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**“DIALOGUE BETWEEN
T. NAGEL AND J. SEARLE”**

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INTRODUCTION: I initiated to write this essay on the viewpoints of T. Nagel and J. Searle, to understand the ‘explicit’ contradictions between their theories and try to show the implicit amity in their thoughts. I hope that I could gain some successful results with the latter purpose of this paper. It is important to mention that the research area is defined by two target articles: first one is Nagel’s ‘What Is It Like to Be a Bat?’ and the second is Searle’s ‘Features of Consciousness’.

The paper’s sequence corresponds with the order of the above mentioned article by Searle. Within this research mainly one feature is touched, that is *subjectivity* of consciousness. This choice is generally determined by the circle of particular common-character issues discussed also by Nagel in his aforementioned article.

Thus, before touching the main problems, let me first share with some of my thoughts and present some notes on Searle’s article. He divides eleven features of consciousness, which are *Qualitativeness, Subjectivity, Unity, Intentionality, Mood and etc* (they’ll be mentioned farther). But the first question which the reader asks is what conscious is from Searle’s point of view? I think it is quite hard to find some concrete answer within this article. The understanding of the notion of consciousness is still, in some sense, in intuitional level. Besides, it’s also difficult to find out particular criterion of dividing those features. Based on the diversity of the features’ characters one can suppose that the criterion is not homogeneous. Anyway, let’s start with the first feature, *qualitativeness* and Nagel’s approach to it.

QUALITATIVENESS: “...every conscious state has a qualitative feel to it. Conscious states are in that sense always qualitative.”(Searle 2004, p. 134) I think here we can hardly find some contradiction between Searle and Nagel. The word ‘qualitativeness’ is not explicitly emphasized by Nagel, but it is, I suppose, directly connected with the notion of experience in the sense understood by Nagel¹. Thus, before touching the problem concerning the notion of qualitativeness in Nagel’s theory let’s first point out how he treats with the concept of experience in respect of consciousness. Hence, for understanding what consciousness is, he inserts a new concept, ‘experience’, without which the consciousness can hardly be understood. These two conceptions are undividable. The ‘experience’ is the main tool that

¹ Searle insists on not making ‘qualia’ as something distinct from consciousness. He gives it the same meaning as ‘qualitativeness’ (See Searle 2004, p. 134).

colors and gives a new expression to consciousness: “Conscious experience is a widespread phenomenon. It occurs at many levels of animal life, though we cannot be sure of its presence in the simpler organisms, and it is very difficult to say in general what provides evidence of it²...But no matter how the form may vary, the fact that an organism has conscious experience *at all* means, basically, that there is something it is like to *be* that organism. (Nagel 1979, p. 392) As we will see further, this conscious experience is exceptionally subjective³. It is supposed that these borders of subjectivity are defined by certain qualities, i.e. each experience has its particular qualitiveness, in other words, that is the factor that makes the experience subjective. E.g. when Nagel says: “I have said that the essence of the belief that bats have experience is that there is something that it is like to be a bat.” (the same place, p. 393), he just distinguishes the qualitiveness of a certain conscious state. And when he gives the description of the abilities of the bat⁴, he just precisely defines what can that qualitiveness consist of (not ‘*is*’): “Their brains are designed to correlate the outgoing impulses with the subsequent echoes, and the information thus acquired enables bats to make precise discriminations of distance, size, shape, motion, and texture comparable to those we make by vision. But bat sonar, though clearly a form of perception, is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess⁵, and there is no reason to suppose that is *subjectively*⁶ like anything we can experience or imagine.” (the same place, p. 394). As it becomes clear and as it was mentioned in the text above, the qualitiveness is directly connected with another feature of consciousness which is ‘*Subjectivity*’⁷: We will touch the problem concerning experiencing or imagining of that subjectivity a little bit later. Now it’s necessary to point out how Searle understands this concept:

² I suppose there isn’t any contradiction between Nagel and Searle also on the question if we can talk about the consciousness of subjects other than humans. Nagel, as it is mentioned in the cited passage above, extends the consciousness to many levels of animal lives. In this sense, Searle, also, at the beginning of his article, before talking about the features of consciousness one by one, mentions that all the features presumably concern also animals (See Searle 2004, p. 134). It should be also mentioned, that both of them do not concretize limits of animal level where consciousness is available.

