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## Vision and Intentional Content

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John Searle's treatment of visual perception and *de re* thought in his book *Intentionality* constitutes a challenging point of view presented in a clear, forthright way. It deserves attention not only for its own merits, but also because it represents an approach to vision and belief that is perennially tempting. In many fundamental respects, it is a revival of Russell's view.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I shall critically discuss Searle's approach, with special attention to his conception of Intentional content. I shall use this discussion as a basis for replying to his remarks about some of my work on the same subjects.

### I

Let me begin by setting a background of agreement. I think that Searle is right to develop issues in the philosophy of language in close conjunction with issues in the philosophy of mind. We differ in our evaluation of the work on reference that grew out of the ideas of Donnellan and Kripke: I think that it is fundamentally right as far as it goes; he thinks that it is fundamentally wrong. But we share the view that much of this work is weakened by largely ignoring the relevance of thought to language.

I am also in substantial agreement with Searle's non-reductionistic, realist approach to Intentional phenomena. I accept the broad but loose analogy between the content of speech and the content of thought that Searle appeals to, and I agree with many of the points he makes in filling out the analogy (pp. 4-13). These analogies do not, of course, answer all questions about the determination of content. But reviewing them reminds one that we share a useable core conception.

A key element in Searle's account of Intentional phenomena is his explication of Intentional content in terms of the conditions for satisfaction of mental states and events. In identifying such phenomena we typically make use of propositional items that may be evaluated as true or false. Searle puts this point by saying that conditions for satisfaction are "internal" to Intentional states:

just as the conditions of satisfaction are internal to the speech act, so the conditions of satisfaction of the Intentional state are internal to the Intentional state. Part of what

makes my statement that snow is white the statement that it is, is that it has those truth conditions and not others. Similarly part of what makes my wish that it were raining the wish it is, is that certain things will satisfy it and certain other things will not. (p. 11; cf. p. 22)

So stated, I accept this view without serious reservation.

Searle says that a belief "represents" its truth conditions or conditions of satisfaction, and explains this notion by appealing to the notion of a statement's representing its truth conditions (p. 12). Neither notion is transparent to me. But I take it that the idea is that the Intentional content of the belief is, or involves, a certain requirement on what it takes to satisfy the belief. The belief represents its truth conditions in the sense that the requirement "determines" (pp. 12, 19) what states of affairs are required for satisfaction of the belief (cf. p. 13). As long as "determines" is read in a relatively inspecific way, I think that these points can be taken to be correct and relatively uncontroversial.

What is controversial is the application Searle makes of these remarks, or the inferences he draws from them. It appears that he interprets them in a more restricted way than I think that they should be interpreted.

## II

The phrase "truth conditions" (similarly – "satisfaction conditions") is one of the most widely and carelessly used phrases in analytic philosophy. The expression has numerous non-equivalent applications. But it is rarely explicated. Consequently, it occasions all manner of mischief – unfocused doctrine, misunderstanding, fruitless disagreement.

Searle uses the expression with more circumspection than most. But I think that it is a source of difficulty in evaluating his account. One reason why the phrase is not clarified in contemporary writing, unfortunately a secondary reason, is that difficult philosophical problems attend any attempt at serious clarification. I shall skirt such problems by approaching the difficulty in evaluating Searle's account through some relatively elementary considerations.

Searle notes the distinction between (1) construing a "truth condition" as a requirement that has to be met for an Intentional state to be veridical (here the truth condition itself has Intentional or referential properties), and (2) construing a "truth condition" as what the requirement makes reference to – what would fulfill the requirement if the Intentional state is veridical (here the truth condition is something like a state of affairs) (p. 13). This is a good distinction, often ignored. I shall always take "truth condition" in the first sense, as a requirement with Intentional properties.

There are many ways of stating what might count as a sentence or statement's "truth conditions." A statement or used sentence occurrence of the form "That F is G" (applied, let us imagine, to a physical object) is true if and only if:

- a that F is G [where one indicates the relevant F]
- b the F that is the referent of the relevant token of "that" is G

- c the object that falls in the extension of (or has the property indicated by) "F" and that is the referent of the relevant token of "that," falls in the extension of (or has the property indicated by) "G"
- d there is an F, and it is the referent of the relevant token of "that," and it is G
- e there is an F, and it is at the end of such and such a causal chain leading to the relevant occurrence of "that," and it is G
- f there is an object that fits the concept associated with "F" (or bears such and such a causal relation to the relevant occurrence of "F") and it is at the end of such a causal chain leading to the relevant occurrence of "that" (or fits the concept associated with the relevant occurrence of "that") and it fits the concept associated with "G" (or bears such and such a causal relation to the occurrence of "G").

Any of (a)–(f) might be taken to give the "truth conditions" of the statement or used sentence. Different ones might be given, depending on the point of talking about "truth conditions." (a) is a homophonic "translation" of the sentence, or reiteration of the statement. It must be used in a context in which one preserves the reference of the demonstrative that occurs in the statement whose truth conditions are being given. (b) involves semantical ascent with respect to the demonstrative. (c) adds semantical ascent with respect to the predicates. (d) involves the semantical ascent of (b), but adds a change in the logical form, adding a quantification that takes a step in the direction of Russell's analysis of the definite article. (e) is like (d) except that it includes an account of the relation of demonstrative reference, which is left primitive in (b)–(d). (The form and content of the account are irrelevant to present purposes.) (f) is like (e) except that it adds an account of the semantical relation associated with predication left primitive in (c). Clearly permutations among these ways of giving truth conditions could lengthen the list.

Apart from a homophonic "translation" of the statement, there are various forms and degrees of semantic ascent, various means of representing logical form, and various analyses or accounts of those relations between the statement (or sentence-at-a-use) and the world that constitute the requirements for being true associated with the statement.

Searle's account of Intentional content is in terms of truth conditions or satisfaction conditions. But he does not say enough about the point of his appeal to truth conditions to motivate choosing one among various possible types of "truth conditions." The problem is made more complex by the fact that we are concentrating on the Intentional content of visual experience. There are significant differences between visual experiences and statements. Nevertheless, there is supposed to be a fundamental analogy. And we can try to evaluate the account by reference to the analogy as Searle presents it.

