

## EXPRESSING AN INTENTIONAL STATE

1:

I don't have any serious quarrels with John Searle's approach to speech act theory.<sup>1</sup> There's a lot of little things that I do not really understand. (Example: what is a direction of fit?) There are a few minor points which I think are wrong. (Example: the doctrine about "underlying rules" which are "manifested or realized" by conventions, and, to be frank, the whole thing about so called constitutive rules. Why should a statement like "Greeting in a normal context counts as a courteous recognition of the addressee by the speaker" be regarded as conveying a rule? How could one violate, or follow, the alleged rule? Maybe greeting is something which presupposes the existence of certain rules, or maybe statements of the type "x counts as y in context c" are true only in virtue of the fact that certain policies are accepted in the contexts in question, but the statement above, concerning the essence of greeting, is not the statement of a rule.)

So instead of nagging and carping at this or that detail, I should like to concentrate in these precious ten minutes on a point in Searle's account which I take to be of some interest, and not only for speech act theory. It concerns the concept of expressing one's mental states. Here are two pertinent quotations from Searle:

... in the performance of any illocutionary act with a propositional content, the speaker expresses some attitude, state, etc., to that propositional content. Notice that this holds even if he is insincere, even if he does not have the belief, desire, intention, regret or pleasure which he expresses, he nonetheless expresses a belief, desire, intention, regret or pleasure in the performance of the speech act.<sup>2</sup>

Now to say that the Intentional state which constitutes the sincerity condition is expressed in the performance of the speech act is not to say that one always has to have the Intentional state that one expresses. It is always possible to lie or otherwise perform an insincere speech act. But a lie or other insincere speech act consists in performing a speech act, where one does not have the Intentional state that one expresses.<sup>3</sup>

In these quoted statements, Searle assumes that there is a concept of expressing an intentional state such that the following is a possibility: a case in which somebody, in doing something, expresses his  $\psi$  that  $p$ , although he does not  $\psi$  that  $p$ . Not everybody seems to agree that there is such a sense, for example, of the phrase "to express the belief that  $p$ ". But I think that Searle is right, and besides I think that such a concept of expressing a belief is of central concern for any attempt at a theory of belief-ascription.

But as far as I can see, Searle nowhere attempts to give an analysis of this concept. That's what I shall do now: sketch an account of this delicate concept and ask John what he thinks about it, inquire if my sketch puts us on what he takes to be the right track, and if not, at which points he disagrees.

Obviously, the concept we are looking for must be weaker than the concepts of manifesting or revealing. But it should be stronger than the concept of merely producing evidence. I suggest the following:

- (1) In doing  $x$ ,  $S$  expresses the  $\psi$  that  $p \approx$  In doing  $x$ ,  $S$  does something which is (incontestably<sup>4</sup>) *cp*-analytical evidence of his  $\psi$ -ing that  $p$ .

Let me explain. Consider a generalization like the following:

- (UG) For all subjects  $y$  of population  $P$ , if  $y$  performs an action of type  $X$ , then  $y$   $\psi$ s that  $p$ .

I shall call such an unqualified generalization *cp-analytical* if it is false as it stands but can be turned into a conceptual truth by adding nothing but a bunch of normality qualifications. So (UG) is *cp*-analytical if the following, or something like it (something containing even more normality qualifications, but nothing else), is a conceptual truth:

- (QG) If a normal person in normal circumstances performs an action of type  $X$ , then, *ceteris paribus*, he  $\psi$ s that  $p$ .

Let's get back to the right hand side of (1). So if  $S$  is a normal person, and his doing  $x$  is the performance of an action of type  $X$ , then he produces not only evidence of his  $\psi$  that  $p$ , but rather *cp-analytical evidence*. To the extent in which everything relevant can be assumed to be normal, *cp*-analytical evidence is more forceful than evidence which is merely empirical. (Anyone who accepts that everything relevant is normal, cannot coherently deny that  $S$   $\psi$ s that  $p$  in doing  $x$ .) But it still is defeasible evidence, as long as it is considered a possibility that something relevant may not be normal. The thing is: normally, it is more forceful evidence, but even in the cases which appear as normal as can be, it still remains defeasible evidence.

