Most importantly, in taking Descartes seriously, the author manages to demonstrate the historical value of his thoughts.

Cottingham's style is eloquent, while the book is accessible, though not, perhaps, suitable as an introduction to Descartes's thinking, as it presupposes some foreknowledge of his thoughts and Western philosophy in general, without which one may understand the work but not fully appreciate it. For those, however, who are somewhat advanced in Western philosophy and who seek a book that does not eschew unconventional (but at the same time well-founded) analyses, it is a recommended read.

Additional references

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Review of John R. Searle: Philosophy in a New Century: Selected Essays. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008. ISBN 9780521731584; Euro 18.99, US$ 29.99 (paperback); ISBN 9780521515917; Euro 50.00, US$ 90.00 (hardback); 201 pages.

Philosophy in a New Century is a collection of ten papers, all of them written during the last decade with the exception of "Is the Brain a Digital Computer?" which was Searle's Presidential Address to the American Philosophical Association hold in 1990. The final essay of the book, "The Unity of the Proposition," constitutes the only original manuscript of the volume. All others have appeared previously in diverse journals or anthologies. In most cases, the original text was lightly modified and enriched for the present publication.

The collected papers do not have a single subject; on the contrary, while some of them deal with questions of philosophy of language, others concentrate on problems of philosophy of mind and social ontology. The sixth essay, "The Phenomenological Illusion," compares Searle's own approach to intentionality with the conception of intentionality employed by continental philosophers coming from the Husserlian tradition. In the ninth chapter, "Fact and Value, 'Is' and 'Ought,' and Reasons for Action," the author revisits his famous – and controversial – argument against the naturalistic fallacy. In this way, the book offers a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the different areas in which Searle has contributed to contemporary philosophy.

Searle's authoritative essays are written in the precise, clear, and almost colloquial style that characterizes his writings. As in most personal anthologies, some repetitions are unavoidable, but they will surely be welcome by the reader unfamiliar with Searle's philosophy.

In the following pages, I will discuss some of the most relevant theses advanced along the different essays of *Philosophy in a New Century*. As far as possible, I will review the chapters following the order proposed by the book.

(i) The first chapter, whose title became then the title of the whole volume, is the text of a speech that Searle delivered to an audience of scientists. Its appearance of simplicity can nevertheless be misleading, for he introduces there a highly ambitious thesis. The thesis says that in the last decades there has occurred a new "turn" in philosophy, but this time of a far more radical kind than the last turn, the "linguistic turn" that took place one century ago. We have thus entered, according to Searle, into a new, post-epistemic era. While the whole building of philosophy from Descartes on was based on epistemology and was hence made dependent on the resolution of the central epistemic question: "how can we justify the knowledge we have or presume to have?" the new era can be called a post-epistemic or post-skeptical one. Freed from the obsession with justification and from the apparent need to find a last foundation, it is now possible to tackle the whole range of real philosophical problems that had been postponed all that time. It's not that we had found an answer to the skeptic – the point is that we have at last understood that the whole epistemic problem was a pseudo-problem. It was Wittgenstein, Searle underlines (10, and then again on page 110), who has decisively contributed to this understanding.

Searle points out two additional factors that helped the new turn to happen. On the one hand, the undeniable, exponential growth of scientific knowledge that we currently possess; "the sheer weight of accumulated knowledge is now so great that we cannot take seriously arguments that attempt to prove that it doesn't exist at all" (6). On the other hand, the shift of the focus from "language" to "mind," because "our understanding of the issues in a lot of subjects […] presupposes an understanding of the most fundamental mental processes" (14).

In this sense, Searle holds that the linguistic turn, as important as it indeed was, represented nevertheless a partial move out of the framework defined by modernity or the "epistemic era." The focus was shifted to language, but the basic idea remained the same: the first task of philosophy was considered to be an epistemic one, concretely "to give an analysis of meaning according to which the hearer is engaged in the epistemic task of trying to figure out what the speaker means either by looking at his behavior in response to a stimulus, or by looking at the conditions under which he would hold a sentence to be true" (17).

Searle's claim that we have come into a post-epistemic era – or, at least, that the conditions are given to take that step – clearly recalls pragmatism's traditional tenet (see Margolis 2006). But, as he promptly warns, the point is not to deny that there is "certain, objective, and universal knowledge," but (only) to state that the quest for a last foundation for our knowledge is pointless. Consequently, a philosophy for the already begun century will be able – as soon as it gets rid of its previous burden – to deal directly with problems of philosophy of mind, ontology, philosophy of science and ethics without being distracted by supposedly previous questions regarding justification. Once made this point, the rest of the book can be read as an effort to show how post-epistemic philosophy concretely works.