Searle's account gives the following satisfaction conditions to a propositional visual experience "VE." VE is true if and only if:

- (S) there is an F there and there being an F there is a causing this very visual experience (p. 48).

I have some reservations about taking visual experiences to have propositional form. (Searle argues for his view on this matter (p. 40); but I do not find the arguments persuasive.) But I shall accept the point for the sake of argument.

It seems to me that (S) bears fairly close comparison to (e). I will take it that "F" remains the same between (e) and (S). And I will assume that "there" (in the sense of "which is there") in (S) approximately plays the role of "G" in (e) – though this latter comparison will not be crucial. In both (e) and (S), the predicates appear in an entirely straightforward manner.<sup>2</sup>

Searle introduces the quantifier "there is" in (S) as an explicit representation of the existential commitments of visual experience, in something like the way that the quantifier has been introduced in (e) as an explicit representation of the existential commitments of demonstrative reference in the statement. This point will not figure prominently in the discussion.

Searle's (S) has a self-referential element, whereas (e) does not, at least not explicitly. This difference derives from special views about visual experience, and from Searle's desire to provide what he calls a "first-person" account of the content. One can provide a parallel to (S) on this count, however:

- (e') there is an F, and it is at the end of such and such a causal chain leading to this very statement (or sentence occurrence), and it is G.

Like (e) and (e'), (S) involves a certain *ascent*: Reference is made in the truth condition to one of the vehicles of reference in the Intentional item whose truth conditions are being given. In (e) the truth conditions make reference to an occurrence of the word "that," which is a vehicle of reference, within the statement whose truth conditions are being given. In (e') reference is made to the statement itself. In (S) the truth conditions make reference to the visual experience, which is a vehicle for referring to the physical object that is seen.

Also like (e) and (e'), (S) involves an "analysis" or *account* of the referential relation between the vehicle of reference and the physical object referred to. A broadly causal account is gestured toward in both cases.

Intuitively, Searle's proposal is not immediately attractive. Almost anyone will have the initial feeling that the Intentional content that Searle attributes to visual experiences is too complicated or too sophisticated. One instinctively thinks that not every visual experience, including those of babies, higher animals, and unreflective adults, has that complicated and reflective a content. I think that, understood aright, this instinct is correct. My purpose will be to articulate it.

The use of *ascent* (including self-reference) and the introduction of an explicit *account* of reference in Searle's statement of the content of visual experiences are the primary sources of complication in (S). I will ask how these features of the truth condition are motivated and whether the motivation suffices to render Searle's account of Intentional content visual experience superior to alternatives.

### III

A project that reflects on truth conditions in order to give an account of Intentional mental states or events is subject to a certain constraint. It must say something plausible about how the objects that the Intentional state refers to are presented to the thinker. Or if the mental states fails to pick out an object, the account must say something about the mode of presentation that fails of reference. The language I

am using here is, of course, derived from Frege. But the point does not depend on anything particular in his doctrine. Another way of putting the idea is this: The "requirement" that truth conditions place on the way the world is to be if the mental state is to be veridical, must be in a form that indicates the Intentional (broadly, referential) elements that constitute or identify the thinker's point of view. The point should be uncontroversial. It helps define the project of characterizing Intentional states.

A near corollary of this point constrains any account of the satisfaction conditions of demonstratives that could serve as an account of Intentional content. One cannot simply cite the referent of a demonstrative as its content unless the referent *is* one's way of thinking about the referent. So in giving an account of the satisfaction conditions of the use of a demonstrative that picks out a physical object, one cannot simply cite the physical object as the Intentional content. One cannot do this because it is obvious that in using the demonstrative one thinks of the object from a certain perspective or in a certain way that is not simply identical with the object itself. Some aspect of one's mental state or perspective is relevant to picking out the object. And this aspect must be cited if one is successfully to characterize Intentional content. Precisely analogous observations hold for giving an account of the Intentional content of visual experiences.<sup>3</sup>

I belabor these points because I want to make some preliminary remarks about the "truth condition" (a) listed above. (a) comes closest to representing what I think is the Intentional content most naturally associated with the statement. And in discussing Searle's account of the content of visual experience, I want an analogue of (a) to serve as a foil and rival for his account.

If (a) is to give truth conditions for a statement involving a demonstrative applied to a physical project, and if those truth conditions are supposed to characterize an Intentional content associated by the speaker with the statement, it does not suffice to use (a) and note that one is picking out the same physical object that is picked out in the original statement. Something has to be said about some Intentional element associated with the demonstrative in the original statement, about how the object is picked out in the original statement.

It is not part of my view that the full Intentional content associated by the speaker with the sentence or statement is necessarily what one must assign to it in order to give its "semantics." "Semantics," like "truth conditions," is a term with a bewildering variety of actual (and even legitimate) applications. Certainly, *what is conventionally understood and conveyed* by a used sentence, or a statement, may be less than the Intentional content that the speaker thinks in using it. Perhaps in some theoretical contexts, (a) may suffice for a "semantical" project that aims at accounting for some aspect of what is conventionally understood or conveyed. From a certain point of view, the referent of the demonstrative and its being F and G are all that matters.

But the gloss represented by (a) would fall short of explicating Intentional content. It would say nothing about how the referent of the original statement "That F is G" is indicated. It would not even say that it was indicated demonstratively. And an account of Intentional content must say something about mode of indication or mode of presentation. Moreover, a "semantics" that limited itself in this way would not accomplish all that traditional approaches to semantics (e.g. Frege's) attempted.

How are we to meet the requirement that something be said about some Intentional element associated with the demonstrative in the original statement? The Intentional element might *be* the occurrence of the demonstrative in the statement. It might be a mental demonstrative occurrence. It might be some concept – descriptive visual, or otherwise – or some conceptual complex, perhaps involving or governed by a demonstrative. The point is that (a) must be glossed in some way that indicates an intentional element associated with the statement whose truth conditions are being given.

