

## **A Dilemma for Searle's Argument for the Connection Principle**

Kirk Ludwig  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, FL 32611

Objections to Searle's argument for the Connection Principle and its consequences (Searle 1990a) fall roughly into three categories: (1) those that focus on problems with the *argument* for the Connection Principle; (2) those that focus on problems in understanding the *conclusion* of this argument; (3) those that focus on whether the conclusion has the *consequences* Searle claims for it. I think the Connection Principle is both true and important, but I do not think that Searle's argument establishes it. The problem with the argument is that it either begs the question or proves too much.

It will be helpful to begin by laying out some criteria of adequacy for the success of Searle's argument. I take Searle's argument for the Connection Principle to be an *a priori* argument, based on a claim about our concept of an Intentional mental state. If it is an *a priori* argument, then its premises must be knowable *a priori*, and it must be deductively valid. I will require in addition that it meet the following criteria of adequacy:

- (A1) No premise should presuppose the conclusion;
- (A2) No premise should be in conflict with other assumptions Searle makes about the relation of mental to physical states.

I believe that objections similar to the one I am going to make to Searle's argument have been made by a number of the original commentators on Searle's article (e.g., Lloyd 1990, Rosenthal 1990, and Shevrin 1990). But the difficulty these objections have been pointing to has not been put as sharply as I

think it can be. I want to put the point in a way that shows that Searle's argument faces a dilemma, neither horn of which can be acceptable to him. At the end of one horn is failure to meet the criterion of adequacy (A1); at the end of the other is failure to meet (A2). This problem with the argument was one that struck me when I first read the target article in manuscript. I do not think Searle has responded adequately to this in his reply to commentators, and so it seems worthwhile restating it as forcefully as possible. This problem provides those who, like myself, would like to support the Connection Principle, with a strong motivation to look for additional arguments. I believe that there is an alternative argument, though I will not give it here.

Searle's argument, starting at step 2, has the following form. (2) All Intentional states have aspectual shape. (3) Aspectual shape cannot be "*exhaustively or completely characterized solely in terms of third person, behavioral, or even neurophysiological predicates*" (Searle 1990a, p. 587). Put another way, "you cannot give an exhaustive account of aspectual shape" (Searle 1990a, p. 587) in terms of such predicates. Searle also puts this by saying that no behavioral, neurophysiological, or other third person facts can "constitute" aspectual shape. (4) The "*ontology of unconscious mental states, at the time they are unconscious, consists entirely in the existence of purely neurophysiological phenomena*" (Searle 1990a, p. 588). Let me now reconstruct as a series of formal steps the informal reasoning that takes Searle from step (4) of his argument to step (5). (4.1) If the ontology of unconscious mental states at the time they are unconscious consists entirely in the existence of purely neurophysiological phenomena, then "there is simply nothing there except neurophysiological states and processes" (Searle 1990a, p. 588). (4.2) By 3, these neurophysiological states and processes are not sufficient by themselves for aspectual shape. (4.3) But these states do have aspectual shape. (4.4) Therefore, these states must have their aspectual shapes in virtue of their relations, actual or potential, to other states. (4.5) The only possible states to which these states could bear a relation that would suffice for their having an aspectual shape would be conscious mental states, and the only relation that would count is that of being a possible conscious thought or experience. Therefore, (5) "The notion of an unconscious intentional state is the notion of a state that is a possible conscious thought or experience" (Searle 1990a, p. 588). Searle then represents (incorrectly, I think,

though I cannot go into that here) step (6) as a "further explanation of Step (5)," and as "implied by 4 and 5 together" (Searle 1990a, p. 588). (6) "*The ontology of the unconscious consists in objective features of the brain capable of causing subjective conscious thoughts*" (Searle 1990a, p. 588).

The crucial moves in the argument are made in steps 3 and 4, and in the reasoning that takes us from 4 to 5. I have filled in the steps between 4 and 5 in a way which I think represents Searle's reasoning, and in a way which makes the argument deductively valid.

There are many who would object to the truth of the premises. For example, Georges Rey (1990) objects to 3, as would many other philosophers. One might object also to 4.5. Step 4.4 tells us merely that we need to make an appeal to something in addition to a person's neurophysiology in the case of an unconscious mental state. It does not tell us what we should appeal to. The basis of 4.5 must be that we really have no conception of anything we could appeal to other than the Connection Principle. One must worry here that this is simply a failure of imagination, even if we grant everything up to this point. The Connection Principle would explain in what sense unconscious states could have aspectual shape. But the Connection Principle is entailed by 4.4 only in conjunction with the claim that no other relation is available. I think this step may be what Searle has in mind when he says, "The argument is explanatory though not demonstrative" (Searle 1990b, p. 634).