³ See the next page..

⁴ To find out the reason why Nagel takes a *bat* as an example, see T. Nagel (1979), ‘What is it like to be a Bat?’, p. 393.

⁵ Here one can see the designing of the border between the qualitative differences of human and bat conscious states.

⁶ Emphasized by A. Hakobyan.

⁷ For the connection of these features, including ‘*Unity*’, see J. Searle (2004), ‘Features of Consciousness’, in *Mind: An Introduction*, p. 136-137.

SUBJECTIVITY:

COMMON NOTION OF SUBJECTIVITY: “Because of the qualitative character of consciousness, conscious states exist only when they are experienced by a human or animal subject. They have a type of subjectivity that I call ontological subjectivity. Another way to make this same point is to say that consciousness has a first-person point of view...Conscious states have a subjective mode of existence in the sense that they exist only when they are experienced by a human or animal subject” (Searle 2004, p 134-135)

I think Nagel would not argue to this statement. It can be more apparent if we take a look on this passage: “But fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism-something it is like *for* the organism.

We may call this the subjective character of experience.” (Nagel 1979, p. 392)

ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF PERCEIVING THE SUBJECTIVITY: Now we come closer to the ‘so called’ contradiction between Nagel (as pessimist) and Searle (as optimist): “...but ontological subjectivity of the subject matter does not preclude an epistemically objective science of that very subject matter...Whenever I hear philosophers and neurobiologists say that science cannot deal with subjective experiences I always want to show them textbooks in neurology where the scientists and doctors who write and use the books have no choice but to try to give a scientific account of people’s subjective feelings, because they are trying to help actual patients who are suffering.”(Searle 2004, p 136)

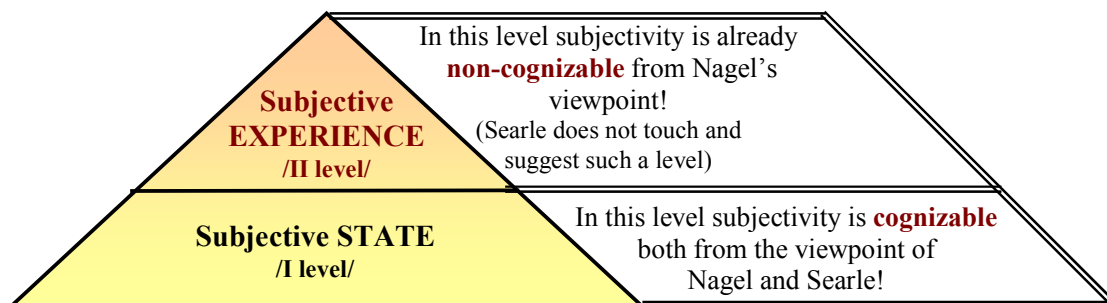
One can suppose that the above mentioned by Searle directly refers Nagel, as just according to the context of Nagel’s article and generalizing his thoughts on this issue, it is possible to make a conclusion that he tends to refuse such a possibility. Of course, there can be an objection asking how can we extend that refusal to Searle when it is generally directed against reductionists, whom Searle is not attached to. And that person would be right, because, I think and as I am going to show, here we treat with ‘pseudo-contradiction’.

So, why I called this ‘obvious’ contradiction as ‘so called’ or ‘pseudo’ contradiction? Before replying to this question it would be better to prepare some stable ground. For this purpose, first, it is necessary to show Nagel’s explanations what the conscious experience is and if it can be cognizable: “Our own experience provides the basic material for our imagination,

whose range is therefore limited. It will not help to try imagine that one⁸ has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic. Insofar as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only **what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not a question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat**⁹. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task." (Nagel 2004, p. 394) Nagel, apparently mentions that the part which is imaginable¹⁰ is not what he wants to know, it is not the conscious yet.

