; pg. 46): for pain to be always and firstly “in the mind”, and only in the various body parts in a derivative sense, is for it to be “pain” only in a very unordinary sense²²—and one that, if the private-language argument is right, is far from clear. Rather, pains are, like colours, qualities of objects in the world—in this case, of bodies.

The targeted criticism of the private-language argument (like Dennett’s “intensified verificationism” [Dennett 1988]) follows naturally from the more general point made in detail in the last chapter: that the supposedly inner qualitative content, or “qualia” of perceptions or sensations, cannot be introspected (nor, therefore, confirmed) on a “looking and seeing” model. Wittgenstein considers what this means more generally for consciousness itself:

“Human beings agree in saying that they see, hear, feel and so on (even though some are blind and some are deaf). So they are their own witnesses that they have consciousness.”—But how strange this is! [...] Do I observe myself, then, and perceive that I am seeing or conscious? [...] Is my having consciousness a fact of experience? (PI, I, s.416-418)

We do not conclude that we are conscious by observing it as a fact of our experience—not without begging the question in the way mentioned earlier. For contrary to Chalmers, we do not know that we are conscious “primarily from our own case” (Chalmers 1996; pg. 102)—that is, from introspection. According to the private-language argument, we

²² It is interesting to note that in ordinary talk, to say that a pain is “in the mind” is to suggest that the pain is not actually real, but imagined.

would not even know what would *count* as “my own case of consciousness”, when the meaning of “consciousness” is given by the *public* criteria by which we learn the use of the word. Thus, for Wittgenstein, “conscious” people are a contrast-class to others who are sleeping, drowsy, etc., and *not* to people who find that nothing of an especially elusive sort applies to their otherwise ordinary experience (philosophical zombies). Hanfling quotes Wittgenstein:

“A man can pretend to be unconscious; but conscious?” [Z 395]. On the other hand, suppose he came clean: “You have found me out; I am not really conscious”. Would this make sense? And if it did, would it also make sense in the case of you or me? “What would it mean for me to be wrong about [someone’s] having a mind, having consciousness?” [Z 394] (Hanfling 2001; pg. 56)

Wittgenstein says that we do not learn, or come to have knowledge of our sensations; by the lights of the meaning-verificationism of the private-language argument, we could not *know* that we are acquainted with such sensations, considered as private, inner *somethings*. Rather than knowing of them, “we simply have them”, Wittgenstein says (PI, I, s.246); this is to say that we do not experience *them*, but rather the world *through* them. And only this, one thinks, truly does justice to the characteristic of consciousness that philosophers call *transparency*:

This simply means that we do not experience phenomenal states *as* phenomenal states, but that we, as it were, *look through them*. They seem to bring us into direct contact with the world, because we perceive the content of these states in the mode of immediate givenness. We do not have the feeling of living in a three-dimensional film or in an inner representational space: in standard situations our conscious life always takes place *in the world*. (Metzinger 1995; pg. 11)

In the end, one might thus consider that the real import of Wittgenstein’s thoughts on privacy and introspection is that we are not conscious of our consciousness, do not

experience our experience. As Wittgenstein says, the eye does not see itself (TLP, 5.6331). To answer the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, we do not experience our own experience—we do not experience “inner-ness” in this metaphysical sense. And this entails the collapse of a series of problematic, “double-barrelled” distinctions that tread on the substantiveness of the sensation, the hypostatization of the inner, the merely grammatical way that we separate subject and object. As William James (one of the few philosophers that Wittgenstein read and respected) said, there is no “inner duplicity” between “consciousness and [its] content” (James 1904): nor between experiencer and experienced, nor the ontological mind and body. As Wittgenstein himself put it: “[i]dealists were right in that we never transcend experience. Mind and matter is a division *in* experience” (WL32, pg. 80—quoted from Cook 1994; pg. 15).

So much for the prospects of a mental ontology. Still it must be noted, to continue a point made at the end of the previous chapter, that this is not to deny the use of mental talk to *express* our psychological situation in a “non-ontologized” way. Second-order judgements about private sensations undeniably serve useful functions in the language-game of first-person report. To understand them innocuously, however, is to understand the limits of the sort of “moves” that such expressions can make, the distinct nature of the “descriptive” language-game they are involved in, and thus the extent to which we ought to draw philosophical (ontological) conclusions from such moves. To express the subjective way that it is with me “inside” is to be involved in a language-game that is importantly different from the one by which we describe, or report on the outer world.