I will not argue that any of the premises are false. I will show that there are two ways of reading the premises, on one of which the argument begs the question, and on one of which the argument shows that neurophysiological states are not causally sufficient for conscious mental states.<sup>1</sup>

Let us concentrate our attention on the step I have labeled 4.2. This premise says that when a person is unconscious, his neurophysiological states and processes are not by themselves *sufficient* for that person to have states with aspectual shape. If they were, we could stop there, and not enquire into their relation to that person's conscious mental states. It is only if his states do not have aspectual shape *in virtue of* his present neurophysiological states and processes that we will be forced to seek their aspectual shape in their relation to something else. Now, what do "sufficient" and "in virtue of" mean here? These expressions are open to two interpretations.

(1) The neurophysiology of a person's unconscious states and processes is not by itself *logically* sufficient for their having aspectual shape, hence, for their being Intentional states.

(2) The neurophysiology of a person's unconscious states and processes is not by itself *causally* sufficient for their having aspectual shape, hence for their being Intentional states.

The dilemma for Searle's argument can be developed in the following way. If we take interpretation (1), then we have not ruled out the possibility that the neurophysiology of a person's unconscious states and processes is causally sufficient for their having aspectual shape, hence, for their being Intentional states. If the neurophysiology is causally sufficient for their being Intentional states, then nothing forces us to look further for the possibility of the person's having unconscious mental states. We need no relation to conscious mental states to explain the possibility of unconscious mental states with aspectual shape. The causal sufficiency of the neurophysiology accounts for it. Therefore, we must reject interpretation (1) as too weak, and consider interpretation (2). But interpretation (2) itself admits of two readings.

(2a) The neurophysiology of a person's unconscious states and processes is not by itself causally sufficient for their having aspectual shape, hence for their being Intentional states, because neurophysiology is *never* causally sufficient for aspectual shape, hence never causally sufficient for Intentional states.

(2b) The neurophysiology of a person's unconscious states and processes is not by itself causally sufficient for their having aspectual shape, hence for their being Intentional states, because neurophysiology *of the sort associated with unconscious states and processes* is not causally sufficient for aspectual shape, hence not causally sufficient for Intentional states.

The dilemma is this. If we take interpretation (2a), the argument proves too much. It shows that

neurophysiology is insufficient not only for *unconscious* mental states, but for *conscious* mental states as well. But Searle is explicit in rejecting this: "the neurophysiological facts are always causally sufficient for any set of mental facts" (Searle 1990a, p. 587). Thus, reading the argument in this way violates constraint (A2). This is the first horn of the dilemma. Let us turn to interpretation (2b). Since we cannot hold that neurophysiology is in general causally insufficient for Intentional states, and since in particular the neurophysiology of someone who is conscious is causally sufficient for her conscious Intentional states, this interpretation amounts to the claim *that the neurophysiology characteristic of states of the brain associated with unconscious mental states is not sufficient for their aspectual shape*. But this is just the question at issue. Someone who rejects the Connection Principle and holds that there are deep unconscious Intentional states holds that the neurophysiology associated with these states is (at least) causally sufficient for their Intentionality. Thus, interpretation (2b) presupposes what is to be proved, and so violates constraint (A1). This is the second horn of the dilemma.

The point is important, so let me restate and summarize it. The move from step 4 to step 5 relies on the claim that the neurophysiology of the unconscious is insufficient for aspectual shape. The aim is to force an appeal to a relation to something else, namely, conscious mental states. But if the neurophysiology is merely logically insufficient, then this leaves it open that it is causally sufficient, and no further appeal is needed. If the neurophysiology is causally insufficient, this is either because the neurophysiology of specifically unconscious mental states is causally insufficient, or because neurophysiology *generally* is causally insufficient. If the first, then the question is begged, (A1). If the second, then neurophysiology is not sufficient for conscious mental states either, which is in conflict with Searle's own position, (A2). To put this in capsule form: if the neurophysiology of conscious mental states is sufficient for their aspectual shape, then Searle's argument gives us no reason to think that the neurophysiology of unconscious mental states is not sufficient for their aspectual shape.

