

A Tradition Ignored: A Review Essay of John Symons' *On Dennett*

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Odds are, today's practicing scientist has not been given the full story on the "philosophy of mind." Instead, it is more likely that [s]he has been engaged with "analytic" debates and questions, authored or inspired by philosophers like Ryle, Quine, Chisholm, Fodor, Churchland and Dennett. But at best, this is only half of the story; since the late 19th century, so called "continental" philosophers have also been hard at work on questions concerning topics such as dualism, naturalism and of course, the nature of consciousness.¹ Names like Dilthey, Sartre and Husserl come immediately to mind.

In fact, most any book that offers an introduction to the philosophy of mind tends to be analytic, including those books that focus on a particularly prominent figure. As a result, the unwary reader of such books might be misled into thinking that the philosophy of mind is, and always has been, a primarily analytic endeavor. However, for the most part, such approaches merely perpetuate a myopic view of what counts as legitimate philosophy of mind, if not what counts as legitimate

¹ Although the distinction between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy can be complex, if not muddled at times, for the purposes of this essay we may understand it as follows: Analytic philosophers tend to take a strictly logical approach to philosophical questions—above all, it is the clarity of one's arguments and concepts that matter. Analytic philosophers may also tend to align themselves with a naturalistic, scientific approach (which for the most part, can be construed as an empirical approach), although not always. For instance, analytic metaphysics—which is not built on an empirical methodology— is alive and well. Historically speaking, analytic philosophy has its most recent (and I think strongest) roots in Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Tarski and Quine; not surprisingly, in addition to being philosophers, all of these men were accomplished logicians. Continental philosophy, on the other hand, does not presuppose logic as the most important measure of philosophical clarity. Nor do continental philosophers gravitate towards naturalism in the way that some analytic philosophers tend to. Rather, many of the major continental philosophers have specifically attempted to redefine what counts as "clarity," if not dismantle the notion altogether (enter "postmodernism"). For instance, much of Heidegger's work was intended to uproot our logical prejudices; only then, he thought, could genuine philosophical insight emerge. But for this very reason, many analytic philosophers find his work utterly unintelligible. Other paradigmatically "continental" philosophers are: Nietzsche, Dilthey, the later Husserl, Bergson, Sartre, Derrida and Foucault. For a much more detailed account of the analytic/continental distinction, including an account of its Kantian parentage, see at least: Margolis (1995), Dummett (1993), Biletzki and Matar (eds, 1998), D' Agostini (1997) and Boeder (1997 and 2002).

philosophy altogether. But it is high time, I submit, to move beyond the continental/analytic boundaries, or, at the very least, make a responsible attempt to justify them.²

To show just how slanted the analytic viewpoint can be when it comes to the philosophy of mind, I examine a case in point in this essay: John Symons' recent book, *On Dennett* (Wadsworth, 2002). For although Symons' book does an excellent job of introducing Dennett's work, it could easily mislead those readers who have never been exposed to a broader philosophical venue. Granted, Dennett is a child of the analytic school, and as a result, Symons focuses on his analytic roots. However, for the reasons noted above, I would have liked to have seen at least a head nod towards the relevant issues that had been simultaneously brewing in the continental camp. For instance, Symons assures us that: "Dennett has been one of the most important voices in the philosophical and scientific discussions of the mind for the past thirty years." (OD 1) And as far as analytic discussions go, Symons is absolutely correct; Dennett has dominated recent conversation. In fact, we might even say that Dennett's Presidential address at the 2000 American Philosophical Association meeting was, in some respects, a passing of the torch: Quine, sometimes dubbed the "most famous living philosopher" had died four days earlier. Now, we might conjecture, it is Dennett's turn to bear this title.

If only for this reason, every neuroscientist or neurophilosopher who wishes to become acquainted with current philosophy of mind should read Symons' book, regardless if they are continentally or analytically inclined. Using non-technical language, Symons paints a clear and often colorful picture of Dennett's thought; examples are abundant and well-formulated, allowing the reader with little or no philosophical training to grasp the force of Dennett's general position. Further, given that Dennett himself read a penultimate draft of this book, we may rest assured that Symons' portrait is accurate, although introductory.

However, as suggested above, although the reader of *On Dennett* will come away with a solid grasp of the relationship between Dennett's thought and the fundamental issues that moved

² Recently, some work *has* been done in philosophy of mind that attempts to cover both the analytic and continental perspective. See for instance Brann (1991). There is also recent evidence for this more comprehensive approach in the history of the philosophy of language. See for instance, Garcia-Carpintero (1996).

twentieth century analytic discourse—behaviorism, naturalism, ordinary language philosophy, folk psychological and consciousness—[s]he might be misled into thinking that these are the *only* viable philosophical approaches to “brains” and “minds.” For instance, the unsuspecting reader of *On Dennett* may be misguided into thinking that Ryle—who had a significant influence on Dennett—was one of the first philosophers to question the “object-hood” of mental entities in *The Concept of Mind* (1949).³ Yet this question had already been raised by at least Dilthey in *Poetry and Experience* (1907) and then later, and at great length, by Sartre in *Imagination: A Psychological Critique* (1936).

