

DIRK FRANKEN • ATTILA KARAKUŞ • JAN G. MICHEL

JOHN R. SEARLE

Thinking about the Real World

13. Münstersche Vorlesungen zur Philosophie
13th Münster Lectures on Philosophy

mit/with

JOHN R. SEARLE

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(EDS.)

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PREFACE BY THE EDITORS

John R. Searle is one of the world's leading philosophers. During his long and outstanding career, he has made groundbreaking and lasting contributions to the philosophy of language, to the philosophy of mind, as well as to the nature, structure, and functioning of social reality.

The Philosophy Department of the University of Münster invited John R. Searle to the 13th Münster Lectures on Philosophy which took place in December 2009. The basic idea of the Lectures is to give students of the Philosophy Department the opportunity to get into discussion with important philosophers. In line with what has by now become a venerable tradition, Searle gave a public lecture on the first night of the Lectures—it was entitled “Language and Social Ontology”. On the following two days, Searle participated in a colloquium. At this colloquium, eleven groups of students and faculty members presented papers dealing critically with Searle's wide-ranging philosophical work that Searle directly responded to.

It has become common practice that the lecture, the papers, and the invited guest's replies are published together in one volume. However, this book marks a deviation of the common practice: instead of preparing the lecture he gave in Münster for print, Searle made the welcome suggestion to write an original article for this volume in which he discusses his general philosophical position and also touches on the topics of the colloquium papers. Therefore, this book has the following three parts: (1) Searle's introductory chapter on his overall philosophical enterprise, (2) the papers presented at the colloquium in a revised form, and (3) Searle's replies to the papers.

The publication of this volume and the Münster Lectures on Philosophy would not have been possible without the support of a lot of people. First, we would like to express our gratitude to John R. Searle for accepting our invitation to Münster and for the stimulating discussions of his work. It was an absorbing experience for all participants of the colloquium to discuss his philosophy with him and to ‘think about the real world’ together. Second, we would like to thank all participating colleagues and students of the Münster Philosophy Department for the preparation of the colloquium papers and for their various contributions to the colloquium discussions—without their excellent cooperation

and support, this volume could not have been realized. Third, we would like to thank Reinold Schmücker for helpful advice during our process of organization of the Münster Lectures, and Arne M. Weber for the photograph on the front page of this book. Fourth, our thanks go to the many helping hands in the background which ensured that the colloquium would run smoothly. On behalf of the Münster Philosophy Department, we are, last but not least, grateful to Rafael Hüntelmann andontos for funding the Münster Lectures on Philosophy.

Münster, August 2010

Dirk Franken, Attila Karakuş, Jan G. Michel

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BY JOHN R. SEARLE

I would like to thank the organizers of the conference and the editors of this volume as well as the Münster Philosophy Department for their hospitality, hard work, and organizational abilities, in both the conduct of the seminar and the preparation of the book. I am especially grateful to Dirk Franken, Attila Karakuş, and Jan G. Michel for their efforts.

This acknowledgement has to be more than just the routine expression of gratitude. There are some remarkable features of the Münster experience that require special mention. At first, I was dismayed that the actual sessions were closed to the general public and only open to members of the Münster philosophical community. But as the sessions proceeded I realized that this was essential to the creation of the intense cooperative atmosphere of the meetings. Their high level of cooperation and collaboration is unusual in philosophy, and I think the close feeling of the group made that possible. The second feature of the experience that requires special mention is the high intellectual level of both the discussions and the papers by the students involved. I think Münster is probably unique among contemporary universities in its ability to produce such a high level of philosophical production from their philosophy students. I was also favorably impressed by the high percentage of women who participated in the preparation of the papers and the conduct of the discussion. In spite of the tremendous advances made by women in the past decades, they remain very much a minority in Anglophone philosophy, and I was happy to see their contributions in Münster.