The constraint that I have been discussing has already been met in (b)–(f). Let us provisionally satisfy the constraint for (a) by revising it to

- (a') that F is G [where one indicates the relevant F, and where "that F" is not only used, but stands for the mode of indication used in the statement (or visual experience) whose truth conditions are being given].

Here it is understood that we are not merely using the demonstrative in the unbracketed part of (a'); we are also attributing the demonstrative and its application. The unbracketed part of (a') – which gives the content of the original statement – displays the content of the statement (or visual experience) by mimicking its demonstrative mode of presentation. The Intentional content involves a demonstrative occurrence (or a type individuated in terms of a demonstrative occurrence) that governs the F-predication and that in fact is applied to the relevant physical object.<sup>4</sup> I will speak of (a') as the form of a statement of the truth conditions both of statements and of visual experiences.

(a') provides truth conditions that are relevant to Intentional content. It replicates the Intentional content of the original and gives its "truth conditions" at the same time. I do not intend this as a full explanation of anything. Rather I am merely illustrating a form of account that will guide us as we discuss the Intentional content of visual experiences.

#### IV

What motivation does Searle offer for fixing on a form of "satisfaction condition" for visual experiences that parallels (e') rather than (a')? Nothing in his most direct arguments for his view will serve. Let set out his arguments in his own words:

it is part of the conditions of satisfaction (in the sense of requirement) of the visual experience that the visual experience must itself be caused by the rest of the conditions of satisfaction (in the sense of things required) of that visual experience. Thus, for example, if I see the yellow station wagon, I have a certain visual experience. But the Intentional content of the visual experience, which requires that there be a yellow station wagon in front of me in order that it be satisfied, also requires that the fact that there is a yellow station wagon in front of me must be the cause of that very visual experience. Thus, the Intentional content of the visual experience requires as part of the conditions of satisfaction that the visual experience be caused by the rest of its conditions of satisfaction, that is, by the state of affairs perceived. The content of the visual experience is therefore self-referential in a sense that I hope to be able to make fairly precise. The Intentional content of the visual experience is entirely specified by

stating the conditions of satisfaction of the visual experience, but that statement makes essential reference to the visual experience itself in the conditions of satisfaction. For what the Intentional content requires is not simply that there be a state of affairs in the world, but rather that the state of affairs in the world must cause the very visual experience which is the embodiment or realization of the Intentional content. (pp. 47-8)

Searle says that the Intentional content of the relevant visual experience has the form: "I have a visual experience (that there is a yellow station wagon there and that there is a yellow station wagon there is causing this visual experience)." He continues:

The Intentional content of the visual experience determines under what conditions it is satisfied or not satisfied, what must be the case in order that it be, as they say, "veridical." Well, what must be the case in the station wagon scene in order that the experience be a veridical one? At least this much: the world must be as it visually seems to me that it is, and furthermore its being that way must be what causes me to have the visual experience which constitutes its seeming that way. And it is this combination that I am trying to capture in the representation of the Intentional content. (pp. 48-9)

The notion of self-reference that Searle promises to make precise in the first of the quoted passages is given two further glosses:

the sense in which the visual experience is self-referential is simply that it figures in its own conditions of satisfaction. (p. 49)

We can say either that it is part of the content of the visual experience that if it is to be satisfied it must be caused by its Intentional object; or, more clumsily but more accurately, it is part of the content of the visual experience, that if it is to be satisfied it must be caused by the state of affairs that its Intentional object exists and has those features that are presented in the visual experience. And it is in this sense that the Intentional content of the perceptual experience is causally self-referential. (p. 49)

Searle seems to me entirely right and extremely insightful in his claim that the Intentional content of a visual experience should reflect the fact that the content of a visual experience is satisfied only if the experience is caused by entities of the sort represented as present by the experience. This condition on success or satisfaction must indeed be somehow reflected in the content of the experience, given our assumption that Intentional states' content is identified in terms of the satisfaction conditions of the states.

It is not enough for the satisfaction of the Intentional content that there be some entity in the vicinity that has the visible properties presented by the visual experience. Less obviously, it is not enough for an account of the nature of the experience (and of how the experience refers to entities in the physical world) that one state that the visual experience must be caused by the entities represented by the experience in order for the entities to be seen. In specifying *what experience it is*, one must take account of this condition and somehow reflect it in one's specification of the content of the experience itself. The Intentional content must itself somehow reflect the causal condition of its satisfaction. Searle emphasizes this point and is right to do

so. Many have failed to see the point at all; and many others have not seen it as clearly.

What is missing, however, is reason for taking satisfaction conditions in the form of (e') – rather than some other form, such as (a') – to account for Intentional content. For, by including a demonstrative element in the content of the visual experience, in the way that (a') does, one may reflect in the Intentional content the condition that to be veridical the experience must be caused by an entity that is (say) F. An *account* of the semantical or Intentional nature of the visual demonstrative in the visual version of (a') should require that the demonstrative fails to apply to anything unless the experience is appropriately caused. On this view, the Intentional content given in a visual version of (a') *does* require “that the fact that there is an [F] in front of me must be the cause of that very visual experience” (pp. 47–8).

Searle's argument that visual experiences are self-referential is similarly in-specific. He writes that “the sense in which the visual experience is self-referential is simply that it figures in its own conditions of satisfaction” (p. 49). He continues: “it is part of the content of the visual experience, that if it is to be satisfied it must be caused by the state of affairs that its Intentional object exists and has those features that are presented in the visual experience. And it is in this sense that the Intentional content of the perceptual experience is causally self-referential” (p. 49).<sup>5</sup>

But in an ordinary sense, the visual experience does “figure” in its own conditions of satisfaction according to a theory that gives the Intentional content and “conditions of satisfaction” as (a'). Such a theory might add a meta-specification of what it is to be “the relevant F” by requiring that the experience whose content is being given, and which contains the demonstrative element, be appropriately caused by the object being demonstrated. Similarly, in a non-technical sense it is surely true that it is “part of” the conditions laid down by (a') that to be veridical, the visual experience must be appropriately caused. Any theory that treats satisfaction conditions of an Intentional state as token-reflexive will be “self-referential” in this broad sense.

