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CHECKING SEARLE'S BACKGROUND

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RESUMEN

El significado literal de una oración corriente es consistente a menudo con interpretaciones inaceptables. La hipótesis searleana del Trasfondo nos capacita para entender cómo ese significado literal podría proporcionar, a pesar de todo, una determinada condición de satisfacción. Pero Searle pretende que el Trasfondo sea una condición que afecta a la representación en general, no solamente a la significación representacional de los elementos lingüísticos. En este artículo se argumenta, usando distinciones que el propio Searle ha trazado, que es en la transmisión de la intencionalidad de lo mental a lo lingüístico donde se abre el vacío entre significado y condición de satisfacción. De este modo, una distinción más cuidadosa pone a prueba el papel que desempeña el Trasfondo.

ABSTRACT

The literal meaning of an ordinary sentence is often consistent with unacceptable interpretations. Searle's hypothesis of the Background enables us to understand how that literal meaning might nevertheless yield a determinate condition of satisfaction. But Searle intends the Background to be a condition on representation in general, not just on the representational significance of linguistic items. This paper argues, using distinctions Searle himself has drawn, that it is in the transmission of intentionality from the mental to the linguistic that a gap between meaning and condition of satisfaction opens up. A sharper distinction between mental and linguistic intentionality thus checks the role of the Background.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970s, John Searle has been interested in a philosophical problem. As is his wont, Searle has confronted the problem directly. This paper will discuss the problem and Searle's response to it.

What is the problem? Just to have a name, we might here call it the "problem of satisfaction conditions". The problem concerns a logical gap between literal meaning and condition of satisfaction: literal meaning appears to be logically insufficient for condition of satisfaction. Searle's response is to recognize a set of capacities, abilities, and general know-how which he calls, collectively, the 'Background'. The Background is supposed to enable intentionality to func-

tion; in particular, it fills the representational lacuna. Its existence is then a precondition of a properly functioning intentional system.

I will *not* argue that Searle's response to his problem is unsuccessful. I address it because I want to recommend an alternative, an alternative which can be supported in terms with which Searle would, I think, find himself in broad agreement. Indeed significant support for the alternative can be found more or less explicitly in Searle's own work. On the other hand, Searle has considered the alternative I favor, if not in extensive detail, and he has rejected it. The alternative thus does represent a significant departure from the *direction* of Searle's work.

The dialectical situation should ultimately appear as follows: there is a problem concerning conditions of satisfaction. Searle finds one way of responding: the Background. This response is promising, though it has drawn criticism[1] and has not yet been fully completed. The problem admits, however, of another response. And though he rejects this alternative, it finds substantial support in arguments Searle himself has developed in much of his work. Thus the alternative may be superior even from the point of view of his own position. That, at least, is what I hope to make plausible.

II. The Problem of Satisfaction Conditions

What exactly is the problem of satisfaction conditions that leads Searle to suppose there must be a Background? Meaning appears to contribute in a systematic way to the determination of conditions of satisfaction. We can focus on truth-conditions: the meaning of a truth-evaluable linguistic entity appears to contribute to its condition of truth in a systematic way. It is easy to be tempted by the claim that this systematicity is in virtue of the *identity* of truth condition and meaning. This of course will not do: consider for just one example the relations between the meanings and truth conditions respectively of '2+2=4' and '2+3=5'. Still, we might think that although truth condition is insufficient for meaning, the converse is otherwise. We might think, that is, that though truth condition does not uniquely determine meaning, meaning *does* uniquely determine truth condition; and hence that though identity of truth condition does not guarantee identity of meaning, identity of meaning *will* guarantee identity of truth condition.

It is here that Searle's concern sharpens. According to him, the same literal meaning can determine *different* truth conditions. To begin to see this, the best source is Searle himself [Searle (1992), pp. 178-79].

> [I]f you consider occurrences of the word "cut" in sentences such as "Sam cut the grass," "Sally cut the cake," "Bill cut the cloth," "I just cut my skin," you

> will see that the word "cut" means the same in each. This is shown, for example, by the fact that conjunction reduction works for the occurrences of this verb with these direct objects. For example, one can say "General Electric has invented a new device that will cut grass, cut cakes, cut cloth, and cut skin". One can simply then eliminate the last three occurrences of "cut" and put "General Electric has invented a new device that will cut grass, cake, cloth, and skin".
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> [...] the utterances contain the literal occurrence of the verb "cut," but that word, on a normal interpretation, is interpreted differently in each sentence. You can also see this if you imagine the corresponding imperative version of these utterances. If I say "Cut the grass," and you rush out and stab it with a knife, or if I say, "Cut the cake," and you run over it with a lawn mower, there is a perfectly ordinary sense in which you did not do exactly what I asked you to do.

