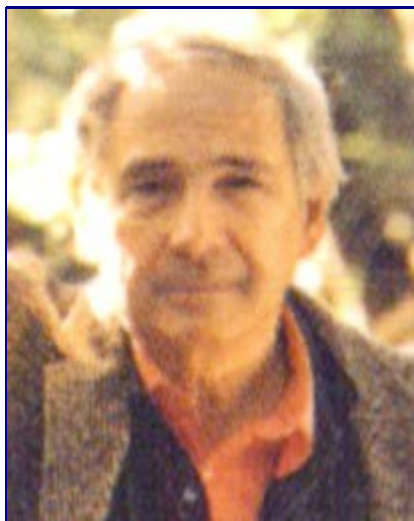
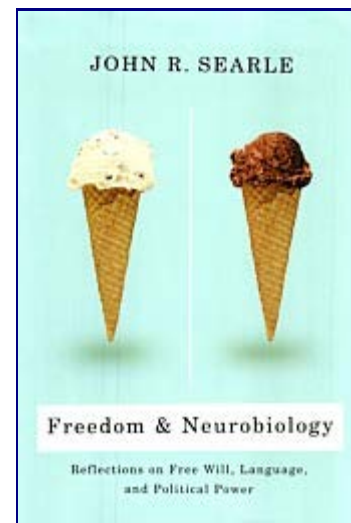


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A READER'S JOURNAL
Freedom & Neurobiology
Reflections on Free Will,
Language, and Political Power
by
John R. Searle



ARJ2 Chapter: Evolution of Consciousness
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2014

Persian proverb "Night hides the world but reveals a universe."

On a long-distance phone call to my mom back in 1970, she told me that a cousin of mine just had a surprise appendectomy. After the call, my wife and I mused over the doctor coming into the room to announce to Danny, "Surprise! You've just had an appendectomy!" John Searle tells us, in effect, that his editor called about this book to tell him, "Surprise! You've just had your book published!" The way this happened was that John gave a series of lectures at the Sorbonne in 2001, one in French on language and political power and the other in English on freedom of the will. They asked him if he would allow these two presentations to be published. He assumed one would be published in French and the other in English.

[page 2] To my surprise, my editor, Patrick Savidan, published the two lectures as a rather elegant, though small, book in French called *Liberté et neurobiologie*. I knew nothing of the publication plans until a boxful of books arrived at my home in Berkeley. It is the first time in my life that I published a book I did not know that I had written.

Soon translations appeared in German, Spanish, Italian, and Chinese and then Columbia University Press approached him to produce an English translation. Luckily he had the original English text of the French lecture, and he decided to revise the English lecture based on his current views. All of which is portrayed very nicely on the book cover: Surprise! Two delicious ice cream cones, one filled with French Vanilla and the other with English Chocolate.

Searle drops a big Unanswered Question on us on Page 5:

[page 5] Our self-conception derives in part from our cultural inheritance, but mostly it derives from our own experience. We have a conception of ourselves as conscious, intentionalistic, rational, social, institutional, political, speech-act performing, ethical and free will possessing agents. Now, the question is, How can we square this self-conception of ourselves as mindful, meaning-creating, free, rational, etc., agents with a universe that consists entirely of mindless, meaningless, unfree, nonrational, brute physical particles?

If we accept Searle's view of our universe as mindless, meaningless, unfree, nonrational, and consisting only physical particles, then we must certainly let go of any idea of freedom or free will. He has clearly set forth the basis of a materialistic view of the universe, has he not? Immanuel Kant would be proud of Searle for doing such a good job of

reasoning.

Let's examine what Searle says about our self-conception: "it derives from our own experience." Hmm, let's examine what our experience has been thought to consist of since the time of Francis Bacon: only *sensory* experience. If our experience derives only from sensory experience, we are left in an unfree world. I accept that to be the case because it logically follows from the premise. However, I strenuously reject the premise. If I used that premise to examine plants as they exist above the surface of the ground, **I** could not understand plant biology at all. Rightly understood, there is as much a mass of plant biology below the ground as above the ground.

We humans live above the ground in a visible physical world, and also below the ground in an invisible spiritual world, one which is as unknown to our senses as the plant biology underneath of the earth is invisible to our sight. Only if we dig into the earth can we examine the plant biology that is invisible to our eyes, and doing so kills the very biology we wish to inspect. How can we examine the invisible spiritual world upon which the visible physical world exists and from which it originates? The Fox's Secret of [The Little Prince](#) gives us a hint, "It is only with the heart one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

Since Searle defines consciousness as "subjective, qualitative states of sentience or feeling or awareness", it seems clear Antoine Saint-Exupéry is saying that our heart, as a center of feeling, gives us a consciousness of our essential spiritual nature.