The difference between (a') and (e') is, of course, that in (a') self-referentiality is made explicit only in the background condition (entailed or presupposed by (a')) that *provides a descriptive account* of the semantical workings of the demonstrative in (a'). Someone whose Intentional state was constituted by satisfaction conditions and Intentional content given by the unbracketed part of (a') could reflect on that state and give a descriptive account of what is presupposed by (a'). Such a person would be expanding on the bracketed part of (a'). One could note that implicit in the use of the demonstrative is a background condition that the very experience involving the demonstrative occurrence be appropriately caused. (e') is such a descriptive account; there the self-reference is fully explicit.

In making the critical point, one may say that Searle's argument is in-specific as between the two types of satisfaction condition. Or one may say that the argument tacitly assumes strict notions of “figures in” and “part of” that would rule out (a') – whereas such assumptions are in need of support. Nothing in the argument provides a reason for rejecting (a') as giving “the satisfaction conditions” of the visual experience. For (a') takes full account of the point that motivates Searle's proposals – the point about the need to reflect *in* the conditions of satisfaction, and so in the Intentional content, the requirement that veridical visual experience be caused. The question is why it should be reflected one way rather than another.



## V

Now one might be baffled about why the fine distinctions between (a') and (e') matter. After all, I claim that (a') presupposes something like (e'). So it may appear that there is no basis for taking them as rivals. As long as one is talking about satisfaction conditions alone, they are not rivals. In some loose sense, they are just different ways of laying down requirements for veridicality that ultimately determine the same conditions in the world.

But a theory of Intentional content is not just a theory of satisfaction conditions. It is simultaneously a theory of mental states – mental abilities and cognitive point of view. Let us accept the view that “truth conditions” are “internal” to the mental states in the sense that they are the fundamental or “intrinsic” aspects of mental kinds. Let us accept the view that “truth conditions” exhaust the “content” of those states, in the sense that nothing beyond a relevant “truth condition” is thus fundamental. Still, truth conditions that are equivalent in requiring for their veridicality that the same state(s) of affairs obtain may nonetheless differ in the types of mental abilities they individuate. They may, to use Frege’s language, constitute different modes of presentation.

A thought of the form (a') – the unbracketed part (see note 4 below) – requires less sophistication, less reflection, fewer conceptual resources than a thought of the form (e'). Yet Searle gives no explicit argument for fixing on (e'), other than the inconclusive one that we have already canvassed.

It seems to me that Searle is guilty of just the thing that he (correctly) accuses his “direct reference” opponents of: concentrating so exclusively on semantical issues that issues in epistemology and the philosophy of mind are distorted or neglected.<sup>6</sup>

Searle does provide some discussion of the mental abilities required by (S), the visual analogue of (e'). He holds a realist position about perception. He claims that although the Intentional content of (S) makes reference to a visual experience, one *sees* only physical objects and properties, not the visual experiences (p. 38). And he holds that although we see such objects by way of our visual experiences, we do not infer the physical object from awareness of the visual experience (p. 73). On the other hand, Searle holds that we do *experience* our visual experiences (p. 74), that we experience them as caused (p. 74), and that we are “directly aware” of the causal nexus between our experiences and the objects that cause them (pp. 123, 125).

It is unclear what distinctions are being drawn here between experiencing and seeing. Both terms, particularly the former, have been construed in many different ways by different philosophers. I think that progress can be made, however, by isolating and discussing two significant issues: One is whether in every instance of vision, the subject experiences causal relations between physical objects and his perceptions in such a way that reference to those relations is a visual ability invariably exercised by his visual apparatus, and made available by that apparatus for the formation of thoughts. The other issue is whether in every instance of vision, the subject experiences, or is directly aware of, his own visual experiences in such a way that visual beliefs automatically are about or make reference to those experiences.

Searle appears to take an affirmative stand on both issues.<sup>7</sup> He must do so if his favored conditions of satisfaction are to provide a general account of Intentional

content. I shall concentrate more on the second issue than the first. I shall, however, make a few remarks about Searle's position on causation.

It seems to me implausible in the extreme to claim that we invariably visually experience causal relations between physical objects and our own perceptions. What is Searle's argument for that view? There are some generalized references to the work of Piaget that indicates that our experience of one event following another is different from our experience of one event causing another (pp. 115, 127). This work does not, however, concern experience of causal relations between physical objects and experiences – but rather between “external” physical events and other “external” physical events. So it is relevant at most in suggesting that we sometimes experience causal relations other than those Searle appeals to.<sup>8</sup>

Searle's primary argument for the view is a repeat of the argument that the Intentional content of visual experiences is captured by their “truth conditions,” and “truth conditions” make reference to the relevant causal relations: “I get a direct experience of causation from the fact that part of the Intentional content of my experience of perceiving is caused by the object perceived, i.e., it is satisfied only if it is caused by the presence and features of the object” (p. 130; cf. p. 125). This direct move from an “analysis” of truth conditions, one that involves “ascent,” to a conclusion about direct experience is illegitimate for the reasons we have developed earlier.

In a footnote Searle produces a supplementary argument that we experience causal relations between objects and our perceptual experiences (p. 124n.). He appeals to the experienced difference between voluntarily producing an image of a house and actually seeing the house (where, presumably the qualitative elements of the two experiences are identical). This argument is inconclusive. The difference can be accounted for by assuming that we experience (as such) our voluntary efforts in the former case and not in the latter. On reflection, we come to realize that passive experience is caused. But unreflective passive experience involves no more than a lack of the experience of our own activity.

I turn now to the second of the issues mentioned above: the issue of whether in every instance of vision, the subject “experiences,” or is directly aware of, his own visual experiences in such a way that visual beliefs automatically are about or make reference to those experiences. Again the issue is not settled by the argument from “truth conditions.” It depends on further discussion of mental ability.

There are surely various loose senses in which we “directly experience” or are “aware of” our visual experiences. They are part of our conscious, visual life; we react to them in a discriminating way. But Searle's view requires more. *Reference* to those experiences must be part of every visual experience of physical objects. To be part of experience in the relevant sense, it is not necessary, I think, to be conscious. But I take it that experience is something that is available for use by a subject's central cognitive system. Visual experience is what is automatically supplied by the visual system to the rest of the cognitive system for purposes of judgment and intention. The relevant referential events must automatically be part of the references of judgments and intentions that incorporate visual models of presentation. I find this view very implausible.