In more detail, the problem as recognized by Ryle concerns “category mistakes.” Such mistakes commonly occur when either a general term is mistakenly identified with the particular it is meant to generalize, or less commonly, when particular terms and general terms are inappropriately associated. Symons elucidates the first breed of category mistakes as follows:

Ryle initially explains what he means by a category mistake with an example. Imagine that a foreign visitor to a university is taken on a tour of the campus. After being shown each building in turn, the visitor thanks his host and asks whether he could be taken to the University. The visitor’s request indicates his mistaken assumption that the university, like the library, the classroom buildings and the administration buildings, would also be a building rather than being an institution constituted of the buildings, staff and students that the visitor saw on his tour. The visitor had committed the category mistake of placing ‘university,’ an institution, in the same category as the buildings that jointly house that institution. (OD 35)

Yet when it came questions of the mind, Ryle called our attention to the second kind of category mistake, which is not entirely analogous to the first. In particular, according to Ryle, the mind and its various aspects do not belong to the ontological category of “thing;” in other words, particulars such as “mind,” “thoughts,” “hopes,” “beliefs” and “images” have been inappropriately classed under the general term ‘thing.’⁴ And thus, Symons concludes: “Basically, [Ryle] argues that we have

³ Dennett, like Ryle, thought that the mind and its attributes could not be counted as “things.” See above for more detail.

⁴ Symons does not distinguish between the two kinds of category mistakes noted above, but given Ryle’s objection to the “thing-hood” of the mind and its various attributes, it seems we should. For it is not the case, similar to the university example, that the general category “thing” has become a particular alongside the particulars it may be alleged to range over, namely, the mind and its attributes (as the university had been mistaken as a particular alongside the things it is supposed to range over, e.g. dormitories, administration buildings, etc.). Rather, according to Ryle, the mind and its

incorrectly treated minds as though they are things. Mental terms such as ‘mind,’ ‘thought’ or ‘belief,’ according to Ryle, are not words which refer to or describe an inner private mental world of spiritual entities.” (OD 37) Thus, according to Ryle’s method of “ordinary language use,”⁵ we may conclude that the mind and what we typically identify as mental properties should not be treated as “things” or “objects” in *any* sense of the word; they are not physical things like tables and chairs, *nor* are they “immaterial objects” such as “spiritual entities,” or Cartesian mind-stuff. Rather, we should treat them as certain “dispositions:” “When we say that a child is intelligent, according to Ryle, we are not referring to any particular object or process in her brain, or mind. For Ryle, intelligence is simply the disposition to perform certain tasks successfully.” (OD 36)

In short then, we may say that Ryle’s notion of category mistakes were particularly harmful to “substance dualism,” or in other words, the Cartesian idea that the mind and its attributes are one kind of “thing” while the body and its attributes are different kinds of “things.” Ryle writes: [According to the Cartesian way of thinking] the differences between the physical and the mental were thus represented as differences inside the common framework of the categories of ‘thing,’ ‘stuff,’ ‘attribute,’ ‘state,’ ‘process,’ ‘change,’ ‘cause’ and ‘effect.’ Minds are things, but different sorts of things from bodies; mental processes are causes and effects, but different sorts of causes and effects from bodily movements.” (CM 19)

But as suggested earlier, the claim that the mind is not a “thing,” let alone the various aspects that may be said to inhere in it (beliefs, images, etc.) was not particular to Ryle. Rather, almost half a century earlier, Dilthey—a continental philosopher—had come to a very similar conclusion. However, because Dilthey was concerned with elucidating what it means to do art, his analysis of

attributes have been mistakenly placed in the wrong category—the category of “thing.” Yet to Symons’ credit, Ryle is not very clear on this distinction either, writing: “[According to the Cartesian] Minds are things, but different sorts of things from bodies; mental processes are causes and effects, but different sorts of causes and effects from bodily movements. And so on. *Somewhat* as the foreigner expected the University to be an extra edifice, rather like a college but also considerably different, so the repudiators of mechanism represented minds as extra centres of causal processes, rather like the machines but also considerably different from them.” (CM 19; emphasis added). Yet as noted above, at best, these two kinds of category mistakes are *somewhat* alike; if they were logically analogous, we would have to say that the body (like the buildings of the university) belong to the general category of mind, where one mistakenly assumes that the mind is an existing, albeit different particular existing alongside the particular body. And this is surely not the story Ryle wanted to tell.