This brings out the logical gap alluded to earlier that Searle finds between literal meaning and condition of satisfaction[2]. Contrast this with different phenomena that have certain (limited) points of contact. Because of the possibility of metaphor, ambiguity, and indirect speech acts, we should in general not be surprised that uses of a given sentence will admit of diverging interpretations and thus diverging truth conditions. Searle's point is that this interpretative gap is not closed by *literality*. What the example of "cut" shows is that even assuming an expression is being used on various occurrences with its literal meaning, still the expression may contribute differently to the conditions of satisfaction of the sentences of which it is a part. Multiplicity of interpretations can, but need not, proceed from non-literal use.

There are different types of case in the same point. In a now well-known example, we are asked to compare the questions "Have you had breakfast?" and "Have you been to Tibet?" Although it might be appropriate to respond to the second by saying "Yes, once, 17 years ago," an analogous answer to the first would be highly unusual, even comical, if not explained further. That is because any utterance of the first question asks, implicitly, whether you have had breakfast *on that same day*. So the question is properly interpreted as having some content that is not explicitly encoded in the sentence uttered. "[A common] suggestion, surely correct, is that sentence meaning, to at least some extent, underdetermines what the speaker says when he utters the sentence. Now the claim I am making is: Sentence meaning *radically* underdetermines the content of what is said" [Searle (1992), p. 181].

The result is that intentional contents appear not to function in isolation. By themselves, they appear incapable of determinate representation in at least the following sense: they always permit a multiplicity of interpretations. One way to put Searle's problem is then as follows: how is the intentional rendered representational? His answer: by the Background.

III. THE BACKGROUND

What then is the Background and how does it take up the slack between intentionality and representation? A complete answer to this question cannot be given here. But we can make a start at understanding it and how it is supposed to work. Perhaps the central point is that the Background is itself *non*-intentional. The Background consists of non-intentional mental capacities, dispositions, stances, ways of behaving, know-how, *savoir faire*, and so on. Unless the Background is non-intentional, to appeal to it in order to explain the representational capacity of intentional items is unhelpful and generates a regress. If there is a problem about the multiple interpretability of intentional items, no appeal to further intentional items is likely to solve the problem: the problem will simply re-arise for these new items. The Background is not and cannot itself be intentional. By effectively eliminating improper interpretations, it allows intentional items to have determinate conditions of satisfaction.

So fully meaningful declarative sentences do have determinate truth conditions relative to specific contexts. However, this is in virtue of constraints on proper interpretation imposed by the Background. Some otherwise candidate conditions of satisfaction are excluded in virtue of conflicting with Background commitments.

Explicit recognition of the Background amounts to an attractive theoretical insight. Much of what Searle says about the Background is clearly correct and illuminating. But Searle is in addition struck by a kind of extension of the problem of satisfaction conditions, and he makes a corresponding extension in his use of the Background. These extensions prompt my skepticism. I think the problem of satisfaction conditions may not extend in the way Searle fears, and this will lead to my preferred alternative.

IV. EXTENDING THE PROBLEM AND THE BACKGROUND

In *Intentionality* [Searle (1983), p. 143], Searle claims that the "Background is a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable *all* representing to take place" (emphasis added). He notes further [*Ibid*. p. 151] that the Background is not on the periphery of Intentionality but permeates the entire Network of Intentional states: "without the Background, [intentional] states could not function, they could not determine conditions of satisfaction". There is a similar passage in Searle (1991b), p. 289. These passages suggest an extension to intentional states generally of the problem of satisfaction conditions that we saw in connection with literal meaning.

Searle sees the problem as endemic to the intentional. Although his explicit arguments emphasize the gap between the literal meaning of natural

language expressions and their conditions of satisfaction, he takes the phenomenon to be general and thus to admit of a general response. The Background not only excludes otherwise available inappropriate interpretations of the sentences of ordinary languages, but it also narrows the range of otherwise acceptable satisfaction conditions for *any* intentional item-belief, desire, hope, fear, *etc*.