Let us return to step 3 to see what has gone wrong. According to step 3 of the argument, third person facts, whether behavioral, neurophysiological, or other, do not constitute aspectual shape. Put another way, third person predicates (non-mental predicates) cannot be used to give an exhaustive account of aspectual shape, or to characterize it completely. This is at the same time compatible with

the causal sufficiency of neurophysiology for aspectual shape. Hence, the kind of account, or characterization, step 3 denies we can get is not a causal account, but a logical or conceptual account. Above, I represented step 3 as playing a role in supporting step 4.2. What has gone wrong is that a point about conceptual reducibility has been used to motivate a claim about causal irreducibility restricted to the neurophysiology of unconscious mental states. Thus, two mistakes are made. First, the conceptual point does not motivate the causal point. Second, if it did, it could not be restricted to the neurophysiology of unconscious states.

Does Searle adequately respond to this objection in his response to commentary? I don't think so. According to Searle, "though aspectual shape is always instantiated in neuronal structures, just as neuronal structures are instantiated in molecular structures, the specification of the neuronal features is not yet a specification of the aspectual shape" (Searle 1990b, p. 633). What does "specification" mean? It can't mean "specification of facts causally sufficient for." So in saying a specification of neuronal features is not a specification of aspectual shape, we must mean that the first does not entail the second. But although this is true (let us grant), and it is true that "there is no aspectual shape at the level of neuronal properties," it does not follow from this that "when a state is completely unconscious, there is no aspectual shape that is manifest, so to speak, then and there" (Searle 1990b, p. 633).

I do not think we have yet brought out what is behind this argument. What drives Searle's argument is the question: what fact makes it the case that, or corresponds to the fact that, an unconscious mental state has aspectual shape? Searle's intuition is that it cannot be facts about neurophysiology alone, that these facts cannot by themselves be either logically or causally sufficient for aspectual shape. I also feel the pull of this intuition. But I do not see how it can be employed in this argument without begging the question or, as I have said, proving too much. For consider the question in the case of conscious mental states. What fact about conscious mental states makes it the case that some of them have aspectual shape? If we are looking for logically constitutive facts, then what answer can we give except: the fact that they have an aspectual shape? In any case, we will not find the answer in neurophysiology. If we are looking for causally constitutive facts, then the answer, unless we are dualists, must be: something about neurophysiology. This is open to empirical investigation. But in a

certain sense these causal facts are simply brute facts. There is no logical or conceptual reason why the universe should obey the laws it does. But now turn to unconscious mental states. Our puzzle is this: Why can't we give the *same* pair of answers to our question when it is posed about unconscious mental states? We ask: what facts make it the case that unconscious mental states have aspectual shape? If we are asking about facts that logically constitute their aspectual shape, we say: the fact that they have an aspectual shape. For such facts are not entailed by any others. If we are asking about causally constitutive facts, then we say: something about neurophysiology. Perhaps there is a reason we should not give the same answers to these questions in the case of unconscious mental states as we do in the case of conscious mental states. But we must be provided with it. In the absence of that, the claim that we cannot will beg the question.

Despite my disagreement with Searle's argument for the Connection Principle, I think the conclusion is correct. And I believe that Searle is asking the right kind of question, only about the wrong thing. Instead of asking What fact makes it the case that an unconscious mental state has aspectual shape? we should be asking, What fact makes it the case that an unconscious mental state is *this* rather than *that* person's unconscious mental state? It is by pressing this question that I believe we can see why we must accept something like the Connection Principle. But this question must be pursued on another occasion.

## Notes

1. There are two respects in which this is more specific than will be needed for the argument. The first is that it will be irrelevant to the argument that we talk of neurophysiological states, and it will be irrelevant at what level of description we characterize these states, as long as they are thought of as non-mental states. The second is that it is irrelevant whether we think of the determining relation as being a causal one, as long as it is not a relation knowable *a priori*, and the following is true: given the relevant physical states, we fix the mental states. Nonetheless, for convenience, I will speak of brain states or neurophysiological states (or neurophysiology) being causally sufficient for mental states.



## References

- Lloyd, Dan. (1990) Loose connections: Four problems in Searle's argument for the "Connection Principle." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13: 585-642
- Rosenthal, David. (1990) On being accessible to consciousness. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13: 621-622.
- Rey, Georges. (1990) Constituent causation and the reality of mind. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13: 620-621.
- Shevrin, Howard. (1990) Unconscious mental states do have an aspectual shape. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13: 585-642
- Searle, John R. (1990a) Consciousness, explanatory inversion, and cognitive science. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13: 585-596.
- Searle, John R. (1990b) Who is computing with the brain? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13: 632-640.