Here are a couple of examples. Example #1: Before leaving his home,  $S$  looks out of the window and then puts on his raincoat. Normally, this is evidence of his believing that it may easily rain today. But is it *cp*-analytical evidence? No. For even if we were to assume that  $S$  is a normal member of a population  $P$  of which the following holds:

If a normal member of  $P$  before leaving his home looks out of the window and then puts on his raincoat, then, *ceteris paribus*, he believes that it may easily rain today;

even if we make such an assumption, the evidence in question would not be *cp*-analytical. The generalization in question clearly is not a conceptual one: there is nothing incoherent in imagining that this true generalization could turn into a falsehood. No concept would have to be changed (not even the concept of a raincoat or the concept of normality); normal members of *P* would merely have to acquire new habits of raincoat wearing. — Example #2: *S* says “It may easily rain today”. If *S* is a normal speaker of English, then in making this utterance he produces *cp*-analytical evidence of his believing that it may easily rain today.

Let me go on. The *explicans* of (1) entails:

- (2) a. There is some population *P* such that a generalization like the following is *cp*-analytical: “Whenever a member of *P* does *X*, he  $\psi$ s that *p*”,  
and it holds that
- b. it is common ground among normal members of *P* that this is so;<sup>5</sup>
- c. *S* is a normal member of some such population;
- d. in doing *x*, *S* performs an action of type *X*. (Or else: In doing *x*, *S* does something which in *P* counts as performing an action of type *X*.)

From (2) it follows that among members of *P*, doing *X* counts as an expression of the  $\psi$  that *p*. For according to (2b), it is common ground in *P* that if a member of *P* does *X*, and things are normal, then he  $\psi$ s that *p*. And this is all it takes for *X*ing to count as an expression of the kind in question.<sup>6</sup> The relativation to a population allows for the possibility that *X*ing may *count*, among normal members of *P*, as an expression of the the  $\psi$  that *p*, without *being* an expression of the the  $\psi$  that *p*. (Yet a normal member of *P* cannot, for obvious reasons, easily accept this as a possibility.)

As soon as we introduce the additional assumption that *S* did *x* voluntarily in a *P*-context<sup>7</sup> in which all saliently relevant things appeared normal to normal members of *P*, we are in a position to deduce a lot of normative or quasi-normative statements. For example the following:

- (3) In doing *x*, *S* created (at least among his audience) a presumption that he  $\psi$ s that *p*.
- (4) In doing *x*, *S* presented himself (at least to his audience) as somebody who  $\psi$ s that *p*.
- (5) In doing *x*, *S* took *prima facie*-responsibility (at least towards his audience) for being somebody who  $\psi$ s that *p*.
- (6) Because of his doing *x*, *S* can be justifiably ascribed the  $\psi$  that *p* (at least by his audience).
- (7) In doing *x*, *S* committed himself (at least towards his audience) to be a  $\psi$ er that *p*.

So the idea is this. Expressing, on the one hand, is less than manifesting; on the other hand it is more than merely-producing-behavioural-evidence. These two facets

of the concept of expressing an intentional state are accounted for, in the analysis suggested here, by two features: first, by a certain type of conceptual connection between the action and the intentional state expressed; second, by a normality qualification. The first feature is a strengthening one: it renders expressing-the- $\psi$ -that- $p$  as something clearly more demanding than merely producing evidence that one  $\psi$ s that  $p$ . The second feature is a weakening one: it renders expressing-the- $\psi$ -that- $p$  as something clearly less demanding than manifesting-the- $\psi$ -that- $p$ . So we have found what we were after: a concept which is located between the concepts of manifesting and of merely producing evidence. The crucial point may be put thus: On the (essential) assumption that everything relevant is normal, the agent, on conceptual grounds, has the intentional state he expresses.

But one never knows if everything relevant is normal. In fact, such knowledge is impossible on conceptual grounds. On reflection, the concepts of a human being, of knowledge, normality, and relevance seem not to allow for the possibility that a normal person ever enters a situation in which he *knows* that *everything relevant is normal*. Normality is such a wishy washy thing, and relevance isn't any better. Not to speak of knowledge. Or of everything.