CONTRADICTION? Now I suppose it is more convenient to suggest what I think could be a sufficient answer to the question concerning the 'contradiction' between Nagel and Searle. I think, for this purpose, we should perform an analyze between two conceptions: "*Subjective Conscious Experience*"¹¹/*Nagel*/ and "*Subjective Conscious State*"¹¹/*Searle*/. Until now it seemed that Nagel's 'subjective experience' and Searle's 'subjective state' had some synonymous attitude towards each other. But I think, the notion 'experience' has some implicit tinge which makes it distinct from 'state' and which is the KEY to show the absence of contradiction between him and Searle. I suggest to put a hierarchy between 'subjective state' and 'subjective experience' to show the shade of meaning of 'experience':

Picture 1: Consciousness



⁸ Nagel talks about the *bat*.

⁹ In this case, emphasizes in italic are done by the author of the article, and in bold are marked by A. Hakobyan.

¹⁰ *Imaginable* can be also used in the sense of *cognizable* based on the whole context of the article.

¹¹ In Searle's article *state* is often substituted by *experience*, but, according to the context, the meaning stays the same.

Thus, I suppose, Searle's complaints and defenses touch only the first level. In this level there is no any contradiction between these authors, because Nagel himself accepts the possibility of such cognition. For example, in this current article he is using much information from sciences to describe the abilities of a bat¹², he agrees that, all these things are obviously cognizable, but the main problem is that he does not call all these things as 'consciousness', it is still the first level of Subjectivity, which is absolutely describable by the terms of science, thus, transferable to objective knowledge: "I do not deny that conscious mental states and events cause behavior, *nor that they may be given functional characterizations. I deny only that this kind of thing exhausts their analysis.*" (the same place, p. 392)

I think, Searle from the viewpoint of Nagel, misunderstands the true level of consciousness. The level on which Searle stops, which he treats as consciousness is not yet the 'consciousness' itself for Nagel.

After this, I suppose, Nagel should not be called as pessimist, as he does not refuse the thing that Searle defends, on the contrary, he also accepts what Searle defends, i.e. the first level of subjectivity, which was described above. But he also develops, goes farther from that level. I mean the criterion of the division to pessimist and optimist, in this case, is not homogeneous, they do not touch the same thing and say different ideas on it, but on the contrary.

In order to conclude the analysis of the problem of 'subjectivity', it is also necessary to touch his approach on the question of 'objective' ascription of the experience: "I am not adverting here to the alleged privacy of experience to its possessor. The point of view in question is not one accessible to a single individual. Rather it is a *type*. It is often possible to take up a point of view other than one's own, so the comprehension of such facts is not limited to one's own case. There is a sense in which phenomenological facts are perfectly objective: One person can know or say of another what the quality of the other's experience is. They are subjective, however, in the sense that even this objective ascription of experience is possible only for someone sufficiently similar to the object of ascription to be able to adopt his point of view-to

¹² E.g.: "Thus we describe bat sonar as a form of three-dimensional forward perception; we believe that bats feel some versions of pain, fear, hunger, and lust, and that they have other, more familiar types of perception besides sonar. But we believe that these experiences also have in each case a *specific subjective character* (emphasized by A. Hakobyan), which it is beyond our ability to conceive." (Nagel 1979, p. 395) I think the above mentioned '*specific subjective character*' is the very II level of subjectivity, level of subjective experience, according to the graphic in the previous page.

understand the ascription in the first person as well as in the third, so to speak. The more different from oneself the other experiencer is, the less success one can expect with this enterprise.” (the same place, p. 396-397) This passage finally fills the space in Nagel’s theory and concludes it as a system.

To my opinion, Nagel’s approach to the problem is quite specific, within the framework of Philosophy of Mind, no matter he is supposed to be a pessimist or optimist. Probably, his thoughts could serve as a guide for many sciences spreading light on the new side of the problem of mind, showing a new level and putting a task for sciences to find some new solutions for revealing it.