Without doubt, Searle's thesis is highly polemical and will encounter much resistance: firstly, because it urges to understand the whole modern philosophy – if not the entire history of the discipline from Socrates and Plato until the first Wittgenstein – as an endeavor based on a misconception. And secondly, because there is clearly no consensus at all among contemporary philosophers saying that questions of justification do not play any important role in current philosophical analyses.

Plausible or not, to accept the idea of a post-epistemic turn implies the abandonment of traditional pairs of categories that have structured – but also limited – our thought, like the already alluded pair "externalism" vs. "internalism" in philosophy of language, "mind" vs. "body" in philosophy of mind, and "is" vs. "ought" in ethics and social philosophy. The philosophy in the post-foundationalist era will operate with new categories, which

Searle specifies once and again throughout the book. Moreover, this new set of categories does not consist of opposed terms, but of complementary (even though distinct) dimensions: "syntax" and "semantics," "material reality" and "first-person ontology," "brute" and "institutional facts," "observer-dependent" and "observer-independent facts," "intrinsic" and "derived intentionality," "subjective" and "objective judgments," "logical analysis" and "phenomenological experience," and last but not least "regulative" and "constitutive rules."

(ii) If there is one concept running through all the essays of the book (and even the complete oeuvre of Searle), then this is "intentionality." Human beings are basically intentional creatures. It is convenient to bear in mind that, following Searle's convention, "intentionality" with small "i" (typical of mental states involving desires and purposes) should be distinguished from the most basic fact of "Intentionality," written with capital "I," "that feature of minds by which mental states are *directed at* or *about* objects and states of affairs in the world" (31, italics in the original). That is the very starting point of Searle's whole philosophical system. Consequently, he devotes much space dealing with two rival positions. On the one hand, with the continental phenomenologists, who try to reduce intentionality to our phenomenological experience; there, the criticism is that "*some of the most important logical features of intentionality are beyond the reach of phenomenology because they have no immediate phenomenological reality*" (115, italics in the original; see also the whole discussion in chapter 6). On the other hand, he vigorously opposes the approach inside the analytic tradition, especially among logical behaviorists and functionalists, according to which we should play down the importance of intentionality (and consciousness), assuming either that we can explain human behavior without resorting to intentionality, or that we should consider intentionality as a feature that is simply "attached" to the working of neuronal processes as well as to the running of computational programs. An extensive criticism of these two last positions can be found in chapter 3 and 4, where he revisits the arguments he had developed with the Chinese Room Thought Experiment, the discussion on how to interpret the Turing Test, and the criticism to the Strong Artificial Intelligence Program. In a nutshell, the point is that the dimension of semantics and intentionality cannot be reduced to the syntactic level; on the contrary, intentionality is the main feature of consciousness. "Program operations are purely syntactical, and the syntax by itself does not constitute consciousness, nor is it sufficient to cause consciousness" (62). In chapter 5, he even affirms that purely syntactic operations cannot be identified with whatever process taking place in nature or in a running computer: "I am now making the separate and different point that syntax is not intrinsic to physics. […] to say that something is *functioning as* a computational process is to say something more than that a pattern of physical events is occurring" (95).

I cannot here dwell any longer on this discussion. Consequently, I will restrict myself to stating the following points. For Searle, "Intentionality" and "consciousness" are two interrelated dimensions: there is no Intentionality without consciousness, and consciousness' main feature is Intentionality. These two intertwined spheres are the base of the language we have, properly endowed with a syntactic *and* a semantic dimension. Now Searle moves a step forward and suggests that what ultimately characterizes our language is not only the syntactic and semantic dimensions it entails (which allows us to represent the world), but also (and especially) its *pragmatic* component (thanks to which we construct the whole social world that distinguishes us from all other species). In other words, Intentionality makes possible the performance of different kinds of *speech acts* (other than the "assertive" ones) through which we create and maintain a new ontological sphere, the one of "institutional facts."

(iii) This last remark leads us to Searle's theory of institutional facts, and thus to chapter 2, "Social Ontology: Some Basic Principles." The essay has two main parts. The first and

largest one can be read as a summary of the theory developed at length in his 1995 book *The Construction of Social Reality*. The second part introduces (after some loose remarks that lack a better treatment) an important "addendum." I will briefly examine both parts in turn.

We usually take social reality for granted, but when we take a closer look at it, we suddenly realize a "peculiarly puzzling feature" of it, "that it exists only because we think it exists" (27). In virtue of "collective intentionality" (a somewhat misleading term Searle uses to refer to the fact that I, you and we all can have simultaneously and persistently similar beliefs about the world), we are able to give rise to institutional facts. Intentionality allows us not only to represent the world but to see some objects as "performing a function." The members of two communities cannot only believe that the river flowing between them is deep or large, but they will also see it as the border separating and distinguishing one group from the other. "X counts as Y" is the formula that condenses that property of intentionality by means of which social reality is constructed. Nevertheless, while some functions are closely related to the physical properties of the object, a host of others are independent of them, becoming what Searle calls "status functions." Stones can serve as weapons in a fight for territory because of their physical properties (weight, shape, solidity), but the same stones may be considered (once the conflict is settled) as a token to divide the once disputed field, thus separating the property of the neighbors. In this sense, status functions have "deontic powers." The same act of signaling the divide between the properties of the neighbors means the establishment of specific rights and obligations – what Searle calls "reasons for action," that is, reasons independent of the particular wishes I may now happen to have.