To make reference to one's visual experiences, over and above the physical objects that one sees by means of them, one must have some means of distinguishing experiences from the objects they are experiences of. There is a sense in which

the visual system itself must make some such discriminations in order to have objective reference to physical entities. The system must be capable of screening subjective visual phenomena from the deliverances of the system that have objective significance. But there is no ground for thinking that the system makes systematic reference to causal relations between physical entities and unconscious visual representations of them. And although visual experiences are manipulated within the visual system, they are not thereby referred to by the subject in visual experience. Such manipulations and discriminations are unconscious, automatic, and most important inaccessible to use by other parts of the cognitive system. Empirical evidence and common sense both suggest that they are not supplied to visually based thoughts useable by the central cognitive system. Only the results of the visual system's filtering its information through such discriminations are supplied.<sup>9</sup>

For the subject's judgments to make reference to visual experiences, the subject himself, not merely a sub-system of the subject, must be capable of making discriminations between experiences and physical objects, and of using these discriminations in a wide range of judgments, judgments which presumably would involve reasoning about the discriminations. I think that these are what are ordinarily called "conceptual discriminations." The subject must be capable of making and utilizing these discriminations in a variety of practical and cognitive endeavors.

I see no reason to alter the view of common sense, developmental psychology, and cognitive ethology that these distinctions cannot be drawn by many higher animals, children, and adults of low intelligence that nonetheless have visual experience of physical objects. They lack the conceptual resources to make the distinctions on which reference to their experiences would have to be based. A content like (S) guarantees inferences, available to the whole cognitive system, that distinguish experiences from physical objects that cause them. But such inferences are not guaranteed by the visual experiences themselves. People and animals make reference to physical objects alone in many (most) of their visual experiences and their judgments that incorporate visual modes of presentation. Although (S) approximates a reflective *account* of the semantical principles governing these experiences, it does not represent or provide an equivalent of the mental abilities that are exercised in the experiences themselves.

Searle's account of Intentional content in (S) is nearly the same as Russell's (cf. note 1). But there is a significant difference. Russell combined his account with – and even motivated it by – a distinctive epistemology and theory of mental ability. He thought that all knowledge rested on acquaintance with one's present experiences and with universals. And he thought that acquaintance is a non-propositional, perspective-free, infallible sort of cognition. One makes reference in thought to all entities other than present experiences and universals only by description – only by forming Intentional complexes out of the entities known by acquaintance, complexes that descriptively denote the other entities.

Searle does not appear to be committed to this preposterous theory. He says that we see physical objects "directly." He does not clarify in detail what he means by "directly." But he does not mean that we are "acquainted" with them in Russell's sense. We see them by way of Intentional contents and visual experiences, neither of which we see. And our seeing them is fallible. But seeing physical objects seems to be epistemologically basic. Searle holds that our knowledge that a physical object

causes my visual experience is *less basic* than the knowledge that I see the physical object: "The knowledge that the car caused my visual experience derives from the knowledge that I see the car, and not conversely" (p. 73).<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, reference in thought to particular physical objects, on Searle's view as on Russell's, occurs only through descriptions (descriptions containing demonstratives). And the descriptions are anchored in demonstrative relations to our present experiences. Searle says nothing about our cognitive relations to our present visual experiences, except that reference to such experiences in the Intentional content is by way of an ineliminable demonstrative element ("this").

The lack of discussion of the demonstrative relation between the thinker and present experiences is a serious deficiency. In view of the fact that this is the only sort of demonstrative relation, according to Searle's theory of Intentional content, one would expect there to be a serious account of the cognitive and mental abilities that correspond to this unique sort of reference (or Intentionality) in thought.

There is an apparent mismatch here between Searle's epistemology and his theory of Intentional content. If seeing physical objects is epistemologically fundamental, then the most basic form of cognitive reference should correspond to that relation. The most basic form is demonstrative (or indexical) reference. So a realist view of perception should, I think, be combined with an account of Intentional content that countenances demonstrative relations between the thinker and physical objects. Assuming agreement on the basic outlines of Searle's theory of perception, this point favors a theory of satisfaction conditions and Intentional content for ordinary visual experience along the lines of (a'), rather than (e') or (S).<sup>11</sup>

The same basic critical point can be put another way. We noted above that knowledge of the causal relation between visual experiences and physical objects seems posterior to the experience (and knowledge of the experience) of seeing physical objects (cf. p. 73, and note 10) We gain knowledge of the causal relation, and indeed of our own visual experiences, by reflecting on unreflective visual experience. If this is to be possible, there must be a cognitive *step* of some sort between the unreflective experience and the knowledge gained by reflection. Searle's theory collapses the step by attributing to the unreflective visual experience satisfaction conditions that are the result of reflection. The theory of satisfaction conditions does not match the facts of mental ability.

Russell's theory does not involve these mismatches. But it is committed to a highly implausible theory of perception, knowledge, and mental ability. If one gives up these theories, one should give up his strategy for representing Intentional content. One should recognize demonstrative reference in thought to physical objects.

## VI

The distinction between the mental abilities backing satisfaction conditions of the forms (a') and (S) can be further elucidated by standing back from special issues regarding reference to causation or visual experiences. It is possible to have a perceptual belief that that yellow station wagon is self-identical and yet be in a position

to reason about whether to accept the view that the yellow station wagon causing this very experience is that yellow station wagon. One might, for example wonder whether two yellow station wagons are causing this very experience – whereas only one of them is *that one*. On Searle's account such doubt, described in the way I have described it, is not really possible. For the perceptual model of presentation that I have expressed by "that yellow station wagon" has the *same* content as "the yellow station wagon that is causing this very experience." (I am happy to enrich these contents by assuming that "yellow station wagon" is a stand-in for a concrete visual model of presentation that images the object. The point still stands.)

The argument, a variant of Frege's argument for distinguishing senses, indicates that the Intentional content of the visual mode of presentation must be different from that of the account of that content stated in (S).