Part of the problem of understanding consciousness is that humans are treated as animals by those who look only above the ground at the material world and ignore the deep reality of the spiritual world. This is a premise that lies so deep in Searle's thinking that he can presume it to be a fact without having to specify that it is only a belief. Note his

presupposition in this phrase below, "traits that humans share with many other species of animals", which presumes that humans are a species of animal.

[page 8] In addition to having consciousness and intentionality, traits that humans share with many other species of animals . . .

That allows us to understand Searle's bias toward humans as mere advanced animals, presupposing that humans evolved from animals, rather than the equally likely possibility that animals remained behind in their level of spiritual growth, never having evolved to the level of humans.

Searle refuses to state that free will is a fact, but he does, after intense study of the matter of consciousness, feel obliged to state: "The point is that, given the structure of our consciousness, we cannot proceed except on the presupposition of free will." (Page 11)

[page 17] We have to presuppose free will whenever we engage in voluntary action, but the presupposition is not self-guaranteeing. Perhaps we are mistaken in supposing that we have free will, but mistaken or not, we still do not have an account of free will that will make it consistent with both our experiences and what we know about the rest of the universe.

The collective pronoun "we" is how Searle uses points to those who use Baconian thinking like himself — he has a lot of company in this manner of thinking. The answers to the questions Searle and his colleagues must hold unanswered, are well-answered by Rudolf Steiner who views the matter of free will both above the ground materially *and* below the ground spiritually. Steiner holds out a *macroscope* to Searle and others when they rebuff him like Criminino did when Galileo

proffered him a look through his *telescope*. "Look through here to see the mountains on the Moon," he told Criminino, from whom he received the curt reply, "There are *no* mountains on the Moon." Today's establishment scientists would tell Steiner, "There are *no* spiritual realities in a Human."

A true scientist would want to take a look through Steiner's macroscope for himself, for his own *self*. Searle gives us a definition for *self* which he was apparently led to while he was trying to lasso free will, as if it were a dogie in a cattle herd which, lacking a mother, had to be tamed by philosophers:

[page 33] Hume, with his skeptical account, destroyed any possibility of the conception of the self as some sort of substantive entity that could be the object of experiences. But there are certain formal features of conscious decision-making that force us to recognize that one and the same entity is conscious, rational, capable of reflection and capable of decision and action, and therefore of assuming responsibility. This purely formal entity I call the self.

The problem of free will is a Gordian Knot that we have tied ourselves up with using our processes of logic and we cannot untie the knot using those same processes. Alexander the Great, a pupil of Aristotle, knew how to loosen the Knot, he sliced through it with his sword. Rudolf Steiner, a modern day Aristotle, sliced through the Gordian Knot of free will with his [Philosophy of Freedom](#) which, rightly understood, will toss Kant's philosophy into the dustbin of history. Here's how Searle describes the Knot:

[page 38] Typically, when we encounter one of these problems that seems insoluble it has a certain logical form. On the one hand we have a belief or a set of beliefs that we feel we really cannot give up, but on the other hand, we

have another belief or set of beliefs that is inconsistent with the first set, and seems just as compelling as the first set. So, for example, in the old mind-body problem we have the belief that the world consists entirely of material particles in fields of force, but at the same time the world seems to contain consciousness, an immaterial phenomenon; and we cannot see how to put the immaterial together with the material into a coherent picture of the universe. In the old problem of skeptical epistemology, it seems, on the one hand, according to common sense, that we do have certain knowledge of many things in the world, and yet, on the other hand, if we really have such knowledge, we ought to be able to give a decisive answer to the skeptical arguments, such as, How do we know we are not dreaming, are not a brain in a vat, are not being deceived by evil demons, etc.? But we do not know how to give a conclusive answer to these skeptical challenges.

What about natural events? Are they completely deterministic or random? If natural events like hurricanes are deterministic, why shouldn't natural events like human behavior also be deterministic and not capable of occurring voluntarily or freely?

[page 38, 39] In the case of free will the problem is that we think explanations of natural phenomena should be completely deterministic. The explanation of the Loma Prieta earthquake, for example, does not explain why it just happened to occur, it explains why it *had* to occur. Given the forces operating on the tectonic plates, there was no other possibility.