Searle is right in remarking that the specific questions of "social ontology" summarized above are neither the subject matter of epistemology of the social sciences (which centers on problems regarding the justification and methods of social-scientific knowledge) nor of the social sciences themselves, which study social phenomena – being most of the time aware that the social reality is "constructed," but not explaining what basic features make possible that construction. Searle is also right in assuming that he has done an enduring contribution in this particular field of research, that he insist on calling "philosophy of society." (I have nothing against introducing such a term, except for the fact that it calls for a complementary expression, that is, for a "philosophy of nature" as a field dealing with the ontological questions that posits our observation and knowledge of the physical and biological reality.)

The second part of the essay (the "addendum") revisits the classification of speech acts in three main kinds: Assertives, Directives and Commissives, and Declarations. Searle's treatment of this last kind is what matters for the present discussion. Indeed, Declarations "change the reality by representing it as being so changed." There, the novel claim is that "[…] all status functions, and hence all of institutional reality […] are created by speech acts that have the logical form of Declarations" (49). For that purpose, he coins the specific term "Status Function Declarations." The only human dimension that does not need in its turn a Status Function Declaration to be constituted is of course language: "[…] language itself does not require Status Function Declarations in order to exist because the meaning or semantic content of the sentences themselves is sufficient to enable us to perform the speech acts expressed by those meanings. The contrast is that in extra-linguistic status functions, we use semantics to create powers that go beyond the powers of semantics" (51). This last remark was possibly motivated by the criticisms of some of his commentators. If Searle formerly assumed that every speech act rested on a promise and that promises were the source of all other kinds of obligations in society, now it is clear that promises are only one source of them, and perhaps a marginal one (cf. Zaibert 2003). The Declarations are now understood to be the origin of "deontic power."

(iv) To recapitulate: Society, i. e., the whole system of interlocking institutional facts, is possible thanks to language (construed as "speech activity"), and language is possible thanks to Intentionality. It its turn, Intentionality is to be understood as the basic feature of consciousness. As Manson points out: "Searle argues that intentionality can be properly understood *only* in terms of consciousness." (Manson 2003: 140) Contrary to functionalism, Searle insist on viewing intentionality as the primary property of consciousness. Now, if it is so, then the question becomes how to explain consciousness. For that purpose, he has two complementary answers. The first one says that we should learn to understand consciousness as something "unproblematic". Searle insists that consciousness is not a weird or mysterious phenomenon, but something natural, like digestion of photosynthesis. "[…] my conception of intentionality is resolutely naturalistic […] a biological feature of the world, on all fours with digestion and photosynthesis" (114). The second and interconnected answer says that consciousness is caused by the brain, and again: in the same way as digestion is caused by the stomach or photosynthesis is caused by the leaves. Searle admits that we still do not have a clear picture of how exactly brain activity produces consciousness. In chapter 7, "The Self as a Problem in Philosophy and Neurobiology," and chapter 8, "Why I am not a Property Dualist," he elaborates on these arguments and discusses the prospects of success that the two main rival neurobiological approaches (the "building-block theory of consciousness" and the "unified-field theory of consciousness") have in showing how the brain causes the mental.

Here, I would like to point out a possible difficulty. If we are to avoid both substance *and* property dualism, as Searle suggests, we need an approach able to reduce the phenomena of a given level to its constituent parts. Indeed, Searle advocates a strong version of reductionism. In rejecting all forms of emergentism, he says that "we also have a misconception of the nature of reduction" (158). I personally doubt that we can completely reduce *in all cases* the emergent properties of a certain system to the properties of its constituent parts. The point is that adhering to a certain form of emergentism does not mean that we have to appeal to mysterious forces or entities; what we need is a proper conception of nature. Emergent properties can simply be understood as "natural" features of an evolving universe in the sense already proposed by Popper (1985, especially chapter 1, "Materialism Transcends Itself," and chapter 3, "Materialism Criticized").