The case suggests a mare's nest of problems about causal theories of perception. Searle suppresses these problems when he presents his analogue of (S), and only takes them up briefly later (pp. 135–40). There he makes some suggestions about how to deal with problems. He holds, with some diffidence, that cases of deviant causation can be ruled out by such conditions as the following: the object that is seen must cause the visual perception by a plannable, regular pattern of causation. It is not important for our purposes whether such conditions deal with all the cases. What is important is that the conditions must be incorporated into the account of the Intentional content of visual perception if one is to provide a correct account of "satisfaction conditions". (Searle does not note this. Perhaps he regarded it as obvious.)

Incorporating the fruits of reflecting on deviant causal chains into the account of Intentional content provides a more nearly accurate account of the satisfaction conditions of visual experience. But it provides an even less plausible account of the perspective, and mental abilities, involved in having visual experience. It is obvious that one arrives at an account of non-deviant causation only after reflecting on numerous cases that most people have never thought of. And it is obvious that one is reasonable in being uncertain (as Searle is) that one's account is correct. This very uncertainty, expressed in the material mode (i.e. without semantic ascent), counts against theories of Intentional content gotten by supplementing (S) or (e') with more conditions. Even if a thought like "that [visually presented] yellow station wagon is the yellow station wagon causing this experience in a plannable, regular way" is firmly believed, it is informative in a way that the associated self-identity is not.

One is tempted to note here that supplementations of (S) or (e') are arrived at by reflection, not by induction from ordinary empirical observations. Many would hold that they are knowable *a priori*. Some would infer from this that everyone already knows them. Does this line of reasoning help such accounts?

I do not think so. In the first place, it does not follow from the assumption that the accounts are discoverable by *a priori* means that everyone already knows them. Much *a priori* knowledge is new knowledge (witness the growth of mathematical knowledge). If someone managed to provide a correct and known "account" of non-deviant causation, it would constitute new knowledge in philosophy.

In the second place, even if everyone with a visual system always knew, in some unconscious way, things of the form

(Frege) that [visually presented] F is [necessarily] the [visually presented] F causing this experience in a plannable, regular way,

that knowledge would still have different and greater cognitive value than a mere thought of self-identity (that that [visually presented] F is [necessarily] self-identical). The former thought connects the seen object to the very most general conditions for seeing it. The latter, self-identity thought provides no philosophically interesting insight at all. This indicates, I think, that the cognitive content of the latter phrase in the identity (Frege) is not identical with the former.

## VII

(a') (from section III) is essentially analogous to the explication of demonstrative or indexical beliefs, including perceptual beliefs, that I gave in "Belief De Re."<sup>12</sup> On my view, demonstrative elements – which I contrasted with conceptual elements – should be taken as primitive in mental states, or their Intentional contents. In order to have a reference, demonstrative elements must be part of a particular thinker's thought or experience in a particular context. The individuation of a demonstrative element, its intentional properties, and its referent normally depend on some one particular mental event. In this regard, demonstrative elements contrast with conceptual elements, which have a constant reference or extension regardless of who thinks them or when they are thought. To be *de re*, a thought should both contain a primitive demonstrative element in its content and involve successful reference (application) through a demonstrative element to an object or *re*. Relevant *res* may be physical or mental.

The two requirements for being a *de re* thought are separable. It is possible for an applied demonstrative element to fail to have a referent. Since thoughts are individuated in terms of their contents (including the token applications of demonstrative elements in thought), some demonstrative thoughts are not *de re*. Moreover, since some demonstrative token applications that in fact have a referent might have failed to have had one (if the contextual circumstances had been different), some thought tokens that are in fact *de re* are not essentially *de re*. The very same demonstrative thought might have lacked a referent if the world beyond the thought had been different.<sup>13</sup>

In my terms, Searle's account treats perceptual belief as *de re*. He treats the contents of such beliefs as irreducibly demonstrative and as having successful demonstrative applications. It is just that he holds that the only possible demonstrative applications in perceptual thoughts are to perceptual states. I hold that demonstrative applications may be directly to the objects of vision – physical objects.

Searle sees himself as attacking all views that take any beliefs to be irreducibly "*de re*." Obviously he uses the terminology differently. In his discussion of my views, this difference in terminology leads to his overestimating how much we disagree, and prevents his precisely identifying the points of disagreement.

Searle thinks that it is characteristic of a philosopher's believing in *de re* belief that the philosopher hold that such beliefs are not individuated solely in terms of their mental contents (pp. 198, 208, 210–11). He thinks I hold this view:

According to Burge such beliefs cannot be completely or exhaustively characterized in terms of their Intentional contents, because, as he puts it, there are contextual, non-conceptual elements which are crucial to the identity of the belief. (p. 211; cf. also p. 214, no. 3)

This remark contains a misunderstanding. I think that characterizing a *de re* belief as *de re*, requires reference to the *re*, which may indeed be outside the Intentional content. But as I have noted, the property of being a *de re* belief is not in general essential to the identity of the belief. I do not think that a physical *re* in the empirical world beyond the thinker is itself "part of" the belief. (I am familiar with this way of talking, but find it artificial and unilluminating; cf. section III and note 3.) In my view, the Intentional side of a belief is its only side. In many cases, in my view, a belief that is in fact *de re* might not have been successfully referential (could have failed to be *de re*) and still would have remained the same belief. Moreover, the belief itself can always be individuated, or completely characterized, in terms of the Intentional content. Thus the Intentional content is crucial to the identity of the belief.

It is true that I think that there are contextual, nonconceptual elements that are crucial to the identity of the *de re* belief. But these are not the physical individuals, the *res*. Nor are they the causal relations between physical object and perceiver. (They are critical for reference, but not in every case for belief identity.) They are the demonstrative element and the token act of application in the demonstrative belief. These are part of the Intentional content.

Searle's own position involves acknowledging that there are contextual, non-conceptual elements, in this sense, that are crucial to the identity of the belief. He also appeals to ineliminable demonstrative elements in thought. On these important points we are in fundamental agreement. Thus my examples and arguments were not directed against a view such as his that already recognizes such elements. They were directed against pure descriptivist views and against views, such as Frege's, that hold that all elements of Intentional content have their intentional properties timelessly and independently of any particular person's doing any thinking.