⁵ “Ordinary language use” philosophy is generally classed as “analytic.” Historically, it has its roots in Locke, Moore, Wittgenstein, Wisdom, P.F. Strawson, Urmson, Malcom and Austin.

mind focused on the nature of the internal image, particularly, the artistic image. Moreover, Dilthey's approach was not based on ordinary language philosophy, nor did Dilthey attempt to recast the mind in terms of dispositions. Rather, in *Poetry and Experience* (1907) Dilthey writes:

Today, established psychological theory starts with representations as fixed quantities. Changes in representations are allowed to occur externally through association, fusion and apperception. I maintain that this psychology is incapable of explaining the images of the dreamer, the madman, or the artist. If one conceives, through abstraction, mere relations of representations in a purely representational being, no one can say which laws these representations would follow. (PE 68)

That is, unlike the various reductionist and mechanistic schools of psychology—which dominated discussions of brains and minds at this time—Dilthey was loath to think of images as “fixed quantities” which, as such, abided by the laws that governed the external world. Thus, unlike Ryle, Dilthey's opponents were not substance dualists, but instead, the psychologists who were determined to reduce the mind to a thing that admits of naturalistic inquiry.⁶

Regardless, *like* Ryle, Dilthey was convinced that inner representations may not be thought of as “things,” regardless if they are material or immaterial.⁷ For in both cases, such things are alleged to have fixed quantities and properties (recall that Descartes maintained that the immaterial mind did indeed have certain fixed properties, e.g. it is, at least, a “thinking thing”). Rather, Dilthey concluded that “every representation is a *process*.” (PE 68) As a result, Dilthey would have objected to Symons' remark on the behalf of Ryle that “[intelligence] does not [refer] to any particular *object* or *process* in [the] brain” because this suggests that “objects” (things) and “processes” are interchangeable. But as noted above, this is not Dilthey's position; processes ? objects, where

⁶ Here, and throughout this essay, the word ‘naturalistic’ is interchangeable with the word ‘empirical.’ As a result, “naturalistic inquiry” may also be understood as empirical, or scientific inquiry, where observations are made, facts are checked etc.; etymologically, the word ‘naturalism’ has its roots in the term ‘natural sciences.’

⁷ In specific regard to images, Ryle writes: “The crucial problem is that of describing what is ‘seen in the mind's eye’ and what is ‘heard in one's head.’ What are spoken of as ‘visual images,’ ‘mental pictures,’ ‘auditory images’ and, in one use, ‘ideas’ are commonly taken to be entities which are genuinely found existing elsewhere than in the external world. So minds are nominated for their theaters. But, as I shall try to show, the familiar truth that people are constantly seeing things in their mind's eyes and hearing things in their heads *is no proof that there exist things which they see and hear, or that people are seeing or hearing*. Much as stage murders do not have victims and are not murders, so seeing things in one's mind's eye does not involve either the existence of things seen or the occurrence of acts of seeing them. So no asylum is required for them to exist in.” (CM 245; emphasis added).

objects have fixed quantities and properties, but processes do *not*. In fact, to help ensure that such processes are *not* treated like mechanistic things, Dilthey writes:

To be sure, it is necessary to borrow illustrations from the external world to characterize psychic processes. This is because the latter only recently came under observation and were first apprehended in light of the already developed natural sciences. But this should not deceive us about how basically unsuitable these illustrations, taken from the spatial realm and its motions, are for grasping laws whose characteristic features are conditioned by the totally different nature of psychic processes. (PE 69)

In short then, regardless of the way in which Dilthey reached his conclusion, as well as his different conception of “process,” it is clear that both he and Ryle objected to viewing the mind and its various attributes as “things.” As noted, in Dilthey’s case, this rejection was cast primarily in response to the reductionist work being done by psychologists, while in Ryle’s case, it was motivated by what he took to be the absurdities of substance dualism.

Approximately thirty years later, and thirteen years before Ryle’s *Concept of Mind* was published, Sartre—another continental philosopher—returned to Dilthey’s attempt to thwart the reductionist movement. In particular, in *Imagination: A Psychological Critique* (1936), he begins by underlining what he takes to be a certain fundamental problem; in fact, he names the first chapter after it: “The Problem.” Simply put, this problem amounts to the naive metaphysical view that an image is somehow an “object.” Accordingly, Sartre writes:

Nothing would be gained by debating whether this sheet of paper [lying on my desk] reduces to a collection of representations or whether it is and must be something more than that. What is certain is that I cannot spontaneously produce the white of which I take note. This inert shape, which stands short of all spontaneities of consciousness, which must be observed and learned about bit by bit, is what we call a “thing.” Never could my consciousness be a *thing*, because its way of being in itself is precisely to be *for* itself; for consciousness, to exist is to be conscious of its existence. It appears as a *pure spontaneity*, confronting a world of things which is sheer inertness. From the start, therefore, we may posit two types of existence. (IPC 2; emphasis added).

