

Thesis Title: JOHN SEARLE'S CRITIQUE OF
COGNITIVE SCIENCE: A CRITICAL
STUDY

Researcher: Mr. Mohd Manzoor Malik

Adm. No. : 422-9583

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Joseph I. Fernando

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ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at the critical analysis of Searle's critique of cognitive science. The focus of Searle's critique is on computationalism, which holds that mind is to brain as software is to hardware -- all mental states are explained in terms of computational processes.

Searle has refuted the claims of cognitive science. He blames cognitive science for being behavioristic. He has developed his thesis in arguments based on a thought experiment known as Chinese room argument. While he is strongly condemning cognitive science for its false claims in favor of computationalism, however, he seems fair enough in giving the appropriate value to the computers for their many useful functions. This suitable evaluation of computers can be seen in his distinction of weak AI and strong AI, in which he defends the first and refutes the latter. However, there are many objections to him.

This research shows that Strong AI is false and most of the objections to Searle are based on misunderstandings. His axioms, conclusions, and crucial

notions are compelling and sound although there are some defects. But after taking a holistic view of his thesis, such defects, in fact, do not create any serious problem to his thesis.

Searle holds that computer programs are formal (syntactic), they do not have any semantics, and they are observer relative. This research favorably stands on his side. Because, the syntactic sufficiency for semantics has very limited scope and it works in a narrow sense based on logic and mathematics. Syntax alone is not enough without speakers. Searle holds that minds have mental contents (semantics). The objections to this axiom include that it depends on the first-person's privileged access. It is shown that Searle is right in holding that all reality is not objective but some of it is subjective and mental states have an irreducibly subjective ontology. The primacy of the mind's intrinsic intentionality is invisible to science. Traditional science needs to be supplemented by phenomenology in order to provide a complete explanation of mind. Therefore, Searle claims that syntax by itself is neither constitutive of nor sufficient for semantics. Searle's claim is strong and worthy of defense as long it is concerned to semantic engines of cognitive science. However, his theory has a reductionist flavor by taking only mental content sufficient for semantics. Furthermore, Searle claims that brains cause minds. It is based on his biological naturalism. Searle's biological naturalism is labeled as epiphenomenalism and property dualism. But such objections to biological naturalism are proved fallacious. Because biological naturalism is drastically different from epiphenomenalism and property dualism.

Searle's main position is that consciousness is a physical property of the brain and it is irreducible to any other physical property. However, I think Searle's definition of consciousness is defective. The defect is the way in which he tries to make an analogy between the consciousness and the liquidity of water. Furthermore, Searle's position can be classified as non-reductive externalism.

Searle's first conclusion is that computer programs are neither constitutive of nor sufficient for minds. His first conclusion is analyzed and defended. Because the issue is that computer simulations only produce syntax and this syntax has a derived meaning depending on the observer. Searle's second conclusion is that any other system capable of causing minds would have to have causal powers (at least) equivalent to those of brains. Objections to this conclusion are refuted. The objection that since computers behave like human minds then why we need special powers of the human mind. It is shown that such objection is based on the behaviorist foundations. There is a distinction between the performance and competence. Cognitive scientists confuse initiations with implementations. Furthermore, it is shown in consistency with Searle that the brain does not do information processing. The brain, as far as its intrinsic operations are concerned, does no information processing. It is a specific biological organ and its specific neurobiological processes cause specific forms of intentionality.

The importance of Searle's "biological naturalism" is shown to answer the serious questions of cognitive science to the dignity of the human mind and its ontological existence. It is concluded that Searle has succeeded in rediscovering

the mind that has been lost by cognitive science. The implications of biological naturalism for the mind's intrinsicity in the matter, the privacy of experience, and the concepts of action, freedom of will, responsibility, passion, and death constitute the metaphysical and moral dignity of mind.

Finally, it is shown that Searle's successful refutation of cognitive science is demanding a complete cognitive science. His idea is that a genuine science of cognition would allow for at least three levels of explanation—a neurobiological level, a level of intentionality, and a functional level where operation of background capacities can be identified in terms of their functional role in the life of the organism.