Normality, for the reason just mentioned, can't be detected. But it can be taken for granted. It can be decreed. It may be deemed. It may even be imposed against somebody's will. (Then, normally, somebody has to take the consequences.)

Whenever we categorically ascribe a belief or some other intentional state (excepting, of course, so-called self-ascriptions, which are utterly different), we commit ourselves to essentially contestable claims. They are essentially contestable, since there is always, inevitably, the possibility that something relevant may not be normal. This possibility cannot ever be totally excluded, other than by a normative or quasi-normative act.

## 2. OPTIMAL EXPRESSION OF AN INTENTIONAL STATE

Now given the essentially defeasible nature of belief expression, it may be interesting to see how good it can get. Let's consider the best possible case. (Our example being the belief that it's raining.)

The best possible evidence, barring supernatural evidence, for our ascribing to  $S$  the belief that it's raining is any old speech act on  $S$ 's part by which he expresses this belief — which expresses specifically this very belief. If  $S$ , in a context in which everything appears normal, says "It's raining" or "I believe that it's raining", he does the best anybody can do to express the belief that it's raining. If he did more, or less, than that, it wouldn't be best possible evidence for his having specifically this belief rather than another one.

Linguistic evidence of this type is optimal evidence for at least two reasons. First, the evidential tie between certain utterances and the expression of certain beliefs is most forceful because it is a conceptual tie; i.e., because there are connecting statements of the type "If somebody utters a sentence of type  $s$ , he expresses the belief that so-&-so" which are *cp*-analytical. Secondly, the tie between certain linguistic utterances and the beliefs expressed by them is, "logically" speaking, a particularly intimate one. This is so, because it is only some linguistic

utterances which satisfy what could be called the exactness condition on optimal belief expression. Optimal belief expression makes one belief recognizable as exactly *the* belief expressed. There is an important distinction between expressing some belief like, for example, the belief that *p* and expressing the belief that *p*. Wherever this distinction is inapplicable to whatever linguistic utterance or other kind of doing, we do not deal with optimal belief expressions.

An optimal expression of the belief that *p* must differ from the optimal expression of any other belief, however similar in content. The belief that it's raining differs from the belief that there is a considerable amount of water falling down from the skies; the belief that Harvey is very, very sweet is not the same as the belief that Harvey is very, very, very sweet. Only sentences have the right kind of granularity for specifying beliefs precisely. An assertive utterance of a univocal sentence often has belief-expressive disquotationality, if you allow for this ugly neologism. Only where this feature is present, it makes sense to speak of *the* belief (or other intentional state) expressed. What is said, in so many words, sometimes determines one belief: as the belief expressed. Belief-expressive disquotationality is a feature which is special to certain uses of language. A gesture, a grimace or what have you, clearly don't have this feature — lots of beliefs may be expressed, but none stands out so saliently that it could be considered as *the* belief expressed.<sup>8</sup> Let me add that not all univocal sentences have this feature; sentences like "It's cold here" or "The colour of Harvey's eyes is like this" do not have it.

So here we have a fairly good sense in which linguistic utterances — some linguistic utterances — are optimal means for expressing intentional states. We can specify the pertinent population easily ("competent speakers of the English language"), and we can say pretty clearly what kind of behaviour does the trick of producing *cp*-analytical evidence. *Vide* John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), chapter 3.

### 3. TWO MORE REMARKS

Let me close by adding two points. It may seem that the following is true:

- (K) If a normal speaker of English in a normal situation, on reflection, sincerely assents to "*p*", then he expresses the belief that *p*.<sup>9</sup>

But there are types of cases which deserve closer inspection. One such case is presented in Kripke's puzzle about Pierre.<sup>10</sup> It is not obvious that Kripke's Pierre, when he assents to "London is not pretty", expresses the belief that London is not pretty. By assumption, Pierre is a normal speaker of English; by assumption, he is prepared to assent to the sentence in a normal situation, on reflection, and sincerely. So maybe we should consider (K) as false. But (K) may nevertheless be *cp*-analytical. That is to say, (K\*) may nevertheless be a conceptual truth:

- (K\*) If a normal speaker in a normal situation, on reflection, sincerely assents to "*p*", then, *ceteris paribus*, he expresses the belief that *p*.