That is, thinking about, say, a sheet of paper does not reproduce that actual sheet of paper in my mind, and thus, the reproduction could not possibly be a “thing” in the same respect that the sheet of

paper is a thing. Similarly, consciousness is not a “thing” either, rather, “its way of being in itself is precisely to be *for* itself;” as such, it is “pure spontaneity.” Regardless, consciousness must exist in *some* sense, leading Sartre to conclude that we are dealing with two kinds of “existence,” contrary to some reductionist points of view (particularly, eliminativism).⁸ Yet, does this mean that consciousness and all its properties and representations are just different *kinds* of “things—” in other words, does Sartre reawaken Cartesian dualism?

No. In fact, Sartre argues, such a conclusion is part of the problem, occurring when one mistakenly assumes that the image and the object must share the same “essence,” where the image captures certain essential qualities of the object. Thus, one might mistakenly continue, both the image and what is being imagined are “objects,” or “things,” although the external object exists one way, and the image another. “Thus,” Sartre writes:

arises what we shall call ‘the naive metaphysics of the image.’ The image is made into a copy of the thing, existing as a thing. The sheet of paper ‘as image is endowed with the same properties as the sheet of paper ‘in person:’ inert, it no longer exists solely for consciousness, but exists in itself, appearing and disappearing of its own accord rather than at the beck and call of consciousness. When no longer perceived, it does not cease to exist, *leading instead a thing like existence* outside consciousness. This metaphysics—or rather, this naive ontology—is that of the man on the street. (IPC 4; emphasis added)

In other words, according to the “man on the street” perspective, the mental image *is* an inert object, or thing, albeit a different, and thus, “lesser” kind of thing; many dualists would even go so far as to call it “non-physical.” Sartre explains this mistaken line of reasoning still further:

⁸ Generally put, eliminativists, also called eliminative materialists, argue that the ordinary person’s belief in the existence of mental entities (e.g. hopes, beliefs, desires etc.) is [A] False. According to one material eliminativist (Paul Churchland (1981), this is the case because such beliefs constitute a false empirical theory. Thus [B] Such “entities” are not reducible to the material brain. Elsewhere, Churchland characterizes eliminative materialism as follows: “As the eliminative materialists see it, the one-to-one match-ups will not be found, and our common-sense psychological framework will not enjoy an intertheoretic reduction, *because our common-sense framework is a false and radically misleading conception of the causes of human behavior and the nature of cognitive activity.* On this view, folk psychology [namely, the “ordinary person’s” view] is not just an incomplete representation of our internal natures; it is an outright *misrepresentation* of our internal states and activities. Consequently, we cannot expect a truly neuroscientific account of our inner lives to provide theoretical categories that match up nicely with the categories of our common-sense framework. Accordingly, we must expect that the older framework will simply be *eliminated*, rather than be reduced, by a mature neuroscience” (MC 43).

[According to this mistaken perspective], the image may be just as surely a thing as is the thing of which it is the image; but, by the very fact of being an image, it has a sort of metaphysical inferiority relative to the thing which it represents. In a word, the image is now a lesser thing, possessed of its own existence, given to consciousness like any other thing, and maintaining external relations with the thing of which it is the image. (IPC 5; emphasis added)

Sartre proceeds to argue throughout *Imagination* that this assumption has also been made on a more sophisticated level by recent and not so recent philosophers and psychologists. Namely, all make the mistake of assuming that the image is not only some kind of “thing” or “object,” but as just noted, relative to the thing that the image is of, it exists in a different and “lesser” respect. Recall, for instance, Hume’s account of an idea as a “copy” of an impression, where the former is “less vivacious” than the latter. Thus, Sartre writes:

We wish to show that beneath this diversity can be found a single theory. Deriving at first from the naive ontology noted above, it was brought to perfection by the great metaphysicians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, under the influence of a variety of concerns foreign to the problem, and bequeathed to contemporary psychologists. Descartes, Leibniz, and Hume had one and the same conception of the image. They ceased to agree only when they went on to consider the relations of images to thoughts. Objectivistic psychology has kept the notion of the image just as it was left by these philosophers. (IPC 6)

Yet why was this issue so important to Sartre? Basically, because he thought that the attribution of a thing-like status to images leads to a hopelessly self-contradictory reduction of the mind to a mechanistic entity. However, according to Sartre, we may avoid such conflicts if we realize that images are *not* things, but instead, are certain kinds of syntheses: “There are not, and never could be, images *in* consciousness. Rather, an image is a *certain type of consciousness*. An image is an act, not some thing. An image is a consciousness *of* some thing” (IPC 46). As such, the naturalistic laws that apply to the external world of “things” do not apply to consciousness.