Perhaps this word “describe” tricks us here. I say “I describe my state of mind” and “I describe my room”. You need to call to mind the differences between the language-games. (PI, I, s.290)

Wittgenstein also suggests that talk of the inner can be perfectly acceptable in familiar, real-world situations—only we must be careful to understand the special use of the language-game and the potentially misleading “picture” (we might say, the Cartesian one) that accompanies it:

The “inner” and the “outer,” a *picture* (Wittgenstein, quoted in Cook 1996; pg. 18)

Certainly all these things happen in you.—And now all I ask is to understand the expression we use.—The picture is there. And I am not disputing its validity in any particular case.—Only I also want to understand the application of the picture. (PI, I, s.423)

That we often “describe” our experience using second-order judgements (reports about my own impression of the colour) is not, therefore, misconceived. Nor is it constitutive of a mind-body problem if one understands the *use* and unique nature of the language-game of psychological report. To imagine the use of such a language-game, one need only consider the sort of everyday situation that calls for the emphasis of how experience is “subjective”, or subject-specific, owing to the innumerable factors that make one person’s response to a stimulus different from another’s. But this sort of subjectivity is not of a sort that metaphysically outstrips what appears as the sum total of behavioural or functional responses of the organism. The expression of subjectivity is not, in other words, to necessarily make a move in the philosophical language-game of ontology, wherein the expression is taken on an object-designation model to refer to the figments of an inner mind-stuff. In this ontological sense, Wittgenstein says simply: “The inner is a delusion.” (LW, II, pg. 84—quoted from Cook 1994; pg. 18)

III

Hanfling has remarked on the “Wittgenstein amnesia” (Hanfling 2001; pg. 52) that has obtained in the philosophy of mind, and to its detriment. This is an assessment I think we can agree with. Wittgenstein’s meaning-verificationism, by putting into skeptical doubt the notion of our genuine acquaintance with a private, mental ontology, casts a valuable light on the point that makes debates about consciousness truly intractable. A significant argument against dualism, it is also solid grounds for an account of consciousness that is both non-reductive and non-ontological: “non-reductive” because the properties of our experience are not illegitimately denied, and “non-ontological” because they are not also illegitimately hypostatized (as objects in the mind). Rather, they are left as the metaphysically “neutral” features of our experience that, to reiterate Wittgenstein’s point above, is not itself divided into the opposing categories of mental and physical, figured as ontologically significant types of properties or substances. This is neither idealism nor realism but is probably rightly called some variety of neutral monism—minimally, the view that as far as ontology is concerned, we do not infer transcendent entities beyond the concrete, qualitative contents of our experience. Thus, “mental” and “physical” (and the intimately close distinction, “inner” and “outer”) are not to be taken ontologically. They are instead taken somewhat along the lines of language-games: ways of talking, rooted in the real-world uses that we make of them.

Finally, there is a remaining question about the kind of account this is. Is it the metaphysical view that it might at first blush appear to be? Or is it a matter of deflation—a matter, that is, of setting the bounds of sense, for certain problematic terms and forms of expression, at the familiar limits of their ordinary employment? This question will likely

seem particularly important to those who may feel that the later Wittgenstein, often understood as having a merely “therapeutic” intent, is being saddled with a metaphysics—a substantive view of things—that he would have eschewed.

Of course, if the aim of this paper is not to defend neutral monism *per se*, then even less is it to argue that Wittgenstein is himself a neutral monist. It has not been necessary to my own account that Wittgenstein be a neutral monist, where (as stated earlier) it is not at all clear that neutral monism names any well-defined philosophical system that one could or could not adhere to. Nevertheless, it seems to me that regarding the core claims of neutral monism that we can reasonably identify, it ought to be considered that Wittgenstein was a neutral monist in at least this minimal respect. As Cook states in “Wittgenstein’s Metaphysics”:

[B]y 1916, he [Wittgenstein] had made up his mind that neutral monism provides the way out of philosophical difficulties. This is the single most important fact to be known about Wittgenstein’s views, for if one fails to take it into account, one is bound to misunderstand him completely. (Cook 1996; pg. 14)

In his book, Cook shows with much erudition that from 1916 until his last lectures of 1946-47, published as *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Philosophical Psychology*, Wittgenstein’s commitment to core neutral monist premises was plain. (Cook 1996; pg. xx) One can see, as at least partial evidence for this, Wittgenstein’s rejection of the ontological mind as considered in this thesis, and his relocation of its contents back to the world of public discourse.