Searle is right to think that his sort of view can accommodate my examples (granted an adequate account of deviant causal chains). He is wrong to think that I thought otherwise. My objection to the sort of view that he proposes is not that it cannot accommodate the examples, and not that it tries to individuate all belief in terms of Intentional content. It is that it does not match the theory of Intentional content with the theory of knowledge, and gives a misleading picture of mental ability.

A characterization of a disagreement that is closer to being accurate concerns reference, not belief identity. Searle characterizes "*de re* theorists" as holding that

internal Intentional content is insufficient to determine what [the thinker] is referring to. They share the view that in order to account for the relations between words [thoughts] and the world we need to introduce external contextual, non-conceptual, causal relations between the [thinking of thoughts] and the features of the world that the [thought] is about. (p. 199)

they mistakenly suppose that [contextual features on which perceptual and indexical beliefs depend] cannot themselves be entirely represented as part of the Intentional content. (p. 214)<sup>14</sup>

These quotations point toward a genuine disagreement. But they do not identify it precisely. The notion of "introduction" in the first quotation is really not very clear. Searle's own account of the relation between thoughts and the world makes reference in the satisfaction conditions for visual experience to plannable causal regularities between external objects and visual experiences. Such regularities are contextual and non-conceptual. And if there were no such regularities, there would be no relations between perceptual experiences and the world. In a straightforward sense he too "introduces" causal relations in order to account for referential relations.

Of course, Searle specifies these in what he calls the Intentional content of the visual experience, whereas I would specify them in rules governing (and presupposed by) the thinking of demonstrative thoughts. But Searle's notion of Intentional content as the "satisfaction condition" for thoughts is not sharp enough to locate the disagreement. For I too count my presupposed rules of reference as "satisfaction conditions" for demonstrative thoughts.

The real issue once again is whether these relatively complex satisfaction conditions, which analyze the mechanism of reference to physical objects, articulate the mental abilities exercised in visual experience. I take a clear negative position on this issue. Searle does not squarely identify the issue. But in so far as his view is intended as a distinctive alternative, it would appear that he is committed to a positive position.

As I have argued, a positive position blurs an important distinction between what visual experience itself transmits to us – or more generally what cognitive abilities are exercised in a particular *de re* thought – and what we obtain by reflection on that experience. Such reflection makes use of philosophical analysis and reasoning that clearly go beyond any particular visual experiences or particular *de re* thoughts. It makes use of knowledge summed up from visual experience. The problem with Searle's apparent view is not that "the contextual features on which perceptual and indexical beliefs depend *cannot* themselves be entirely represented as part of the Intentional content" (p. 214, my emphasis), for any possible notion of Intentional content. The problem is that the notion of Intentional content that one obtains by including such features does not correspond to our cognitive states or mental abilities.

#### NOTES

- 1 The historical Russell, not the approach of neo-Russellians, often called "direct reference" theorists. Cf. Bertrand Russell, "On the Nature of Acquaintance" and "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. Robert Charles Marsh (Allen and Unwin: London, 1956); "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," in *Mysticism and Logic* (W. W. Norton and Co.: New York, 1929). The general type of approach bears comparison with one defended by Stephen Schiffer, "The Basis of Reference," *Erkenntnis* 13 (1978), pp. 171–206. Numerals surrounded by parentheses in the text will refer to page



numbers in John Searle's *Intentionality* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1983).

- 2 Actually, I think that use of the word "there" may constitute a slip on Searle's part. The spirit of his account of the Intentional content of visual states is to hold that only the states themselves may be the referents of primitive demonstratives. "There" obviously is meant to refer to a place. A fuller Searlean analysis would presumably analyze "there" in terms of some specified relation of the place to "this" visual experience.
- 3 Searle is fully aware of these points. Cf. e.g. *Intentionality*, pp. 63, 214. He is right to complain that some of his opponents pay too little heed to them. As I shall indicate more fully below, one of the ways in which he misconstrues my view is that he fails to see that I am also fully aware of these points.
- 4 In discussing (a') in the rest of the paper, I shall often refer to (a') as giving the Intentional content of a statement or thought or visual experience. This will be shorthand. I will always mean that the *unbracketed part* of (a') gives or displays or mimics the Intentional content; the bracketed part provides instructions to the reader for understanding how the unbracketed part is to be understood. In saying that (the unbracketed part of) (a') gives the Intentional content of a thought, I will not be assuming that a demonstrative is explicitly tokened in some inner language of thought. I assume only that the thought or visual experience involves the exercise of a demonstrative ability and that this exercise has the formal and semantical properties of an applied demonstrative. Obviously, this ability need not to consciously exercised. As will later become clear, there is much more to be said about the Intentional content in (a'). For example, "relevant" can be glossed in terms of conditions on the original demonstrative's picking out the right object. Moreover, the Intentional content does not include any physical object that is actually picked out: the content is a demonstrative applications of something of the form "That F is G." Sometimes a demonstrative content fails to pick out any object. And sometimes, even when it does, it can be individuated independently of that object. The satisfaction conditions require that there be a relevant demonstrated object if the Intentional content is to be true. I shall discuss these matters further in sections IV and VII.
- 5 Both passages are quoted above. See also the passage quoted from pp. 47–8 that relies on the phrase "makes essential reference." This phrase may be treated in a way parallel to the way I treat "figures in," "part of," and "is self-referential" in what follows.
- 6 Searle is perhaps indirectly acknowledging the worry that the satisfaction conditions in (S) are unexpectedly complicated in his insistence that (S) "is not in any sense a translation."