Would Searle feel the same way about natural events being deterministic if he could see below the surface of the events and discern how the collective human psyche in a given area acted as the trigger mechanisms for the Loma Prieta earthquake and the steering

currents for hurricane Katrina, to name two examples? This is exactly the point made by Jane Roberts in her landmark book on the subject of mass events, [The Individual and the Nature of Mass Events](#). Having lived through Hurricane Katrina, I experienced the stultification of the human psyche of the citizens of New Orleans before the massive storm and the clearing of the air afterward which created massive improvements to the levee system, improvements to the educational system, etc., and I experienced first-hand the *joie de vivre* of the entire area post-Katrina. Which makes more sense: that Katrina was a random natural disaster steered by meteorological currents or that Katrina had been steered by the collective psyche of the people of the area? If it were both, then psychic currents came first. True, the steering wheel determines the movement of the ship, but the Captain determines the movement of the steering wheel.

We have seen several movies about totally conscious robots and few of these movies had good endings. Searle looks at the possibility for building a conscious robot.

[page 70] How would we build a conscious robot, where every feature of consciousness is entirely determined by the state of the microelements, and at the same time the consciousness of the system functions causally in determining the next state of the system by processes that are not deterministic but are a matter of free decision making by a rational self, acting on reasons.

He then tells us that is precisely the condition we humans are in. But there is something more in us human beings which distinguishes us from so-called conscious robots.

[page 71] We are conscious robots whose states of consciousness are fixed by neuronal processes, and at the same time we sometimes proceed by nondeterministic

conscious processes (hence neuronal processes) that are matters of our rational selves making decisions on reasons.

Once again, Searle has, in a new way created a Gordian Knot and then admitted there is no way to untie his Knot. So he pulls out of his sheath a well-honed HUP and slices the knot in twain. It is the tool he acquired from Werner Heisenberg, the famous Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which gives Searle some needed comfort in his syllogistic cul-de-sac. He writes, "Previously I never could see the point of introducing quantum mechanics into discussions of consciousness. But here at least is a strict argument requiring the introduction of quantum indeterminism." (Page 71)

In an earlier review I wrote up how quantum mechanics sits on the boundary of the physical and spiritual world(1). If Searle were to take this into account, the *reality* of the spiritual world, as the basis for our experiences in the physical world, it might hit his head like a sledgehammer and bring some sense into his bafflegab of nondeterministic deterministic processes. I include below from my review some comments and a poem which expresses concisely my insight into the conundrum of free will and determinism.

The following poem ties together the human will and quantum particle, both of which have created insolvable conundrums for natural scientists, up until now.

**In the heart
of the human being
lies the boundary
between the physical
and the spiritual world.**

**In the heart
of quantum mechanics**

**lies the boundary
between the physical
and the spiritual world.**

**Quantum particles
sit on the fence
between the physical
and the spiritual world
like Mugwumps —
their mugs on one side**

**their wumps on the other —
until,
like Humpty-Dumpty,
they have a great fall
and are observed by yours truly
on the physical side of the fence.**

**Then all the king's horses
and all the king's men
cannot put Humpty-Dumpty
together again.**

**The pieces which fall
on the spiritual side of the fence
may be observed by others
at the far end of the universe.**

Searle ends Chapter 1, "Free Will As a Problem in Neurobiology" by writing, "There is, I am sure, much more to be said." And I earnestly agree with him on that point.

Chapter 2 "Social Ontology and Political Power" covers my least favorite subject, politics. Why? Because so little understanding infuses the subject in general and Searle's text in particular. But there is one

paragraph near the end of the chapter which caught my eye about a modern day collapse of a socialistic system, the coercive bureaucracy of East Germany, the so-called German Democratic Republic. Most people only looked at the dramatic collapse of the Berlin Wall, but the really interesting part was how the people stopped supporting the coercive bureaucracy and soon not even the police state and army would follow the orders given to them to corral the liberated citizens.

Can this happen in America? Can it happen in these so-called United States of America, which have been welded into a monolithic coercive bureaucracy, and whose grip on the people of this land grows tighter every year, every day? All it would take is for voluntary non-compliance to coercive orders to dissolve its grip like happened in the GDR in 1989. All it would take for this to happen would be for out-of-control socialist programs to drive taxes up and services down. All it would take is for the coercive bureaucracy to strangle on its own red tape while drowning in its own red ink. Can it happen? Each person can answer that question without further prompting.

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----- *Footnotes* -----

1. [The Influence of the Dead on Destiny](#) by Rudolf Steiner

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

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