But Wittgenstein may not have viewed neutral monism as a metaphysical theory at all. He did, after all, see his later philosophical project as one of returning words “from

their metaphysical to their everyday use” (PI, I, s.116). As stated earlier, Wittgenstein’s later “use” theory of meaning was a way of reconciling his basic empiricism (and by extension, his ontology), as in the *Tractatus*, with ordinary language: for Wittgenstein, ordinary language is phenomenological language, so far as its ontological import goes. He held (like Berkeley) that words never refer to, or mean anything transcendent to possible experience; that “[i]t isn’t possible to believe in [or mean] something for which you cannot imagine some kind of verification.” (PR, pg. 89) Thus, as Wittgenstein once said, “the common-sense man [...] is as far from realism as from idealism”. (BB, pg. 48) It is only in this sense that Wittgenstein, presumably like the common-sense man, was no metaphysician—but only because, as Cook says, Wittgenstein was (and remained in his later years) “an empiricist armed with a theory of meaning.” (Cook 1996; pg. xix)²³

This is why Wittgenstein could claim that he only leaves everything just as it is. It is, moreover, what would make a non-reductive, non-ontological account an essentially empirical, while pragmatic one: an account that, as William James put it, seeks for mental notions, or consciousness more generally, “its pragmatic equivalent in realities of experience.” (James 1904) These realities, I have argued, refer quite innocuously to what, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, we mean by such notions in an everyday, pre-philosophical way: the qualitative properties of the world that we directly experience.

²³ The ontology of the *Tractatus*, Cook shows, is an empirical ontology—its “objects” says Wittgenstein, refer to “such things as a colour, a point in visual space etc” (WL32; pg. 120—quoted from Cook 1996; pg. 33). This view did not disappear in the *Investigations*. What changed was the “picture” theory of meaning that held that propositions are constructed from, and logically analyzable as these objects. From the perspective of his later “use” theory, there need not be any such fit between language and the world—a different way of explaining how statements do not ordinarily mean what the grammar may suggest. Hence, “[i]t isn’t possible to believe in [or mean] something for which you cannot imagine some kind of verification.” (PR, pg. 89)

They are not, as such, the basis for a mental ontology—or, therefore, a so-called hard problem of consciousness.

CHAPTER FOUR

An Innocuous Mystery?

I will conclude this thesis by reviewing what the account given here has attempted to accomplish. But my account would not be complete if I did not consider what I take to be the principal concern for any view that holds some variety of direct realism—any view, that is, which holds that our experience of the world is not mediated by inner representations. This would apply to the non-reductive, non-ontological account given in this thesis, perhaps conceived as some variety of neutral monism. For on the one hand, Russell once said that neutral monism “affords an immense simplification”, one that makes it possible “to regard the traditional problem of the relation of mind and matter as definitely solved”, (Russell 1959, 103-4—quoted from Stubenburg 2005) and this would be true of my own account as well. However, if the view that the contents of experience are in the world rather than the ontological mind has solved some puzzles, then at the same time others have been recognized.

The view that our experience is directly of a world pre-configured into the familiar qualities of colour, sound, etc., has for many philosophers since Locke seemed naïve beyond the pale; the view is thus sometimes called naive realism. There is reason for holding that our experience of the world is mediated through some variety of *tertium quid*, or inner “third thing”, historically considered in such terms as reified “ideas” or impressions, secondary qualities, or more recently, sense-data (the term I will use). Sense-data, like its historical counterparts, designates the supposed mind-dependent, inner *some things* which contribute to our experience its subjective, phenomenal quality. They have been postulated to solve a number of puzzles about the relationship between the

mind and the world: puzzles for instance about how our experience can be *directly* of the world given phenomena like illusion (a stick in water that appears bent but is not actually), or even more mundanely, the simple fact of perspectival variance (the way that the shape of a thing can appear to change while its real shape, we like to think, remains the same). Puzzles like these seem to indicate the need for some distinction between appearance and reality, figured in terms of the inner realm of representations that this thesis has rejected.²⁴