As a result, we may now say that Ryle, Dilthey and Sartre all struggled to show that we should not think of the mind and its various attributes—particularly images in the case of Dilthey and Sartre—as *things*. Moreover, Ryle was certainly not the first to make this claim; Dilthey’s and Sartre’s work preceded it by years. However, as noted a number of times now, Dilthey and Sartre

were entrenched in an anti-reductionist position while Ryle was anti-Cartesian. Perhaps for this reason, Ryle's work has been given more credence in analytic circles than Dilthey's and Sartre's; generally speaking, "analytic" philosophy of mind has tended to be anti-Cartesian and reductionist.⁹ However, it must be emphasized still again that Dilthey and Sartre did not re-introduce the Cartesian dualism that Ryle would later object to. Rather, as noted, they made every effort to avoid reintroducing the idea of a Cartesian "mental substance," where such a substance would be a non-physical "thing" that admits of an inert nature and fixed properties.

Further, although Dilthey and Sartre thought that the naturalistic method could not be applied to consciousness, images, etc., this did not mean that they thought that all inquiry into these matters should stop. In other words, their conclusion that standard scientific methods did not apply to mental processes did not lead them to "eliminate" such processes altogether; that is, they were not driven to "eliminativism," as so many analytic philosophers have been.¹⁰ Rather, we may say that both Dilthey and Sartre adopted a kind of "middle ground;" namely, they maintained that the inadequacy of the naturalistic method neither caused them to eliminate the "mental" realm but nor did it cause them to posit a separate realm of "things."

Mentioning as much would have been pertinent in Symons' book, since Dennett has also chosen a certain "middle ground" in regard to these issues, namely, "the intentional stance." According to this position, one may remain metaphysically agnostic about mentalistic entities—concerning herself instead with the mileage we may gain from *assuming* such things exist. As a result, we can explain our behavior *in terms of* beliefs, hopes, images etc., but we need not assert

⁹In fact, riding the wave of a naturalistic, analytic and anti-Cartesian perspective, Dennett claims "Dualism (the view that minds are composed of some nonphysical and utterly mysterious stuff) ... [has] been relegated to the trash heap of history. Unless you are also prepared to declare that the world is flat and the sun is a fiery chariot pulled by winged horses—unless, in other words, your defiance of modern science is quite complete—you won't find any place to stand and fight for [this] obsolete [idea]." (KM 24) Also speaking from this perspective, Patricia Churchland assures us that "Looked at in one way, Plato's theory [of substance dualism] was a desperate one." (N 242) ... "By roughly 1970 logical empiricism had grown weak and toothless, and its newer progeny [given to us primarily by Quine] had taken over. Though its central principles were much changed, what endured was enthusiasm for science and scientifically justified theory, and the correlative suspicion of superstition, religion, and metaphysical maundering [particularly, 'dualism']" (N 253)

¹⁰ See, for instance, the work of Quine, Rorty, Feyerabend, Stich and Paul and Patricia Churchland. For a more detailed account of "eliminativism," see footnote 7.

that such things “really exist” (evidently, as things *or* processes) nor that they really *do not* exist.

Symons explains:

[For instance] In competition with a good chess computer, we will instinctively treat it as though it had beliefs and desires and was rational. To do so, is to adopt the *intentional stance* towards the computer ... What Dennett has done with the notion of an intentional system is to offer a set of criteria, along Rylean lines, for mentality *per se*. Anything which fits the very set of criteria for being an intentional system *is* an intentional system. Or, as Dennett is fond of saying: “handsome is as handsome does.” (OD 48-49; first emphasis added)

That is, if it is helpful to attribute some entity, like a computer, or perhaps even a parasite, with rationality and motives, then so be it; each may count as a legitimate “intentional system.” For instance, it may be instructive to explain a certain biological cycle as follows:¹¹ Because a particular parasite ultimately “wants” to infest itself in birds, it will initially invade tadpoles and cause them to mutate. As a result, these affected tadpoles grow into ineffective, deformed frogs, which are then easily caught and ingested by the very birds that the parasites “want” to live in. However, according to Dennett, such language does not mean that the parasite really *has* such wants or desires, but on the other hand, it does not preclude them from having them either. Rather, it is simply *useful* to talk about the parasites as “wanting” to infest themselves in the birds. Similarly, it is *useful* to attribute intentional entities to human beings. As a result, such an approach, Symons continues, is bold, yet thoroughly pragmatic: “for most philosophers [Dennett’s] approach is disarmingly simple. Dennett’s account of what it means to be an intentional system provides a purely pragmatic approach to the question. If it’s *useful* to treat something as an intentional system, then it’s an intentional system.” (OD 49; emphasis added)

Yet the question is: *Why* does Dennett assume this agnostic, pragmatic position? Symons explains that Dennett, like Dilthey and Sartre before him, was not satisfied with the eliminativist approach; it seems downright counter-intuitive to claim that we do not have beliefs, hopes, images,

¹¹ I am specifically referring to the research done by Stan Sessions at Hartwick College on deformed frogs.