That Searle intends the Background to be a condition on the proper functioning of intentionality *in general* is later confirmed in Searle (1992), p. 175: "the [hypothesis of the Background] was originally a claim about literal meaning (Searle 1978), but I believe what applies to literal meaning applies also to speaker's intended meaning, and indeed, to all forms of intentionality, whether linguistic or nonlinguistic"[3]. Perhaps most recently, Searle has said explicitly in Searle (1995), p. 131: "The thesis of the Background can be extended from semantic contents to intentional contents generally". This claim will constitute our point of departure. My alternative begins by doubting that what applies to literal meaning applies to all forms of intentionality; I will recommend a corresponding restriction on the role of the Background. Searle believes the kind of problem we have seen besets intentionality in general; I think that to the extent the problem exists, it is in fact *independent* of intentionality. The source of the phenomenon Searle points to is not intentionality *per se*, but the attempt to *encode* intentionality. Accordingly, I will argue for a more radical break between the intentionality of the mental and that of the linguistic[4].

Before we proceed to the theoretical disagreements and the new theoretical directions, let us begin on common ground. Searle may well be right about the existence of a problem of satisfaction conditions. The examples show that the literal meaning of non-indexical natural language sentences[5] is insufficient to fix a determinate condition of satisfaction. I am convinced that the exclusion of unacceptable interpretations is not to be found in the *semantics* of linguistic expression types; factors external to the semantics must enter in to fix the conditions of satisfaction.

Part of why I am convinced of this, however, is captured by a pair of distinctions, made by Searle himself, (*i*) between *intrinsic* intentionality and *derived* intentionality, and (*ii*) between *representation* intentions and *communication* intentions. We should consider these in turn. I think the notions can be deployed to distinguish more sharply between the intentionality of the *mental* and *linguistic* intentionality. In separating the mental from the linguistic, we may find a more restricted role for the Background.

"Linguistic meaning is a real form of intentionality, but it is not intrinsic intentionality. It is derived from the intrinsic intentionality of the users of the language" [Searle (1992), p. 79]. This seems right; and I agree also that "speech acts have a derived form of intentionality and thus *represent in a dif-*

ferent manner from Intentional states, which have an intrinsic form of Intentionality" [Searle (1983), p. 5, emphasis added]. I will suggest that it is precisely in the *transmission* of intentionality from the mental to the linguistic that the gap between intentionality and representation may open up.

In what way does language derive intentionality from its users?

> [I]n the performance of the speech act [...] there is the intention, in the ordinary and not technical sense of that word, with which the utterance is made [...] it is this [...] Intentional state, that is, the intention with which the act is performed, that bestows the Intentionality on the physical phenomena. Well, how does it work? [...] in broad outline the answer is this: The mind imposes Intentionality on entities that are not intrinsically Intentional by intentionally conferring the conditions of satisfaction *of the expressed psychological state* upon the external physical entity [...] by intentionally uttering something with a certain set of conditions of satisfaction, [...]. I have made the utterance Intentional, *and thus necessarily expressed the corresponding psychological state*. I couldn't make a statement without expressing a belief or make a promise without expressing an intention because the essential condition on the speech act has as conditions of satisfaction the same conditions of satisfaction as the expressed Intentional state. So I impose Intentionality on my utterances by intentionally conferring on them certain conditions of satisfaction *which are the conditions of satisfaction of certain psychological states* [Searle (1983), pp. 27-8, emphasis added].

To make an initial argument in support of my alternative, I will discuss what may be an internal difficulty with Searle's overall position. This is not intended as a *refutation*. I merely want to raise a kind of tension in the position. Recall that according to Searle the Background is part of what enables intentional states generally to have determinate conditions of satisfaction. So, for example, given a normal Background, a particular belief state will have a specific truth condition. Now, in making an assertion, according to Searle, I invest my words with the intentionality they thereby come to have. And I do this "by intentionally conferring the conditions of satisfaction of the expressed psychological state upon" my linguistic token. Remember, "by intentionally uttering something with a certain set of conditions of satisfaction, [...] I have made the utterance Intentional, and thus necessarily expressed the corresponding psychological state".