The theory of sense-data responds to a genuine perplexity that we can put very generally: if every organism's experience is directly of the world—if the content of experience is not *hidden* inside minds—then it is the world itself that must have the differing contents, corresponding to those of each organism's specific experience. In other words, if the perspectival differences between my own experience of a chair and another's cannot be accounted for in terms of what happens inside our minds, then in some sense at least, are not what we experience two different worlds? Against this, one might think, a basically Lockean distinction between mind-dependent secondary qualities and mind-independent primary qualities preserves a much more robust sense of the one objective world, which appears differently according to the systematic differences in the structures and relative positions of various sensory-systems. The *tertium quid* has some

²⁴ Here is not the place to delve into a thorough re-telling of the disputes that surround these puzzles (for this, see Huemer 2007). Suffice to say that this account must reject any distinction between appearance and reality figured in terms of inner representations. Regarding the puzzles above, we might (in the way of Austin 1962; pg. 20) deny that even if perception is non-veridical in unusual cases, that this entails a general, or superlative appearance/reality distinction to also include the *normal* cases of perception. Considering the issue in depth, moreover, would require a careful analysis of the unusual cases themselves: what do we have in mind when we say a perception is non-veridical—an illusion? For we should ask: what precisely is illusory about a stick in water looking bent but, say, feeling straight? Given the context of our knowledge of the refractive properties of water, this is how we would expect a straight stick to look, half-submerged in water (as opposed to, say, a bent stick submerged in water). In a way such as this, a treatment of non-veridical perception would sooner look to the inferences surrounding our judgements about certain perceptual contents than to an appearance/reality distinction figured in terms of inner representations.

sort of utility, even while it creates the mind-body problem by pitting the secondary qualities of the “veil of perception” against an ontological picture made in terms of scientific unobservables. It also seems to require reductivism, and the particular brand of magic by which scientific unobservables become the “observable” content of our experience: a problem, Russell remarked, that neutral monism is able to avoid:

We no longer have to contend with what used to seem mysterious in the causal theory of perception: a series of light-waves or sound-waves or what not suddenly producing a mental event apparently totally different from themselves in character. (Russell 1927a, 400—quoted in Stubenburg 2005)

But do neutral monists, viz. Russell or James, have a way out of this dilemma?

We do not want to say that the qualitative contents of our experience are not dependent on such factors as our perspective, the structure of our nervous system, our sensory organs, etc.—nothing is more obvious than that our experiences systematically differ along these lines—and yet these contents cannot be *mind*-dependent. *Esse* cannot equal *percipi*. Yet it is no good, if we therefore deny the dualistic mind, to say that in some sense there are as many worlds as there are the experiences that would occupy these minds. It seems to be in the exact same sense that we normally say there are different minds, floating inside skulls and each invisible to the other. On the broadly Wittgensteinian account offered here, one set of experiential contents cannot be metaphysically *hidden* from another.

Evidence of the fact that neutral monism is far less than a complete metaphysical system is that there is no agreement on how to respond to this seeming conundrum—the question of the existence and qualities of experiential space, as we figure it to exist outside the immediate experience that we want to call our own. Russell, for one, once suggested that every possible qualitative content of experience exists, as Stubenburg puts

it, “not only independent of the minds that might be aware of them [...] [but also] independent of the sensory mechanisms that usually serve them up to conscious minds”:

It may be thought monstrous to maintain that a thing can present any appearances at all in a place where no sense organs and nervous structure exist through which it could appear. I do not myself feel the monstrosity. (Russell 1914—quoted from Stubenburg 2005)

We might think of this as a sort of “radical realism”, since every possible experiential content, corresponding to every possible perspective and sense-modality (of which it is hard to imagine an upper limit) exists all at the same time. Such qualitative contents would, as not requiring minds to “own” them, be “free floating”.²⁵ Stubenburg notes that these “free floating appearances—appearances that are not appearances for anybody—would, for example, occur in a zombie” (Stubenburg 2005). Dennett, who says that in this sense “we are all zombies” would likely agree; the sense in which “we are all zombies” for Dennett (as we have seen) is the sense in which there are no ontological minds to possess the contents of experience, as inner contents.

Russell’s radical realism supports a solution to the mind-body problem along the broadly neutral monist lines considered, but at the cost of a plenary ontology that contains no less than every possible experiential content. It is not easy to see how this sort of solution fits with our requirement that experiential content not be hidden—nor with the ontological parsimony that such an account aspires to. And it is not clear why we should think that such an account is *true*.