etc., and concomitantly, reject the idea that such attributes might cause us to behave in the way that we do:¹²

Puzzling questions confront us when we try to remain faithful to both common sense and the strictest standards of scientific truth. How can we be wrong about the idea that people's actions are caused by their beliefs? Surely it makes little sense to *believe* that there are no beliefs? Furthermore, it is difficult to understand what it would mean to judge whether eliminativism is true since without intuited notions like belief, it seems unlikely that we could continue to speak meaningfully of truth and falsity. Dennett's philosophical work is devoted, in large part to showing why our ordinary conceptions of mind are both completely reasonable and adequate for most ordinary purposes, and yet, in some more basic sense, incorrect. He explains how we are all simultaneously virtuosos and idiots when it comes to matter of the mind. (OD 42-43)

That is, Dennett does not—unlike the eliminativists—want to throw the baby out with the bath water. But on the other hand, he only “pretends” to believe in the baby for practical reasons; intentional entities, as noted, offer us a quick and effective way to explain and predict behavior, so let's just *assume* that they exist. As such, Dennett “doesn't see his work as being continuous with traditional worries about the ontological status of mental entities.” (OD 58)

However, we must be careful to note that when Dennett precludes ontological questions regarding the mind, he appears to sidestep questions concerning just *naturalistic* realism, and conversely, *naturalistic* eliminativism. For Dennett's “middle ground” establishes a path between the naturalistic realist/eliminativist debate, and as such, is configured by certain naturalistic tests; if something *fails* the tests, we may, according to the eliminativists, eliminate it, but if it does not, the naturalistic realists assure us that it *is* real.¹³

More specifically, Symons explains that one particular test consists of an application of the “law of substitutivity,” which we may thank Quine for.¹⁴ In particular, Quine argued that inquiry concerning “intentional idioms” (namely, references to mental entities like hopes, beliefs, desires, etc.) does not abide by this law. For instance, Symons explains, if one does not know that Freddy

¹² For instance, we might claim that *believing* it will rain today will *cause* us to take our umbrellas to work. In this case, the mental entity of “belief” is alleged to have caused us to behave in a certain way.

¹³ Generally speaking, such realists would include Fodor and LePare.

¹⁴ However, one should realize that this concept originated in Frege (1892).

Mercury's original name was Farookh Bulsara, the following two claims are not interchangeable: [A] "Jean believes that Freddy Mercury was the lead singer for Queen" and [B] "Jean believes that Farookh Bulsara was the lead singer for Queen." (OD 31) However, the following two claims *are* interchangeable, regardless if one knows that Freddy Mercury's original name was Farookh Bulsara: "[C] "If Freddy Mercury comes to town, there will be a commotion." and [D] "If Farookh Bulsara comes to town, there will be a commotion." In other words, it seems that when propositions are sanitized of all intentional idioms, we can actually check in the world to see if they are true, whereas we *cannot* check to see if intentional propositions are true, simply because we cannot look into someone's mind. Thus, according to Quine, as well as the eliminativists in general, because intentional entities are not "checkable" "facts of the matter," we should stop asking questions of them, if not eradicate them altogether.¹⁵ Relatedly, Symons explains:

Fodor has insisted that intentional states must be irreducible, real *and* accessible to the physical sciences ... There is something intuitively appealing about the realist position. However, if we follow Dennett in accepting Quinean lessons with respect to propositional attitudes we will have to give up the search for hard and fast facts about beliefs in desires ... After Quine, according to Dennett, philosophers should not be trying to provide a recipe for uncovering facts about belief. (OD 59)

In other words, thanks to Quine, Dennett may conclude that mental entities cannot be described in terms of facts.¹⁶ Thus, they cannot, in any empirical or naturalistic sense, be thought of as "real," for, the assumption is, all empirically real things must admit of facts. Thus, because mental entities fail the Quinean naturalistic test, calling them "real" would, according to Dennett, bark up the wrong tree. However, as noted earlier, Symons is careful to explain that this does not mean that Dennett is an eliminativist. Rather, it is simply useful to retain the intentional idiom without committing one's self to naturalistic realism. Symons explains: "Realists insist that there must be some fact of the matter that makes our intentional ascriptions true or false (successful or unsuccessful). Dennett, and

¹⁵ For more discussion on this test, see Quine (1960, §30), (1992, p. 69) and (1995, pp. 90-92).