The potential difficulty is this: If the utterance necessarily has the conditions of satisfaction of the thought, and if the thought already has determinate conditions of satisfaction in virtue of the operation of the Background, then it is unclear how the utterance could *lack* a determinate condition of satisfaction. In other words, the utterance, all by itself, would seem to come ready-made with a determinate condition of satisfaction. Any utterance of 'cut the grass' would, without any (further) input from the Background, have a determinate condition

of satisfaction. It would derive this representational property from the intentional mental state that it is expressing. And that intentional mental state would derive *its* representational property from the Background.

The argument, if it is anything more than a worry, is that *if* the Background helped to determine a definite representational value for any intentional mental state, and *if* linguistic utterances necessarily inherited their conditions of satisfaction from the thought they were used to expressed, *then* there should be no gap between the literal meaning of an utterance and its condition of satisfaction. How could there be? The literal meaning of the utterance, inherited as it would be from the intentional state the utterance is expressing, an intentional state that already has, in virtue of the operation of the Background, a determinate condition of satisfaction, would itself already constitute a determinate condition of satisfaction. But the examples persuade us that the literal meaning of an utterance, even when that utterance is intended to express a thought with a determinate condition of satisfaction, is insufficient for a determinate condition of satisfaction. We are thus led to the idea that linguistic utterances may fail to inherit their conditions of satisfaction from the thought they are intended to express.

There is perhaps a simpler way to make this point more clearly. 'Intend' is not a success term; you can intend to f and yet fail to f. Suppose we accept that every speech act — we'll focus for now on assertion — involves an intention to express a thought. In particular, suppose assertion involves the intention that certain linguistic expressions express one's thought. According to Searle, "In the case of assertives, for example, a man performs an intentional act of uttering and he also intends that utterance to have certain conditions of satisfaction. But those conditions of satisfaction are identical to the conditions of satisfaction of the corresponding belief" [Searle (1983), p. 174]. That is, the conditions of satisfaction the speaker *intends* his utterance to have are identical to the conditions of satisfaction of the corresponding belief. But what if the utterance does not have those same conditions?

V. Initial Considerations in Favor of an Alternative

The intention that your utterance have certain conditions of satisfaction can *fail*. It is possible that you intend your utterance to have certain conditions of satisfaction but that it not have them — perhaps its conditions of satisfaction are not fully determinate. Conditions of satisfaction for utterances are not settled by the intentions involved in their production. Utterances in a language are subject also to *external* constraints, constraints imposed by the language in which they are made.

Like Alice in Wonderland, we cannot make our words mean whatever we want them to; the conditions of satisfaction of an utterance may fail to be identical to those of the thought that utterance is intended to express. In using the declarative sentence ⌜*p*⌝ in English, a speaker uses an expression whose meaning is that *p* — whatever that may be. If that meaning is multiply interpretable, then if the thought the speaker thereby attempted to express has *determinate* conditions of satisfaction, the expression cannot have the same conditions of satisfaction as the thought: those of the thought are fully determinate, those of the expression, even given its meaning, are not. This kind of situation is, I suspect, rather the norm.

Where does it leave the Background? I have so far argued in the direction of a limited revision of Searle's overall program. Part of what sharpens the problem of satisfaction conditions when posed with respect to *linguistic utterances* is that they derive their intentionality — in a complex, social, and convention-governed way — from the thoughts of the users of the language in which the utterance is made.

This feature of linguistic utterances however, their derivative intentionality, permits a diagnosis of the problem slightly different from Searle's. Indeed, if intentional mental states have determinate satisfaction conditions, and if those conditions are converted in a straightforward way into the meanings of utterances, then utterances should *not* have indeterminate satisfaction conditions. But they do. My suggestion is that the transmission of intentionality from mental to linguistic is not straightforward.

We do not simply invest our utterances with the satisfaction conditions of our thoughts. We *intend* that they have certain conditions of satisfaction. But sometimes we are unsuccessful. Our sentence may have a meaning that does not fully determine the satisfaction condition of our thought. The word 'cut' in English, even given its literal meaning, permits multiple interpretations. Even if I utter it with the intention to express a thought whose satisfaction condition *excludes* any use of a lawn mower, the literal meaning of the expression itself does not reflect that exclusion. The literal meaning of 'cut' simply *permits* an interpretation that involves the use of a lawn mower — it permits *unsatisfactory* satisfaction conditions.