²⁵ The idea that the “given is subjectless” would go along with the core neutral monist rejection of the ontological mind, or transcendent ego: we find the idea explicitly in Russell and Mach and, according to Stubenburg (2005), Hume, who said: “All [particular perceptions] are different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other, and may be separately consider’d, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support their existence.” (Hume 1739, 252; quoted in Stubenburg 2005)

On the other hand, William James (in places) seems to be agnostic towards the question of the nature of experiential space, “outside” the experiential contents we are immediately acquainted with. As Stubenburg observes, James’ doctrine of “pure experience” may be a methodological principle²⁶, and not a definitive statement about what exists. “[I]n my opinion we should be wise”, says James, “...to restrict our universe of philosophical discourse to what is experienced or, at least, experienceable.” (James 1906, 243; quoted in Stubenburg 2005) But the first point to make is that, of course, the difference between what is experienced versus *experientable* may come to very much indeed. If the latter, then in principle, James could be left with a plenary ontology akin to Russell’s as considered above—an ontology whose objects are the contents of every possible perceptual and sensorial experience (and this is not much of a methodological principle, or an agnosticism, at all). The former, on the other hand, *would* be grounds for agnosticism. And the most important point to make here is that this agnosticism must presuppose the possibility of solipsism, conceding a possible skepticism about other experiences outside of my own. This would make James’ doctrine of “pure experience” look much more idealistic than he may have intended. Thus, says Stubenburg (2005), “the suspicion that James’s neutral monism is really a form of idealism or phenomenalism cannot be laid to rest.”

Wittgenstein suggests another way of thinking about the question. Wittgenstein wanted to avoid skepticism about other minds, and paradoxically, he went through solipsism to do it. Wittgenstein once said that “[s]olipsism coincides with pure realism, if

²⁶ “The principle of pure experience is also a methodological postulate. Nothing shall be admitted as fact, it says, except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient.” (James 1904; quoted in Stubenburg 2005)

it is strictly thought out. The I of solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and what remains is the reality co-ordinated with it.” (TLP, 5.64) One way of explaining this might be the following: once you put *everything* inside the private mind, the very idea of privacy, lacking a contrast, ceases to mean anything. Solipsism can only equal “pure realism” (what Wittgenstein called neutral monism) if the “I” that the world is reduced to is itself gotten rid of, leaving only the world left. Hence “if the world is idea it isn’t any person’s idea” (NFL, pg. 297—quoted from Cook 1996; pg. 72). This is to say something with which anyone properly called a “neutral monist” agrees: the transcendent ego is an illusion, itself a mere construction out of experiences that are “free floating” and not “possessed” or “owned” by any mind in particular. We might, instead of the cogito “I think”, say “it thinks”—but on this point, Wittgenstein says, “[o]ne symbolism is as good as the next. The word “I” is one symbol among others having a practical use”. (WL35, pg. 63 – quoted in Cook 1996; pg. 64)²⁷

As Cook puts it, Wittgenstein turned his mind “inside out” (Cook 1996; pg. 72). Experience is not given to the “I”—the “I” is a construction out of experience. This sort of inversion (which we have already considered in the previous chapter) may offer a new perspective on the problem posed above: that if experiential contents are, *as the world*, not hidden, then my experience must somehow share some sense of identity with yours—the sense in which they are both one and the same world. It seems the possible illumination that this perspective affords owes more to the limits that such an inversion places on our ability to frame the problematic questions in the first place. This inversion “turns over” the assumption that generates the problem, viz. the hypothesis of minds that

²⁷ We should, as Berkeley put it, think with the learned, but speak with the vulgar.

“own” (by sense-data) private and subjective impressions of public objects. For by the lights of Wittgenstein’s ego-less “solipsism”, there are no questions to be asked about *any* minds (mine or others), for none exist. Cook puts this thought this way:

What the solipsist means is *not*: “While one can conceive of material things and other minds, they do not *in fact* exist,” but rather: “The very idea of ‘things outside (or beyond) immediate experience’ is a delusion, for language is grounded in names being given to objects in immediate experience, and therefore only such objects can, in the last analysis, be spoken of (conceived of).” (Cook 1996; pg. 58)

On this view, I cannot even *conceive* of the problematic, private experiential contents; the very notion of them is constructed from an experiential space that is public, and whose nature as public constrains, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, what we can determine, and even sensibly ask about them.