¹⁶ We must be careful to note that 'fact' is an unhappy term for Quine. See at least p.80 of Quine's *Pursuit of Truth* and Dreben (1992). However, for the purposes of this essay, may ignore this difficulty.

others like him, deny the relevance of the realist's putative *facts of the matter* focusing instead on the practical business of ascribing beliefs and desires to organisms." (OD 59)

In light of the fact that Dennett's middle way serves as an intermediary between naturalistic eliminativism and naturalistic realism, the important similarities and differences between his position and the "middle way" that Dilthey and Sartre establish emerge. In particular, as far as similarities go, both Dilthey and Sartre would have agreed with Dennett that scientific procedure *cannot* be applied to the mind.¹⁷ Further, as noted, like Dennett, this did not lead them to eliminate talk of the mind altogether. However, unlike Dennett, Dilthey and Sartre did not think that the mind and all its attributes were pragmatic props. Rather, according to them, mental processes and syntheses exist, but they do *not* admit of observable facts, and nor are they Cartesian "things."

However, although it may be shown that the "middle ground" established by certain continental philosophers is decisively different from the "middle ground" that Dennett defends, Symons *pace* Dennett does not conclusively show us that the latter position makes any more headway than the former. For the continental perspective has been somewhat glibly dismissed in *On Dennett*, and as a result, the reader cannot be sure if the processes and syntheses that the continentals speak of are the "things" that Dennett thinks we should refrain from asking ontological questions of. Initially, it appears we might answer that they *are*, for although Dilthey's processes and Sartre's syntheses are not "things," they nevertheless *exist*, and, it seems, Dennett has forgone all questions of existence when it comes to the "mind." However, when we consider Dennett's account of "phenomenology" *pace* Symons, it becomes still clearer that Dennett presupposes an entirely *naturalistic* conception of 'existence,' evidently as a direct result of the Quinean test mentioned above. As a result, Dennett leaves the door wide open for the possibility of a *non-naturalistic*, yet non-dualistic and non-pragmatic conception of mind.

To see why this appears to be the case, realize that according to Dennett, all phenomenologists simply assume that intentional "objects" are "real." Symons writes: "Dennett treats the objects of [his] heterophenomenological investigation as parts of a theoretical construct.

¹⁷ Yet for different reasons; recall my earlier discussion of Dilthey and Sartre.

This is precisely the difference between heterophenomenology and phenomenology as it is usually understood. According to the phenomenologist, the objects [of the mind that] he investigates are *real* objects rather than theoretical hypotheses.” (OD 71) That is, when it comes to intentional entities, Dennett is merely pretending (the heterophenomenological position) while the phenomenologist thinks that there are “real objects” to be examined. Symons cites Dennett’s portrayal of the phenomenologist: “When I [the phenomenologist] tell you sincerely that I am imagining a purple cow, I am not just unconsciously producing a word string to that effect [...] cunningly contrived coincide with some faintly analogous physical happenings in my brain; I am consciously and deliberately reporting the existence of something that is *really there!* It is no mere theorist’s fiction to me” (CE 97).

Yet one wonders what “phenomenologists” Dennett has in mind here. For he could not, with a good conscience, be talking about Husserl, the father of phenomenology *per se*. For according to Husserl, consciousness and its various attributes are surely *not* “real” in the respect that they are somewhere in the mind, similar to how tables and chairs exist somewhere in the world—ready and waiting to admit of empirical observation. Rather, such phenomena “exist” only as certain qualified presentations to consciousness. Husserl makes this point very clearly in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” (1910-11): “To follow the model of the natural sciences almost inevitably means to reify consciousness—something that from the very beginning leads us into absurdity, whence stems the constantly renewed tendency toward the absurd problematizing and the false orientation of the investigation” (PRS 103). That is, like Dilthey and Sartre, Husserl did not want to apply the naturalistic method to the mind, to consciousness, nor to the attributes of consciousness. As a result, Husserl thought, not only are we precluded from thinking of consciousness as a “thing” or “object,” but we are also precluded from characterizing it as being “real” in any ordinary, naturalistic sense of the word. Rather, according to Husserl, we are dealing with “phenomena,” not as Dennett misleadingly puts it “*items*—the fauna and the flora, you might say—that *inhabit* our conscious experience.” (CE 44; emphasis added). Accordingly, Husserl writes:

Everything that in the broadest sense of psychology we call a psychical phenomenon, when looked at in and for itself is precisely phenomenon and not nature. A phenomenon, then, is no “substantial” unity; it has no “real properties,” it knows no real parts, no real changes, and no causality; all these words are here understood in the sense proper to natural science. To attribute a nature to phenomena, to investigate their real component parts, their causal connections—that is pure absurdity, no better than if we wanted to ask about the causal properties, connections, etc. of numbers. (PRS 107).

