

Preface

My intention in writing this book was to create something whose importance lies beyond the details of its arguments. I myself consider this primarily a book of ideas. Of all my hopes, my dearest is this: that *A Place for Consciousness* should provide inspiration to those like me who were raised with the physicalist orthodoxy, accepting it but not fully comfortably, whose disquiet always has been silenced at the end by the baffling question: *How could it be otherwise?* I believe this book points to a place in the space of philosophical ideas where something truly new and interesting exists. I am, above all, trying to lead readers to that place so that they can return without me to explore it on their own. The space of ideas is a public space, after all, and these particular hidden woods can surely be mapped better than I have been able to map them.

We all know that in some sense there *is* a ghost in the machine. The question that grips us is, *why?* Why does consciousness even exist? What use has nature for an experience machine? This book proposes a place for consciousness in nature. The framework developed here is ambitious in its scope and detail: It ties experience into a theory of the categorical foundations of causation. Scholars should see it as an attempt to make a substantial advance in the development of Bertrand Russell's *Structural Realism* by borrowing some inspiration from Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. General readers can simply see it as an attempt to explain the mystery of the soul. *Liberal Naturalism* is my name for views of this **[[AU:OK?]]** type.

Both Russell and Whitehead argued that physical science reveals only a structural aspect to nature. If physics is all structure, it is natural to suppose that intrinsic properties related to the intrinsic properties **[[AU: Pls clarify what "those" refers to—**

“**properties**”?]] we experience in consciousness are the intrinsic content of the physical.

This suggestion raises several questions: (1) Why should the intrinsic properties of a physical system be experiential? (2) Why do they exist above the level of the microphysical, where large-scale cognitive systems might experience macrolevel intrinsic content? (3) Why should they form a unity of the kind we are acquainted with in consciousness? and (4) Why should phenomenal content, as the intrinsic content of the physical, correspond so closely to the information structure within the brain? By constitutively linking experience and causation, I answer these questions from first principles.

This may seem like an extraordinary project because the two problems of consciousness and causation are each tough philosophical chestnuts individually. It is not clear that thumping them together will really help us crack them open. I hope to meet the burden of the project: to argue that they need to be treated together and to show, in a very concrete way, how they do go together. To meet my obligations, I argue that physicalism is false, yet I also show how one can reject physicalism in a way that is perfectly compatible with physical science. This is a tough ledge to walk. Accordingly, the aims I have for this work extend only to motivating, introducing, explaining, and defending the overall framework, while leaving detailed discussion of its applications to a sequel. I divide my aims into several levels of ambition even within these boundaries.

At the first level of ambition, I wish to *provoke*. Within the book, I defend a group of ideas that are at odds with the physicalist orthodoxy within science and the philosophy of mind. I believe the framework I flesh out here should at least make physicalists uncomfortable by showing that a nonphysicalist theory need not be supernatural, naturalistically untenable, unmotivated, or hopelessly vague. After reading it, no one should

rest comfortably with any assumption that alternative views to physicalism must lead to absurdity.

At the next level of ambition, I hope to *challenge*. Physicalism's strongest support has been the widespread intuition that only physicalism can guarantee the causal relevance of experience in an acceptable way. A first challenge coming out of this book is that, by explaining why physics is not a theory of causation, it is able to show vividly why the issue makes sense only against a detailed background theory of causation. We see, furthermore, that traditional fears about alternatives to physicalism are without support under at least one possible and substantial view of causation, a view that seems compatible with physical science. Not only does experience turn out to have a place in the causal order on the Liberal Naturalist view, but I also make a case *on grounds completely independent of the mind-body problem* that something exactly like it, in its most mysterious aspects, is required for causation to exist.

A second challenge, one for those sympathetic with the project begun in this book, is to see whether the ideas here lead to fruitful avenues of research or whether, instead, they lead down a dead end. The book only presents a framework called the Theory of Natural Individuals. This framework should provide a new perspective from which to understand nature **[[AU: dashes OK? The Theory is the framework you're referring to?]]** and many open questions about applying the framework remain at the end of this work. These open questions present the possibility for an actual empirical and philosophical research program. It is particularly important to discover the details about the physical conditions that correspond to the existence of the things I call *natural individuals* in the book.

At a third level, I hope to actually *convince*. Although I propose some unusual ideas here, I take no shortcuts, and I accompany my proposals with substantive discussion and

argument. *Liberal Naturalism* is currently a minority position, but it at least has current precedents within philosophy, especially in the work of philosophers such as David Chalmers, David Griffin, Daniel Stoljar, Galen Strawson, and Michael Lockwood.

My more specific proposal, which I call *the Theory of Natural Individuals*, involves experience directly in the fundamental causal character of the world. This more specific proposal seems very radical when stated baldly, but I have not pulled a rabbit out of a hat: Nowhere in this book will the reader find a conjuring trick, a ploy of misdirection, or a wave of the hands. I have tried to work with acceptable rigor by generalizing on some fairly mundane intuitions about the world and about consciousness. And I have tried, always, to respect science. I hope that I have succeeded in rationally motivating my case and that the work is potentially fruitful.

As a work of philosophical literature, *A Place for Consciousness* began in 1988 while I was pursuing my master's degree in Artificial Intelligence. I worked rather doggedly at trying to map the terrain for nearly ten years, resulting in a too-rough first attempt at putting it all together in my 1997 dissertation in philosophy and cognitive science. The year before that, David Chalmers released his book *The Conscious Mind*. As I set about trying to tame the wild threads of my dissertation work into something mature and more polished, I initially conceived of this book as a kind of unauthorized sequel to David's book. In time, I realized that he had set the bar too high for me. I hope instead to have produced at least worthwhile companion reading.

While this book is by no means an easy read, I have aimed to make it accessible and interesting to the generally educated and intellectual public, even to those who have little or no training specifically in philosophy (with the exceptions of chapters 3 and 10, which are necessarily technical). Although the book is long, it is possible to take a short tour and still

come away with the main ideas. For those interested in the short tour, I recommend reading chapters 1 and 2 to understand the setup of the problem. From there, skip to chapters 4, 9, and 12. If the short tour piques your interest, go back and read the rest. Those with a philosophical background who are comfortable with one or more of the standard responses to the antiphysicalist arguments should read chapter 3. Also, the remaining chapters in Part I provide more thorough reasons than the short tour does for believing that someone interested in understanding consciousness should look hard at causation itself. Finally, Part II may be interesting independently of one's views on the mind-body problem, especially the arguments against Humean views in chapter 8 and the detailed treatment of the causal nexus in chapters 9 through 11.

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