Let me stress immediately that by denying that the meaning of the utterance must be *identical* to the meaning of the thought, I do *not* claim that they might be *independent*. I think there will be limits on the degree to which the meaning of an utterance will diverge from the thought it was intended to express, so long as the relevant speaker is proficient with the language in general and with the particular words of his utterance. In a way, what I am noting is the degree to which linguistic items derive their intentionality according to a highly *social* and *holistic* process. It may be that in focusing on

individual speech acts, the interpersonal and conventional character of natural language tends to be underemphasized.

In any case, I said earlier that Searle's discussion of the difference between representation intentions and communication intentions would be helpful in understanding the alternative I will be developing. Before proceeding with that development, it will be worth taking up the contrast Searle exposes. Although representation and communication typically come as a pair, they are distinct phenomena. In a speech act, the speaker normally intends *both* to represent some fact or state of affairs (the representation intention) *and* that listeners recognize that the act was performed with that representation intention (the communication intention). Successful communication thus essentially involves an *inter*action between speaker and listener. The listener must recognize the speaker's representation intention. The logically prior representation intention, on the other hand, does not include a condition on listeners.

VI. Sketch of an Alternative Picture

It may be, though I will be able only to sketch this idea in outline here, that the problem of satisfaction conditions is partly due to features of communication that are not shared by representation generally. More specifically, there appears to be an intimate connection between linguistic meaning and communicative intentions that does not characterize intentionality generally. Representation is, as Searle says, independent of communication. But linguistic meaning, I think, is not.

Recall again the thesis originally used to motivate recognition of the Background: the literal meaning of an expression normally falls short of fully determinate representation. That claim is supported by examples in which it is clear that the literal meaning of an expression is consistent with several incompatible conditions of satisfaction. The consistency in question is demonstrated in terms of the availability of various incompatible *interpretations* of an arbitrary utterance of the expression. Now, without investing too much into the notion of interpretation at work[6], it may be that part of what sustains the relevant intuition is that the utterance cannot by itself *communicate* a fully determinate condition of satisfaction. Someone with a different Background might misinterpret the utterance; and such a misinterpretation need not reflect any specifically *semantic* ignorance.

However, the *speaker* is *not* subject to this kind of misinterpretation. Searle himself has elsewhere urged that "[i]n all discussions in the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind, it is absolutely essential at some point to remind oneself of the first-person case" [Searle (1987), p. 126]. Here

is a case in point. Even if the literal meaning of a given utterance is consistent with a multiplicity of interpretations, that does not entail that the *thought* it is intended to express is similarly insufficient.

The reason for the asymmetry between the speaker and the audience with respect to the possibility of misinterpretation is that the speaker knows what he is thinking *independently* of his utterance whereas the audience must *infer* what the speaker is thinking *from* the utterance. The literal meaning of the utterance may be insufficient to determine satisfaction conditions — semantically proficient listeners could conceivably differ, in different circumstances, with respect to their interpretations of the utterance. But there need be no indeterminacy with respect to the speaker's own "interpretation" of his utterance.

When the speaker says "cut the cake," the literal meaning of what he says is consistent with running the cake over with the mower; what the sentence means thus appears to underdetermine the directive's satisfaction condition. But what the speaker had in mind — which he was attempting to express by means of that utterance — suffers no analogous underdetermination. The speaker is not liable to misinterpret his own utterance because he does not do anything like *interpret* the literal meaning of his utterance. He has a prior grasp of the representational content he attempted to express linguistically. If that attempt was not entirely successful, that is, if the semantics of his chosen utterance are not up to the task of determining the truth conditions of his thought, this problem does not redound to the representational content of the thought itself. The problem is limited to the role of language in *communication*. Perhaps listeners, even those who in one sense *understand* what the speaker has said, could not, were it not for the Background, capture the representational content in question. But we do not in the same sense communicate with ourselves.

I hope the preceding discussion begins to suggest an alternative picture of the relationship between words, thoughts, and the Background. Not only is the intentionality of intentional mental states logically *prior* to the intentionality of linguistic expressions, not only do the latter derive their intentionality from the former, but the former, apparently unlike the latter, *do* determine conditions of satisfaction independently. Unlike the literal meanings of linguistic expressions, thoughts represent independently of the Background.