Berkeley, August 2010

John R. Searle

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF JOHN R. SEARLE'S MAJOR WORKS

- SA *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1969.
- EM *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979.
- I *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983.
- MBS *Minds, Brains and Science: The 1984 Reith Lectures*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1984.
- RM *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1992.
- CSR *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: The Free Press 1995.
- MLS *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World*, New York: Basic Books 1998.
- RA *Rationality in Action*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2001.
- M *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004.
- FN *Freedom and Neurobiology: Reflections on Free Will, Language, and Political Power*, New York: Columbia University Press 2007.
- MSW *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2010.

I INTRODUCTION:

John R. Searle's Philosophical Overall Enterprise

THE BASIC REALITY AND THE HUMAN REALITY¹

John R. Searle

In the lecture I gave in Münster, at the start of the conference on which this volume is based, I discussed my work in social ontology, and specifically the nature of social institutional reality, the reality of money, property, government, marriage, etc. Since that lecture was given, I have published a book, *Making the Social World*, in which these issues are discussed at much greater length. Instead of repeating material that I have already published, it occurred to me after listening to and reading the various contributions to this volume, that it might be a good idea to state my general philosophical position; the overall approach on which my work is based, and to various aspects of which the articles in this volume are dedicated. Instead of repeating what I said in Münster, I am going to discuss my overall philosophical enterprise².

It seems to me that in the present era there is an overriding problem in philosophy. It occurred to me after I had been doing philosophy literally for decades that this was the problem I was dealing with. As a preliminary formula-

1 I wish to thank Dagmar Searle & Beatrice Balfour for comments on earlier versions of the work by me in this volume.

2 Some of the works in which I have discussed these issues and on which this introductory article is based are the following:

J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (1969),

J. R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (1979),

J. R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (1983),

J. R. Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science: The 1984 Reith Lectures* (1984),

J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995),

J. R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (1998),

J. R. Searle, *Rationality in Action* (2001),

J. R. Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (2004),

J. R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (2010).

tion, we could put it by saying that the question is one of reconciling a certain conception that we have of ourselves and our human reality with what we actually know about the world from the advances in knowledge that have occurred over the past three centuries. To spell that out in more detail, the problem is this: we know from such subjects as physics and chemistry, that the world consists entirely of entities that we find it convenient, if not entirely accurate, to call “physical particles”. I do not mean to endorse a particular phase in the history of physics and chemistry, which will no doubt change and improve. However, the basic idea that big things are made out of little things is so well established that I will take it for granted. We know that these “particles” exist in fields of force and that they are organized into systems. The boundaries of these systems are set by causal relations. Molecules, galaxies, and babies are all examples of systems. Our picture of reality, which we know to be accurate as much as we know anything, is that at bottom the real world consists entirely of mindless, meaningless physical entities. But we have a conception of ourselves that is, at first sight, difficult to square with this reality. We think of ourselves as, above all, conscious. And with consciousness, we think of ourselves as having intentionality, and with consciousness and intentionality we have a whole lot of other remarkable features. Among them: language, rationality, free will, society, ethics, aesthetics, political obligations, and social institutions. Our question, in its most general form, can be stated as, How can we make the conception of reality that we know for a fact is correct, the basic reality as described by physics, chemistry and the other natural sciences, consistent with the conception of reality that we live with every day, with the human reality? Just to have an abbreviated way of putting the question, I will say that it is one of reconciling the *basic reality* with the *human reality*. And our problem is not just to make the human facts *consistent* with the basic facts, but to show how they are a natural *development from* the basic facts. Given the basic facts of physics and chemistry, we should show how it is possible, and indeed inevitable, that there should be consciousness, society, rationality, language, moral obligations, and aesthetic pleasures.

Many questions discussed within this problematic are traditional philosophical problems, such as the mind/body problem; others, such as the nature of social ontology, have been much less discussed in traditional philosophy. The whole approach recasts philosophical questions, whether traditional or contemporary, in a somewhat different light, because we are no longer obsessed, as were our philosophical predecessors, with finding epistemic foundations, with overcoming skepticism, with proving the very possibility of knowledge. We can now take knowledge of the basic structure of the universe for granted, and ask how to accommodate, if we can accommodate, our self-conception within that framework.