We can illustrate this point by way of an example. In the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein considers whether a pain in a hand that is shared by Siamese twins is one and the same pain, or whether there are two pains merely “exactly alike”. He concludes that it is in fact the very same pain—the pain that occurs in the hand, and not in the private, metaphysically inner mind-space of each twin. If we see how it could possibly be true that pain (and, by extension, any other “sense-datum” or content of experience) could be public in this way, we might achieve the desired sense of the singularity of the world, despite the differences we want to attribute to its modes of presentation. For regarding the pain, we are strongly tempted to say that it could not even be “*exactly* alike”, given the reasonable assumption that the damage to the nerve-endings will, somewhere along the line of transmission from shared hand to separate brain, be processed in an idiosyncratic way. Wittgenstein, undoubtedly, must have also considered this, while nevertheless

maintaining (for reasons considered in this thesis) that the pain is public: evenly accessible, *on principle*, to everyone.

The important point is that the pain is the same, even if we want to say that, far from being exactly alike, it is felt quite differently by each twin (perhaps, for example, one has been anesthetized). However much we (or more importantly, they) want to say that their pains are different, it cannot be said precisely *how* they are different—how, that is, when they report on the pain, they are not reporting something public, but something essentially private and subjective. On this point, let us recall Dennett’s coffee tasters, Chase and Sanborne, who know no special “that taste”: no mysteriously subjective, second-order property of their minds, or qualia. So too with the twins. There is no “that pain” inside the mind of each twin, corresponding to how each would subjectively describe it—there is only the pain in the hand, in the world (and as considered in Chapter Three). The subjective quality of *this* is something about which we cannot raise certain questions; for sensations are not, as we have seen, things that are *known* inwardly, in this way, as on a “looking and seeing” model; they are not things to which we can point inwardly, as *pictures*, so as to compare their subjective qualities against others. Hacker observes how Wittgenstein considered this long before the contemporary debate on qualia:

The *content* of experience. One would like to say ‘I see red *thus*’, ‘I hear the note that you strike *thus*’, ‘I feel sorrow *thus*’, or even ‘*This* is what one feels like when one is sad *this* when one is glad’, etc. One would like to people a world, analogous to the physical one, with these *thuses* and *thises*. But this makes sense only where there is a picture of *what is experienced*, to which one can point as one makes these statements. (RPP, I, s. 896—quoted in Hacker 2002)

As Hacker goes on to explain, it can make no sense to say that I experience something “like *this*” unless I can go on to say like *what* or *how* it is experienced. Saying

that “I see red thus” (or that I feel the pain like *this*, or taste the coffee like *this*) is not meaningful, he agrees with Wittgenstein, unless there “*is a this or a thus* to which we can point, i.e. unless there is a *this* or a *thus* in terms of which we can cash the sentence ‘I see red *like this*’ or ‘I see red *thus*’.” (Hacker 2002) It is such representations as we make to ourselves or to others (i.e., pictures or descriptions) that are the ways that the contents of experience are figured subjectively: as Dennett put it (considered in Chapter Two), we only gain *this* sort of hold on the content of experience when we ourselves take a third-person perspective towards it, in terms of our reactions, which would include the ways we represent it. On the other hand, as argued in Chapter Two, a *purely* first-person perspective—true inward observation of the subjective facts—only describes the “subjective seemings”, and not the ineffably subjective and private content of the ontological mind.

[I]t is an illusion that one can, as it were, point *inwardly* (and for oneself alone) to the experience one is currently enjoying, saying ‘I see red *thus*’, and thereby say anything meaningful — one might just as well say ‘This is this’.” (Hacker 2002)

And “this”, to make the final point, is something about which we cannot raise certain questions. Because I cannot truly imagine what an answer would be to the question of how the sensation is known to me in a way that is essentially private (“what it’s like”, to use the current jargon), so too I cannot imagine an answer for the case of anyone else. Thus, for Wittgenstein, the philosophical question itself—about the existence and qualities of the contents of experience as they exist outside my own mind—is inconceivable. It dissolves at the limits of our ability to ask about things that we do not properly “know” about.