It is rather a verbal specification of what the Intentional content requires if it is to be satisfied. The sense then in which the visual Intentional content is self-referential is not that it contains a verbal or other representation of itself. . . . Rather, the sense in which the visual experience is self-referential is simply that it figures in its own conditions of satisfaction. (pp. 48–9; cf. p. 213)

What Searle asserts here is inspecific in the same way the argument for his form of truth conditions is. Any view that takes indexicality (or "token reflexivity") as ineliminable will at some level require that the relevant token (here, the visual experience) figure in its own conditions of satisfaction. Part of Searle's denial in this passage is uncontroversial. The reference in (S) is obviously not to the content, but to the visual experience itself. It is less clear what Searle means by denying that (S) is a translation. "Translation" does perhaps carry inappropriate connotations: visual experience is non-verbal; one may think that comparison of visual experience to an "inner language" is misleading; and certainly not all the concrete visual modes of presentation can be captured in ordinary English expressions. But it seems to me that what is wanted is a representation of the content of a mental state that *is* the closest possible cognitive equivalent.

I am inclined to think that Searle's denial of the translation analogy is not meant to excuse the account from the considerations regarding mental ability. Some readers have taken Searle in this way. On such a reading, Searle is only giving an account of abstract truth conditions

that does not purport to correspond in any fine-grained way to mental abilities. I think that such a reading would render Searle's account irrelevant to some of the theories of *de re* belief (such as mine) that he criticizes as alternatives. Cf. section VII.

- 7 Searle's commitment to the view that reference to causation and to the experiences themselves is made available to the formation of thoughts – that is, accessible to the central cognitive systems of a person or animal – is clear throughout the discussion. Cf. e.g. *Intentionality*, pp. 69–70.
- 8 The relevance of Piaget's work to the present issue is further attenuated by the fact that the discriminations that Piaget discovers are acquired. Searle is arguing that such "experience" of causation is part of the content of *every* visual experience. So if there are visual experiences in a child before it acquires the ability to make the discriminations, Searle must *argue* that the experience of causation is present before the ability to discriminate it is acquired.
- 9 For detailed discussion of empirical findings on this and related matters, see David Marr, *Vision* (W. H. Freeman and Co.: San Francisco, 1982).
- 10 I think that Searle would do well to explain how this claim is to be represented within his theory. Since the intentional content of seeing the car is couched in terms of the car's causing my visual experience, it is not evident how knowledge of the latter can be *derived* from knowledge of the former. It appears that knowledge of the former just is, on Searle's account, knowledge of the latter. They appear to be equally basic. This apparent mismatch between Searle's epistemological remarks (with which I am sympathetic) and his account of intentional content seems to me symptomatic of the larger problem with the view that I will go on to develop.
- 11 I am, of course, glossing over many complex issues in the theory of perception. Although I very much agree with Searle's basic approach, I think a more thorough account of the senses in which perception of physical objects is "basic" needs to be given. The primary point of agreement is that perception of physical properties is not a product of inference on the part of the perceiving subject from experience of visual experiences. (It is, however, the product of inference-like transformations carried out by the subject's visual system.) I add two other points here. I think that we obtain knowledge of – and make reference to – the visual experiences only long after we have perceptual knowledge of physical objects. I think that physical properties are the primary "objects" of vision in the sense that obtaining information about them is the primary objective of the visual system; and I think that an account of vision should be centered on this fact.
- 12 "Belief De Re," *Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1977), pp. 338–62.
- 13 This point is made in "Belief De Re". But it is more prominent in my "Russell's Problem and Intentional Identity," in *Agent, Language, and the Structure of the World*, ed. Tomberlin (Hackett Publishing Co.: Indianapolis, 1983).

Although I think that some demonstrative occurrences might have lacked a referent (cf. note 14 below), the nature and intentional content of a demonstrative may in some cases be fixed by the identity of the referent. This is always true of indexicals like "I": the same indexical occurrence could not have occurred with a different referent, or without a referent. My views on the individuation of demonstrative occurrences bear a complex relation to my anti-individualistic views on concept determination. (On the latter, cf. e.g. my "Other Bodies," in *Thought and Object*, ed. Woodfield (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1982); "Individualism and Psychology," *The Philosophical Review* 95 (1986), pp. 3–45; and "Intellectual Norms and Foundations of Mind," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986), pp. 697–720.) Empirical concepts for physical objects are, I think, always determined to be what they are by causal and intentional relations that the individual bears to satisfiers of empirical concepts (though sometimes these relations are indirect – through other empirical concepts, or even through other members of the species). Someone sympathetic with this anti-individualistic view of concept individuation might think that an anti-individualistic view of demonstrative elements is straightforward

and simple. There are views that individuate *all* demonstrative occurrences in such a way that it is impossible for such occurrences to be the same if a different referent is present or if there is no referent. For a variety of reasons, I think that this simple view is incorrect. My anti-individualistic views on the individuation of concepts do not transfer in this simplified and unqualified way to demonstrative elements in thought. But I will reserve discussion of these issues to another occasion.

- 14 Searle sometimes seems to take the opposition position on reference to dictate an opposing position on belief-identity. He seems to treat the two questions in the following passage as equivalent and answers both negatively: "Do some beliefs relate the believer directly to an object without the mediation of an Intentional content which is sufficient to individuate the object? Are they such that a change in the world would necessarily mean a change in the belief even if what is in the head remained constant?" (p. 214).

I think that no beliefs relate the believer to an object without mediation of an Intentional content. But my answer to the former question is nevertheless "yes." The Intentional content is not always sufficient to individuate the object, at least in this sense: the Intentional content considered on its own, independently of the contextual circumstances (including events outside the thinker's mind or body) in which it occurs, is sometimes insufficient to individuate the object. That is, in some cases the demonstrative element in the content that is in fact successfully applied to a physical object might have failed to apply to that object (and either would have applied to nothing or applied to some other object); yet the demonstrative element and its token application would have been the same. Thus the demonstrative element does not by its nature and individuation always suffice to individuate the object: the surrounding circumstances in which the element is applied play a supplementary role. What the demonstrative applies to depends not only on the nature of the Intentional content but on the context in which it is thought. On this point, Searle and I are indeed in disagreement. But Searle seems to think that disagreeing with him on the first question in the quoted passage entails disagreement on the second. In fact, my view is that in those very cases in which the demonstrative element fails to individuate its object, in the sense just specified, a change in the world (in the referent) would not necessarily mean a change in the belief.