

John R. Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). 336 p.

*John R. Searle, Zihin: Kısa Bir Giriş*

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John R. Searle's *Mind: A Brief Introduction* serves as a critique of the philosophy of mind, addressing key topics such as the nature of consciousness, intentionality, mental causation, and personal identity. Divided into 11 thematic chapters, Searle examines the historical roots and conceptual challenges of these topics, while advocating for his biological naturalism, a view that treats consciousness as a fundamental feature of biological systems.

The book opens by framing the issues as "a dozen problems" in the philosophy of mind. These include the mind-body problem, the nature of consciousness, intentionality, and mental causation.

John Searle explains his purpose in writing *Mind: A Brief Introduction* as follows: Nearly all works written on the philosophy of mind rely on historically inherited categories to explain mental phenomena, particularly consciousness. These works accept certain assumptions about how consciousness and other mental phenomena relate to each other and to the world, continuing their analyses within this framework without questioning these assumptions.

Searle lays the groundwork for understanding why the mind-body problem is such a challenging issue to solve. As an introductory book, it does not delve into detailed technical analyses of every view. Instead, it presents the core arguments and essence of each perspective in a straightforward and clear manner. This approach does not make the book



superficial, rather it facilitates comprehension and practical engagement with the topic.

As Searle often mentions in his lectures, “If I cannot present a view as plausible or reasonable, that is my failure.” This principle is evident in the book. Instead of jumping straight to critiques, Searle discusses the historical development of ideas, objections raised against these ideas, and responses to these objections. Finally, he presents his own interpretations.

According to Searle, contemporary thought remains influenced by Descartes. Cartesian dualism and its terminology dominate many debates in the philosophy of mind. Interestingly, he remarks, “Even the man on the street today thinks Cartesian” highlighting how Descartes’ ideas have shaped modern conceptions of the mind and the body.

Searle asserts that conscious states are real phenomena with subjective first-person ontology and that they exist in the real world. Therefore, he finds it impossible to eliminate or ignore consciousness in a reductionist manner. According to him, conscious states are entirely produced by lower-level neurobiological processes in the brain and exist at a systemic level above neurons and synapses. While individual neurons are not conscious, the brain system composed of neurons can produce consciousness.

From this perspective, Searle treats consciousness as a biological property, likening it to other systemic biological features like digestion. He argues that consciousness is a feature of the brain system and thus a part of the physical world. However, he critiques traditional philosophical terminology for defining “mental” and “physical” concepts as absolute opposites, complicating the issue further. Searle advocates abandoning this terminology entirely to better understand consciousness and proposes defining it as a biological phenomenon.

Searle emphasizes that his perspective differs fundamentally from both materialism and dualism. He argues that while each approach captures some aspect of reality, their limitations lead to incorrect conclusions.

Materialism accurately states that the universe consists entirely of physical particles and the force fields they create. However, it makes a mistake by denying the existence of irreducible mental phenomena.

Dualism, on the other hand, correctly asserts the existence of



irreducible mental phenomena but mistakenly claims that these phenomena exist beyond or outside the physical world.

Searle argues for the importance of separating the valid elements of these views from their flaws. He believes that using traditional Cartesian language makes this separation seem impossible, as this language creates the appearance of a contradiction when trying to assert that mental phenomena (subjective and qualitative) are part of the ordinary physical world. To resolve this contradiction, Searle challenges traditional terminology, proposing a complete departure from it and redefining consciousness as a biological property.

Searle distinguishes between subjectivity and objectivity in two domains: epistemic and ontological. Arguing that much confusion in philosophy of mind arises from failing to differentiate these concepts properly.

Epistemic subjectivity and objectivity refer to how we justify or acquire knowledge. A statement is considered epistemically objective if its truth is independent of the observer, such as “Water boils at 100°C at sea level.” Conversely, a statement like “This cake tastes good” is epistemically subjective, as it depends on personal experience and cannot be universally validated. Ontological subjectivity and objectivity, on the other hand, pertain to the existence of phenomena. Ontologically objective entities, like mountains or molecules, exist independently of any observer. In contrast, ontologically subjective phenomena, such as pain or consciousness, exist only insofar as they are experienced by an individual.

Searle emphasizes that consciousness, as an *ontologically subjective* phenomenon, cannot be reduced to *ontologically objective* neuronal structures, despite being entirely dependent on the brain’s physical processes. Consciousness arises as a first-person experience that is real and irreducible to third-person descriptions of neuronal activity. However, Searle stresses that this irreducibility is not metaphysical. Consciousness remains fully grounded in physical processes but requires a systemic understanding that respects its subjective nature.

Searle also argues against those who claim that consciousness cannot be studied scientifically. By emphasizing the distinction between ontological subjectivity and epistemic objectivity, he demonstrates how



consciousness, despite being ontologically subjective, can still be investigated in a scientifically rigorous and epistemically objective manner. This view challenges the claim that consciousness can only be understood from a first-person perspective, highlighting the crucial distinction between epistemological and ontological levels in the philosophy of mind.

During my thesis work on the philosophy of mind, I had the opportunity to examine many books in the field. Among them, Searle's book stood out for its concise structure and its ability to present topics clearly without being bogged down by excessive technical details. Searle is known for his talent in distilling complex philosophical issues into accessible ideas.

This book aligns closely with the lectures Searle gave at the University of California, Berkeley. Having had the opportunity to access and listen to those lectures, I noticed that the book mirrors them closely. As such, it serves as a textbook on the philosophy of mind.

In conclusion, "*Mind: A Brief Introduction*" is a valuable work that offers both a historical overview and a contemporary approach to the philosophy of mind. By addressing complex philosophical topics in a clear and accessible manner, Searle ensures the book is suitable for a wide audience. Anyone interested in the philosophy of mind and Searle's own theory "biological naturalism" can benefit greatly from this insightful work.