That is the present task for philosophy, as I see it. Perhaps in the end we will have to give up on some of our most cherished assumptions, such as for example, free will. Perhaps we cannot make our overall conception of reality consistent with our belief that we have genuine freedom of the will. This philosophical project, as I have described it, will take more than one lifetime. But it might be worthwhile on this occasion to summarize where we are in the development of that project. Some parts I think are rather easy, at least as far as philosophy is concerned, though they may have difficult scientific problems associated with them. Some parts are rather difficult, and perhaps in the end they will prove to be impossible to solve. In any case, I am now going to summarize where I think I am in working on that project.

Here we are in our very large universe, composed mostly of empty space, but containing astronomically large numbers of molecules, themselves composed of atoms, themselves composed of subatomic particles, and many of the molecules organized into larger systems. Then on our little planet, and in all likelihood on planets situated in other solar systems, an amazing thing happened though not necessarily at the same time on every planet. Life began. Here comes the first hole in our understanding. We do not understand the origin of life. We do not know how or where or when life began on our planet. But we are going to take for granted that it did begin, and go on. Then, again confining ourselves to our little planet, over a period of three to five billion years, life evolves into all of its present forms. So we have not only physical particles, organized into systems, but some of those systems are alive. They consist largely of big carbon based molecules, composed with large quantities of nitrogen, hydrogen, and oxygen. We will assume, as we know is indeed the case, that these life forms continued to evolve into the present plant and animal species. The next development raises the first serious philosophical question in our inventory of philosophical problems, the beginning of mental reality.

I THE MIND/BODY PROBLEM: CONSCIOUSNESS AND INTENTIONALITY

With the evolution of certain forms of animal life comes the evolution of organs that contain large numbers of an unusual kind of cell, called neurons. A neuron is a cell like any other. It has a cell nucleus, a cell body, and a cell wall. But neurons are unusual in having peculiar anatomical structures in the forms of axons and dendrites, and a peculiar set of relationships by which neurons communicate with other neurons by sending electro-chemical signals across a small gap, the synaptic cleft, at a point where the axon of one neuron approaches con-

tact with a dendrite of another neuron. Specifically, an electrical impulse passes down the axon where it triggers the secretion of neurotransmitters into the synaptic cleft, and these then initiate an electrical impulse on the post-synaptic or dendritic side. So the sequence is electrical-chemical-electrical. I am leaving out a whole lot of details that are desperately important for our lives, because I want to get to the main topics of this chapter. With the development of neuronal systems come two logically related developments that are absolutely stunning and which are the basis of the rest of the philosophical stories that we will be telling. With the evolution of neuronal systems comes the evolution of consciousness and intentionality. These require special discussion. At first sight, consciousness and intentionality appear to be independent of each other. Consciousness consists of those states of feelings or sentience or awareness that certain sorts of organisms have as long as they are awake. When asleep they sometimes have consciousness in the form of dreams. Intentionality is that capacity that mental states have to be about, or to refer to, objects or states of affairs in the world. Beliefs for example represent how the believer takes the world to be and desires represent how he would like it to be. It is customary to use the word “representation” in connection with the phenomenon of intentionality. Intentionality consists in mental representations of objects and states of affair in the world. That is OK as far as it goes, but it can be misleading because of the way that beliefs and desires represent is totally different from the way that perceptions and intentions-in-actions represent. Perceptions and intentions-in-actions *present*, rather than just *represent*, as we will soon see.

Consciousness and intentionality mark a break from the forms of reality that we have been describing earlier, because they essentially have what we might call a subjective, or first-person ontology. Consciousness only exists as experienced by humans or by animals. And intentionality only exists insofar as it is consciously experienced, or is at least the kind of thing that though often unconscious, could be consciously experienced. There are lots of things that are going on in my brain when I have intentional states such as, for example, neuron firings at synapses. But they have no mental reality because they are not the kinds of things that are conscious states, or could be conscious states.