To conclude, it was said last chapter that the mind-body problem is not totally empty, that recognizing how to solve it means seeing how it collapses into other puzzles that, as we have seen, take us afield from what is typically considered the sole province of the philosophy of mind; we are left with questions that are tied deeply into debates in metaphysics, over realism and idealism, and ultimately, perhaps, to the notion of quietism. In this paper, I can only briefly report on how others (principally Wittgenstein) have proposed going about in the face of the ultimate puzzle over the intrinsic nature of the “mind-independent” content of the world—the question of the existence and qualities of the world beyond what we take to be our own experience of them. As James put it:

[T]he whole philosophy of perception from Democritus's time downwards has just been one long wrangle over the paradox that what is evidently one reality should be in two places at once, both in outer space and in a person's mind. 'Representative' theories of perception avoid the logical paradox, but on the other hand they violate the reader's sense of life, which knows no intervening mental image but seems to see the room and the book immediately just as they physically exist. (James 1904)

Clearly, this thesis is no solution to this paradox. Yet the perspective offered by the Wittgensteinian approach adumbrated above might give us pause to consider whether there really is a puzzle at all, if the question is one that we do not know how to frame. To some, this might sound like a resignation. But if one agrees with Wittgenstein that justifications come to an end somewhere (OC, pg. 204) then we might consider that we have merely found where they end for our centrally important concepts of the “world”, or “reality”. It is, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, not to the detriment of these notions that they have fuzzy boundaries—that we do not know quite what reality is, with regards to the intrinsic nature of its contents (or the sense of the word when we apply it to experiences other than our own, or to the world conceived “mind independently”). The end of justification here is the very public realm of linguistic convention whose nature *as*

public is the mystery that concerns us. And perhaps this end point is where Wittgenstein meets a Jamesian agnosticism; except that to call it agnosticism is to suggest that there is a puzzle that might have an answer. Rather than a puzzle, we might instead call it an “innocuous mystery”—the natural and expected end of certain justifications, and not the “material” (so to speak) challenge that consciousness is supposed to pose to a one-world ontology and science of the mind.

If there is an answer, at any rate, it will not be had in this thesis. I will consider the purpose of this thesis as having been fulfilled if it has accomplished nothing but to show that the current dispute over consciousness may not be as intractable as it seems. Or perhaps, that a certain way of constructing James’ above paradox is not the proper (or at least the only) way to construct it—the way that suggests itself to a misleading *kind* of question. For when we get right down to the point that makes this debate really intractable, we find the hypostatization of the inner—the view that the content of experience is metaphysically (not psychologically) private, as confirmed by introspection. I have attempted to demonstrate that nothing about this view is necessary, that it is the pernicious way of interpreting the conclusion of the non-reductive arguments considered in Chapter Two. This conclusion, it was argued, simply states the obvious by pointing out the falsehood of an ontological picture that, because made in the trans-experiential terms of physical processes taking place “in the dark”, cannot capture the manifest qualities of our experience. These qualities are not necessarily denied by the eliminativist, who (considered mainly with respect to Dennett) can be seen as merely denying their status as private mental contents: inner *some things*, systematically elusive to functional analysis. And with the help of Wittgenstein, we considered the nature of the non-reductivist’s ontological mistake, while at the same time making explicit the grounds for an empirical

ontology that obviates the “hard” problem by not begging the crucial question of the inner to begin with.

In sum, the situation in the contemporary philosophy of mind has all the makings of a false dilemma. Either consciousness exists as some sort of inner process or entity, or else, as Chalmers says, everything takes place “in the dark”. But for the reasons considered in this thesis, I just cannot believe that this simple construction exhausts our explanatory options—that we should be forced into either accepting an ontology of the mental, with the dualism this entails (even if a supposedly innocuous property dualism or double aspect theory) or theoretically writing-out what is genuinely manifest of our experience. The move to ontology is premature to explain what, in a certain Wittgensteinian way, does not need explaining—that, as Dennett put it: “[w]hen we marvel [...] at the glorious richness of our conscious experience, the richness we marvel at is actually the richness of the world outside” (Dennett 1991; pg. 408). Rather, we should reflect on our impulse to ontologize, not only our ordinary mental talk, but also the picture of scientific realism that necessarily frames this talk in a certain way—e.g., as *inner* talk, because its qualitative content could not possibly be *outer*. For where Chalmers states that consciousness “fits uneasily into our conception of the natural world” because “the natural world is the physical world” (Chalmers 2003; pg. 1), he must assume that the physical world is the trans-experiential world of physical processes taking place “in the dark”. But this is not true to the facts of what we really mean, on the Wittgensteinian account considered, by the natural world—really, the world of the qualitative properties of our ordinary experience. And this, on the other hand, is not a world within which conscious experience cannot easily fit, for we mean nothing else by it.

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