However, Dennett might complain that although Husserl’s consciousness and its attributes are *not* real in the naturalistic sense, such phenomena nevertheless “exist” as essences, and thus, invoke an ontology of mind. However, I would have liked to have seen *On Dennett* explain precisely why Dennett must reject Husserl’s qualified realism. In particular, I would have like to have seen Symons explain why Dennett thinks that mental entities, taken as *non*-naturalistically real, are not an option. For Quine’s critique does not apply to Dilthey, Sartre or Husserl, simply because all three grant, if not *insist*, that there are no “facts of the matter” when it comes to the mind and its various attributes. Nevertheless, these philosophers maintained, such processes, syntheses and phenomena *exist*, but in a “non-naturalistic” manner; their reality does not depend on naturalistic tests, and concomitantly, the law of substitutivity.¹⁸ However, as noted, Symons never shows us how and why Dennett dismisses *this* kind of realism such that Dennett can, with a good conscious, maintain his position of ontological indifference.¹⁹

¹⁸ Many readers might balk at the idea of this “non-naturalistic” realism. For what could possibly exist that does not admit of naturalistic tests, particularly, the law of substitutivity? An easy response would be numbers. Consider, for instance, the following two sentences: “The number 5 is the set of all sets of five things in the world” (Frege’s position, loosely construed), and “The number 5 is a Platonic Form” (a Platonist’s position, loosely construed). The number 5 appears to fail the substitutivity test here because its definition cannot be true in both cases. In other words, we could not substitute the Fregean number 5 with the Platonic number 5. Nor could we check the world to determine which answer is true. As a result, shall we say that the number 5 does not exist, which would be an empirical, eliminativist approach? Or, shall we just pretend that the number 5 exists for pragmatic reasons; namely, shall we take a Dennett-like approach (cf. Quine (1995, pp. 86-87))? Or, shall we do metaphysics, and as a result, try to find the correct metaphysical, and thus non-empirical definition of the number 5? In other words, loosely put, shall we take an approach similar to Dilthey, Sartre and Husserl?

¹⁹ However, it must be noted that Symons does point out that Dennett believes in the Law of Conservation of Energy argument, which is often invoked in an attempt to debunk dualism (see OD 40). Briefly, this argument is as follows: i.) This law applies to a closed physical system. ii.) Non-physical entities could not, therefore, interact with this system, unless we abandon the law. However, as noted above, Dilthey, Sartre and Husserl do not argue that the mental world and its attributes are necessarily non-physical things. Rather, a Diltheyian process, a Sartreian synthesis and Husserlian presentation to consciousness may be construed as physical, but *not* in the respect that they admit of ordinary empirical inquiry.

But perhaps this is not Symons' fault. Rather, it appears that Dennett has never truly acknowledged this non-naturalistic way of existing. Instead, he seems to assume that at least Husserl thought that consciousness exists much in the same way that external things do; ready and waiting to be "factually explained." As a result, Dennett seems to think that Husserlian phenomena *can* be effectively dismissed with an application of the law of substitutivity. Note, for instance, the following remark, which is taken from a section of a paragraph where Dennett mentions Husserl (note that this is the *only* time that Dennett mentions Husserl in the course of the two chapters devoted to "phenomenology" in *Consciousness Explained*):

The net result [of Husserl's project] was an investigative state of mind in which the Phenomenologist was supposed to have become acquainted with the pure objects of conscious experience, called *noemata*, untainted by the usual distortions and amendments of theory and practice. *Like other attempts to strip away interpretation and reveal the basic facts of consciousness to rigorous observation*, such as the Impressionist movement in the arts and the Introspectionist psychologies of Wundt, Titchener, and others, Phenomenology has failed to find a single, settled method that everyone could agree upon. (CE 44).

Yet as we have seen, Husserl's phenomenology is *not* "like other attempts to strip away interpretation and reveal the basic facts of consciousness to rigorous observation." Rather, phrases like "basic facts of the consciousness" and "rigorous observation" are naturalistic locutions, not Husserlian. As a result, Husserl's ontology of mind, as well as Dilthey's and Sartre's, may not be dismissed on these grounds.

Thus, although *On Dennett* paints a clear and accurate picture of the philosopher's thought in terms of analytic concerns, it is somewhat truncated when it comes to consideration of the continental approach. In particular, we are left wondering just what kinds of minds and mentalistic attributes Dennett may legitimately avoid making ontological assumptions about, and which he may not. Ironically, in this respect the book is illuminating: it highlights some of the paradigmatic oversights and prejudices that can abuse the analytic tradition. Thus, because neurophilosophy is

almost exclusively informed by an analytic account of the philosophy of mind,²⁰ the neurophilosopher is almost guaranteed to develop a distorted picture of its history. I only hope then, that this essay encourages the neurophilosopher, as well as the neuroscientist, to take a closer look at “continental philosophy.”

²⁰ See for instance, Patricia Churchland (1984), specifically, Part II: “Recent Developments in the Philosophy of Science.” However, it must be noted that Churchland is quite open about her naturalistic, analytic prejudices: “The history of philosophy is a complex and richly ornamented tapestry; I shall be following but one thread, and that is the thread leading to theories that make sense to me. As before, I must emphasize that what follows is in no sense a scholarly survey, nor is it a survey of the thoughts of even the philosophers that I do discuss.” (N 241)