Searle claims that "Intentional contents are not self-interpreting or self-applying". Notably, however, as support for this he says that

> [e]ven, for example, if someone understood (grasped) all the meanings of *words* and thus to that extent understood (grasped) the meaning of a *sentence* containing those words, the *sentence* is still subject to an indefinite range of different interpretations [...] Even "grasping" the meaning [of a sentence] does not

> fix the interpretation or the application [Searle (1991b), p. 291, emphasis added].

What is striking is the return to the linguistic case. This is of course acceptable as a way of putting his argument because most of his disputants do not seek the kind of radical break between linguistic meaning and the intentionality of the mental that we are pursuing here. But in the context of the present discussion, it is interesting to see whether analogous claims could be made about mental content.

Apparently not. When someone understands (grasps) a thought, that thought is no longer subject to an indefinite range of different interpretations. Thoughts, unlike the literal meanings of natural language expressions, have their representational contents built-in. Searle has said that "there is more to understanding than grasping meanings because, to put it crudely, what one understands goes beyond meaning" [Searle (1983), p. 146]. He's discussing the understanding of linguistic expressions here and he intends the Background to be what must be added to "grasping meanings" in order to achieve "understanding"; but his language is suggestive. If what we understand goes "beyond meaning" and if "understanding" is an intentional mental state, then intentional states can go beyond meaning. But if intentional mental states can go beyond meaning, they may be sufficient on their own for conditions of satisfaction — they may be immune to the original problem. The Background may be unnecessary in the fixing of the conditions of satisfaction of intentional mental states[7].

VII. The Uniformity of Intentionality

Searle candidly admits [Searle (1992), p. 184] that he has no real argument for generalizing from literal meaning to all forms of intentionality. He stresses the intuition that there is a match between thought and meaning. I agree that we have that intuition; but I vote that we reconsider.

There is a natural impulse toward the idea that "the man who has the belief that Sally cut the cake has a belief with *exactly* the same propositional content as the literal assertion 'Sally cut the cake'" [Searle (1992), p. 184, emphasis added]. But how essential is the 'exactly' there. Would the natural impulse necessarily be frustrated by a view which held there to be a systematic relationship other than identity between the two? I think the man who has the belief that Sally cut the cake will normally have a belief with a richer propositional content than the literal meaning of the assertion 'Sally cut the cake'. Some aspect of what he has in mind will exclude the inappropriate interpretations in a way that the meaning of the word need not[8].

The alternative I am proposing can be strengthened by independent considerations. There are good reasons to suppose that the intentionality of language will vary from that of the mental states that make it possible. There are good reasons to suppose, that is, that there is representational alteration in the encoding process. Just think of how complex language would have to be if it were to represent every *nuance* of our mental states. Remember that language is a social tool. It develops in order to enable communication. The question, however, is "Communication of what?" Perhaps an (admittedly simplistic) evolutionary hypothesis is helpful.

Suppose that language developed to promote survival. Suppose that there were an evolutionary premium on communication, on the exchange of information. Again, the question is, "What kind of information would it be valuable, from the evolutionary perspective, to exchange?" My suggestion is that as language develops in the evolutionary context, many aspects of mental content are advantageously left out. Considering the evolutionary value of communication, we should expect language to abstract away from many of the details of any subject's particular mental states. Information, in the relevant sense, is a matter of what we might call "configurations of extensions". What matters is mostly *how things are*, in the world. The niceties of our *conception* of those configurations of extensions is not likely to be as relevant to evolutionary advantage. Thus linguistic communication is made more efficient if it is not burdened with the task of transmitting those niceties: language abstracts.

This is far from an account. I mean it to be only an abstract consideration that might weaken opposition to my proposal. In the same spirit, I offer further considerations to similar effect. There seem to be two more or less distinguishable *families* of concepts into which the notions of linguistic meaning and mental content, respectively, naturally fit. Natural language is, again, a *social* phenomenon. It is necessarily *public*. It is a function of interpersonal *conventions*. Thought, on the other hand, is none of these things. It is an *individualistic* phenomenon, potentially *private*, and *independent of convention*. Our conception of linguistic meaning then, must answer to constraints from which mental content is free.

Mental content, by contrast, has its own set of conceptual connections. *Rationality* is to be explained in terms of relations among a subject's intentional mental states. The *explanation of intentional action* will appeal to the contents of mental states. There is the distinctive *authority* of the individual with respect to her own intentionality. This contrasts with the individual's relationship to the literal meanings of a natural language: though she may be proficient, others may be more expert than she.