OTHER FEATURES: These were the main ideas that I wanted to touch within this essay. But let me also make some brief notes on the coming features of consciousness counted by Searle and take a look at them from Nagel’s viewpoint. Thus, the third feature is *unity*: “At present, I do not just experience the feelings in my fingertips, the pressure of the shirt against my neck, and the sight of the falling autumn leaves outside, but I experience all of these as part of a single, unified, conscious field. Consciousness of the normal, nonpathological kind, comes to us with a unified structure.” (Searle 2004, p. 136). Based on the Nagel’s understanding of consciousness it could be hard to accept that the presented passage is about consciousness. This could be just a description of the perception abilities of humans, but not a conscious (experience) itself. What about the split-brain experiments and its connection with unity feature of consciousness, then Searle states: “...at least we have to consider the possibility that there are, in fact, two conscious fields inside one brain, one corresponding to each hemisphere and that in the normal the two fields of consciousness coalesce into a single unified conscious field.” (the same place, p. 138). Perhaps, this opinion can be found within the options concerning the split-brain and mind, which Nagel tries to argue: “There appear to be five interpretations of the experimental data which utilize the concept of an individual mind.

- (1) The patients have one fairly normal mind associated with the left hemisphere, and the responses emanating from the nonverbal right hemisphere are the responses of an automaton, and are not produced by conscious mental processes.
- (2) The patients have only one mind, associated with the left hemisphere, but there also occur (associated with the right hemisphere) isolated conscious mental phenomena, not integrated into a mind at all, though they can be ascribed to the organism.

- (3) The patients have two minds, one which can talk and one which cannot.
- (4) They have one mind, whose contents derive from both hemispheres and are rather peculiar and dissociated.
- (5) They have one normal mind most of the time, while the hemispheres are functioning in parallel, but two minds are elicited by the experimental situations which yield the interesting results. (Perhaps the single mind splits in two and reconvenes after the experiment is over.)

I shall *argue*¹³ that each of these interpretations is unacceptable for one reason or another.”
(Nagel 1979, p. 155)¹⁴

What about the other features, *intentionality, mood, the distinction between the center and the periphery, pleasure/unpleasure, situatedness, active and passive consciousness, the gestalt structure and the sense of self*^{d5}, then I think Nagel will not disagree with these features and their cognoscibility, but as it was mentioned, according to Nagel’s logic, those can be no more than elements of the first level of subjectivity, *conscious state*, but not yet the *conscious experience*, in the sense of Nagel, not yet the CONSCIOUSNESS itself.

LITERATURE:

- T. Nagel, ‘What Is It Like to Be a Bat?’, in Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, CUP, 1979.
- T. Nagel, ‘Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness’, in *Mortal Questions*, CUP, 1979.
- G. Nixon, ‘Imaginal Dialogues’, http://web.ff.cuni.cz/~klimjaff/common/partnership/imaginal_others.doc
(Unpublished: A version of this paper was presented at the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Conference* at the Bergamo Conference Center in Dayton, OH, October 15, 1992)
- J. Searle, ‘Features of Consciousness’, in *Mind: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

¹³ Emphasized by A. Hakobyan.

¹⁴ This citation was done from Nagel’s another article ‘Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness.’ See also, the same article, p. 156-164. It could be also worthy to touch the problem of the unity of consciousness from quite a different sight. This sight does not deal with the bipartition of the brain, but rather with multi-partition of consciousness in its psychological meaning: “*The idea that each of us consists in reality of multiple selves is not new. What may be new is our tendency to call all these personæ and potential personæ "selves," as though they all somehow belonged to a central command station which we entitle "me" or "I" ... what once was felt to be the external influences from mostly invisible divinities is now felt as inner influences from such things as moods, fantasies, inspirations, or even inexplicable actions: "She was beside herself in frustration," or "I can't believe I did that!" Most often such possessions are dismissed as my mood swings or simply an unimportant aberration, blamed on nerves: "I am just not myself today." When "you are not yourself," you must be someone or something other. It may be wondered just who you are, or who is you in such situations. What other beings inhabit the space we generally label as "self?" This is recognized when we cry, Homerically: "I don't know what possessed me!"*” (G. Nixon. *Imaginal Dialogues*, http://web.ff.cuni.cz/~klimjaff/common/partnership/imaginal_others.doc). I think this can be developed as an argument for the relativity of the unity of consciousness.

¹⁵ One can suppose that Searle, counting also the feature of *the sense of self*, has already forgotten that the talk is not only about human consciousness, but also animal.