On the other side, the claim that "the brain causes the consciousness" is, to say the least, an awkward statement. I hold that Searle goes in the right direction in trying to overcome the dichotomy "epiphenomenalism vs. dualism" and to make us see consciousness as something "unproblematic"; however, we still need to develop a fully new conceptual framework to understand consciousness. To state that "brain causes consciousness" is more or less as to say that a given society, for example, the USA "causes" the political institutions it characteristically has (let us say, its two-party system). It is out of question that the nervous system is a necessary condition for consciousness (in the very same way as the millions of Americans are a necessary condition for the mere existence of their political arrangement), but to keep on trying to figure out how the parts of the brain (taken separately or together) cause consciousness will reveal to be a wrong approach. I can make this point clearer by way of a comparison (and all what Searle offers to make sense of consciousness are, after all, metaphors). Suppose that someone for the first time travels by car from one city to another and then, fascinated by the fact of motion, tries to explain displacement looking into the car's engine. Movement and displacement are possible thanks to an engine, but the latter does not "cause" the formers. In this sense, to explain consciousness looking into a brain is more or less like explaining displacement looking into the engine. Displacement is a whole process through space and time, and as decisive as the engine are the wheels and the road. Likewise, we can maintain that consciousness is a phenomenon in its own

right: not only the brain is the sole condition for its being, but the whole human body in constant interaction with other human beings in a social space. My consciousness emerges and develops in a continuous process of social interactions with other "consciousnesses." Perhaps some day we will be able to recreate in a laboratory a working brain, but to expect consciousness out of that test-tube brain is more or less like to assemble on the table of a workshop an engine and simply expect spatial displacement out of the moving piston.

(v) I would like to make some final remarks about Searle's last paper, "The Unity of the Proposition." It is without doubt a highly suggestive and original – but, at the same time, a somewhat tentative – treatment of a long debated subject. (Especially the conclusion needs further elaboration). The paper's main question can be formulated in a very simple way: "how is it that the different elements of the proposition are connected together to form a unified whole?" (181). Searle masterly examines the different attempts to solve the problem from the classical approaches to Strawson, showing why they all failed. For Searle, the solution of the problem lies (again) in a conceptual shift: The proposition should not be seen as a manufactured object, like a vehicle, whose parts were first separated and then assembled together; instead, we are urged to conceive of the proposition as (originally) a unity. It is our highly articulated natural languages that make us believe that the proposition is a set of separable parts. To render this ingenious proposal plausible, Searle resorts to his theory of perception. There, he assumes (a) that any perceptual experience has an intentional and informational content; (b) that this content is not compounded but is in itself a unity (we do not see, for example, different objects put together in our visual field but a given "state of affairs"); and, (c) that perceptual propositions are prior to linguistic propositions. The result seems clear: "Once you see that in the visual experience the unity of the propositional content derives from the unity of the condition in the world that satisfies that content, then the question is turned around. Instead of asking how is it possible that the various sentence fragments can be united to express a unified coherent proposition, we should ask how is it possible that in language we can break up the parts of the proposition into different components in a way that they are not broken up in the actual flow of our experiences" (190). Indeed, as Searle realizes, his alleged solution to the question conducts to an older and perhaps bigger problem: if we do not perceive objects but "states of affairs" and if the states of affairs are then severed into objects in virtue of the possibility opened by natural language, in which sense our concepts of objects can refer to actual objects in the world (if all that exists are "states of affairs")? If our language underdetermines our understanding of the world, can we still hold (a version of) a correspondence theory of truth? Searle concludes the paper leaving the point open.

   Even if we leave aside for the moment that last problem, it is clear that the solution to the initial question of the paper depends entirely on Searle's theory of perception, which is far from being generally accepted. (See Dretske (2003) and O'Shaughnessy (2003) for a critical examination of his theory of perception). Here, I just want to restrict myself to a general observation; it can be maintained that part of Searle's difficulty in this (and other) cases lies in the fact that he lacks a theory on the *origin of language*. Here and there, the reader has the impression that for him perception is prior to language, not only in a logical sense, but also historically. I really doubt that we can dispose temporarily first the evolution of human brain, then the origin of perceptual propositions as a form of basic mental states, then language, and finally the construction of society by means of institutional facts. Perhaps we need also here a conceptual change. "Language" and "society" presuppose the highly developed human brain and the capacity of having basic (intentional) mental states, but the same brain evolved through a process of selection in response to an ongoing need for more and better linguistic and extra-linguistic interaction among hominids. Cultural evolution did not start once biological evolution finished its work, but both dimensions (culture and

biology) influenced mutually. My suggestion is that we will not be able to resolve some basic questions of philosophy of language and social ontology until we do not possess an empirically and theoretically solid framework to understand the origin of human language. Most probably, in such a theory "brain," "perception," "language," and "society" will be all construed as basic and interdependent dimensions, what means that the development of any of them implies the co-evolution of the others.

Needless to say, Searle is one of the most prominent contemporary philosophers and his writings are almost always highly stimulating. For those willing to have a first contact with Searle's thought, *Philosophy in a New Century* will offer an excellent introduction; and for those already familiar with his philosophy, it will surely constitute a comprehensive and up-to-day volume to revisit his entire work.

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