It is thus plausible that linguistic meanings should be distinct from mental contents: they answer to a different set of theoretical constraints. The

conditions of adequacy on a theory of linguistic meaning vary from those on the theory of intentionality. To put it a bit metaphorically, to be useful, language must take shortcuts. But it can: given a common Background, language can serve its purposes. Thought, on the other hand, is not a tool. It is not constrained by the same *practical* demands. Thoughts have, intrinsically, as much representational content as needed to determine their conditions of satisfaction.

So I find myself at some odds with what Searle has called [Searle (1978), p. 134] the "Principle of Expressibility": whatever can be meant can be said. It is not easy to be the meaning of a public language expression. Such imprecise instruments as convention and causation must establish a connection between words and meanings. The coarser the meanings — the more they underdetermine conditions of satisfaction — the easier it will be for the connections in question to be established. Thoughts by contrast have their meanings intrinsically. There is no corresponding *establishment* of a connection between some public entity and a meaning. There is no work for convention and causation to do. So there is no corresponding restriction on fineness of grain. And there is no force pushing in the direction of the underdetermination of condition of satisfaction.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The alternative I have recommended remains underdeveloped. I have only sketched some of its contours. It is worth recapitulating them now. Intentionality is not a uniform phenomenon. Some mental states exhibit an intentionality they have intrinsically. The intentionality of the linguistic, by contrast, is always derivative. In the transmission of intentionality from the mental to the linguistic, representational content is affected. The means of linguistic production are in the hands of the community; the meaning of a sentence in a natural language is a function of social, conventional, and necessarily public phenomena. The intentionality of thought, by contrast, is independent of those phenomena. Without the Background, sentences would not have determinate satisfaction conditions (relative to context) even given a literal meaning. But they do. If they did not, language could not function as the instrument of communication that it is.

That same characteristic, however, that language is essentially an instrument of communication, further distinguishes it from thought. We do not interpret our own utterances. From the first-person perspective, there is no lack of determinacy with respect to the conditions of satisfaction of our utterances[9]. This is not in virtue of some limitation on that perspective: our thoughts simply do not exhibit the lack of determinacy characteristic of our utterances. If we

were forced to interpret our own utterances, if we could not engage our thoughts directly, the Background *would* be required for, so to speak, self-interpretation.

Finally, the considerations advanced in support of the proposed alternative are far from demonstrative. Many of them could be accepted by Searle. He could explain the considerations in terms of the Background rather than take them, as I do, to recommend a limitation on its role. What I hope to have demonstrated, then, is the plausibility of the alternative proposed. There is a Background all right, and we use it in communication. It figures also in certain other types of behavior. But our thoughts represent independently.

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NOTES

[1] See, for example, the essays on the Background in Lepore and van Gulick (eds.) (1991).

[2] See also Searle (1978) for examples involving 'on', 'give', and 'shut' and Searle (1983), pp. 145-46 where he gives examples using the word 'open'.

[3] In fact, already in 1978 [Searle (1978), pp. 130-1] Searle had urged that the "claims I have made about sentences lead naturally to our next conclusion: what I have said about literal meaning also applies to intentional states in general".

[4] This position is defended more substantially in my Ph.D. dissertation, *Representing Thoughts and Language*, Princeton, 1996.

[5] Of course the examples are merely illustrative; the phenomenon is supposed to extend to indefinitely many of the terms of any natural language.

[6] For example, I am not suggesting that there need be anything like an 'act of interpretation' or that these interpretations are any kind of *inference*. [See Searle (1992), pp. 192-3 and Searle (1995), p. 134.]

[7] This is not to say that the Background may not be involved in the *aetiology* of intentional states. Perhaps my having the perceptual belief that this is a chair is partly the causal result of my having certain Background skills (themselves perhaps the result of past causal interactions). But it does not follow that *given* the mental state with its intentional content, its condition of satisfaction cannot be determined without appeal to the Background. [See Searle (1995), p. 133.]

[8] Perhaps it is not irrelevant to point out that when a listener misinterprets an utterance (consistently with the semantics of that utterance), the speaker will often say, "that's not what I had in mind".

[9] A point Searle stressed in Searle (1987).

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