At this point we come to the first of the traditional philosophical problems that we have to address and solve, the so called “mind/body problem”. From the account that we have been giving, however, it appears to have a rather simple solution. All of our conscious states are caused by neuronal processes. We do not know the details of the neuronal structures and processes that cause consciousness, but we do know that neurons and systems of neurons are essentially involved. And the conscious states caused by the behavior of the neurons are

themselves realized in—that is they exist in, as features of—neuronal systems. We also know that conscious states function causally. For example, I have the intention-in-action (I try) to raise my arm, and lo and behold, the arm goes up. And like any higher level feature, such as the solidity of stones or the liquidity of water, conscious states can only function causally because they are grounded in a system composed of the lower level elements. So to spell it out explicitly, our solution to the mind/body problem, insofar as it involves consciousness, involves four claims.

1. Consciousness is real. Because it has a first-person ontology, it cannot be reduced to something that has only a third-person ontology such as behavior or neurophysiology.
2. It is caused by the behavior of neuronal elements.
3. It is realized in neuronal systems.
4. It functions causally.

We have a slightly more difficult problem in the relation of consciousness to intentionality, but that too has a rather easy solution. Many conscious states are not intentional, for instance, feelings of undirected anxiety. And most intentional states are unconscious most of the time, for example, my beliefs and desires do not cease when I fall asleep. They remain in an unconscious form. All the same, there is a conceptual connection between consciousness and intentionality. A state that is an intentional state, but not conscious then and there, is at least the kind of thing that could in principle become conscious. Why? Well we saw that intentionality consisted of representations, but representations are always under some aspect or other. For example, I might desire to drink something under the aspect “water”, but not under the aspect “H₂O”. My desire for water is different from my desire for H₂O, even though both will be satisfied by the same stuff in the world. But representing explicitly under an aspect can only be done by a conscious being. As far as unconsciousness is concerned, there is no difference between standing in a relation to water and standing in a relation to H₂O, because water is H₂O. Where intentionality is concerned, there is a crucial difference between wanting water and wanting H₂O, because intentionality requires an aspectual shape and the aspectual shape of these two intentional states is different. But when an agent is unconscious there is no actual aspectual shape present in his mind. The only reality the system has when unconscious is that of a series of ontologically third-person phenomena, such as neuronal structures and neuron firings. What then makes the aspectual shape of the unconscious person different in the case of wanting water and wanting H₂O? The only answer to that is that the different unconscious states are capable of man-

ifesting themselves as a conscious state. The conscious state of wanting water is different from the conscious state of wanting H₂O, and the potentiality of producing that conscious state must exist when the agent is unconscious.

2 THE STRUCTURE OF INTENTIONALITY

So we have made some real progress. In our universe of basic facts, we have now accounted for conscious beings, who have intentionality, both conscious and unconscious. But still, we have not gotten very far in solving our inventory of philosophical problems.

We have answered the question, How is consciousness possible? The answer is: it is made possible by the activity of certain neuronal systems. Neuronal behavior causes consciousness. It may be possible to produce in systems other than neuronal systems but so far we do not know how to do it. The basic way to explain how intentionality is possible is to explain how conscious forms of intentionality are possible, and that makes our neurobiological explanation of intentionality dependent on our explanation of consciousness. However, there are many different specific forms that will require separate explanations. So, for example, perception is different from intentional action, though they are of course intertwined in all sorts of ways in our actual life. Both intentional action and perception will presumably require appealing to different sorts of explanatory mechanisms than is the case, for example, with thought processes and emotions. All of these are empirical questions that I leave to neurobiology and neuropsychology, and to cognitive science generally. The philosophical point is that the general relationship between the human reality and the basic reality is clear. The details have to be worked out by the special sciences.

In general, intentional states have a structure consisting of the type of state it is, together with the content that it has. So I can both believe that it is raining, and wish that it were raining. These can be represented as:

Bel (it is raining)

Des (it is raining)

Where "Bel" and "Des" name belief and desire respectively.

Furthermore, corresponding to the distinction in the nervous system between the sensory nervous system and the motor nervous system, intentional states have different relations to reality. Perceptions and beliefs are supposed to represent how things are in the world. Desires and intentions are supposed to represent not how things are, but how we would like them to be, or how we are going to try to make them be. Corresponding to these distinctions, I introduce