If we look at things this way, we can concede that Pierre is a normal speaker who on reflection assents to "London is not pretty", but we may nevertheless refrain from conceding that he thereby expresses the belief that London is not pretty. We may point to the fact that something about the whole story is not normal (For example, Pierre, at the same time, in the same normal situation, is disposed to assent, on reflection, to a sentence of a different language which means that London is pretty).

I don't mean to defend, at this point, this kind of strategy for dealing with the puzzling case of Pierre. All I want to suggest is that the approach to belief expression that I have sketched allows us both to accept Kripke's assumptions (about Pierre's being a normal speaker who sincerely assents to "London is not pretty") and to deny that Pierre therein expresses the belief that London is not pretty.

We should be prepared for a whole lot of more puzzling cases, as soon as we are willing to pay closer attention to our most easily available conceptual means. Consider, for example, the conceptual connections and distinctions between the items of the following lists:

**doing something ... that *p***

- [1] *S* asserts (i.e. does something by which he asserts) that *p*;
- [2] *S* says (i.e. does something by which he says) that *p*;
- [3] *S* says (i.e. does something by which he says) something which is true iff *p*;
- [4] *S* says in so many words that *p*;
- [5] *S* means (i.e. does something by which he means) to be saying that *p*;
- [6] *S* commits himself (i.e. does something by which he commits himself) to its being the case that *p*;

... and so on

**doing something ... the agent believes that *p***

- [7] *S* commits himself (i.e. does something by which he commits himself) to believing that *p*;
- [8] *S* expresses (i.e. does something by which he expresses) the belief that *p*;
- [9] *S* voluntarily produces (i.e. does something by which he voluntarily produces) evidence that he believes that *p*;
- [10] *S* produces (i.e. does something by which he produces) evidence that he believes that *p*;
- [11] *S* expresses (i.e. does something by which he expresses) the belief that *p*;
- [12?] *S* manifests (i.e. does something by which he manifests) his belief that *p*;<sup>11</sup>
- [13?] *S* means to manifest (i.e. does something by which he means to manifest) his belief that *p*;

... and so on

**believing that *p***

- [14] *S* believes that *p*.

There is a whole lot of work to be done here: work concerning the conceptual connections between what one does linguistically (or at least means to be doing), what one therein (either voluntarily or not) commits oneself to, and what one thereby (again, either voluntarily or not) indicates, expresses or even manifests about one's doxastic state of mind. To anyone who takes an interest in the relationship between "language" and "mind", a careful exploration of these intricate conceptual connections should be tempting. No less tempting, at least, than the speculative issues and pseudo-issues concerning the relationship between "public language" and "Mentalese". — My guess is, by the way, that all of the conceptual connections (excepting the obvious ones)<sup>12</sup> which obtain between [1] — [14], and their like, contain the heavy application of the conceptual lubricant called "normality". That is to say, whatever may seem to be true, with regard to those connections, really is *cp*-analytical.

Let me mention here, as an aside, one aspect of John Searle's philosophy which I like a lot. It has to do with what philosophy is about and with his straightforwardness in addressing philosophical issues. — After all, the concepts which perplex and fascinate us most in philosophy, are concepts we are already equipped with before we start doing philosophy: seemingly simple concepts like "asserting", "saying", "meaning", "meaning to", "expressing", and "believing". (Or if you wish: "good", "true", "beautiful", "free", ...) As soon as we are doing philosophy, we invent, and are proud of inventing, new concepts: concepts like "intentional state", "mental representation", "truth condition", "direction of fit", "*quale*", "state token" and "ontological subjectivity". (Or if you wish: "essence", "*a priori*", "intrinsic value", "conceptual truth", ...) These made-up concepts are designed solely for the purpose of clarifying the conceptual connections of the seemingly simple ones which perplex and fascinate us in the first place. This is their *ratio essendi*. But once they are there, they have a tendency to attract the philosopher's, or at least the professional philosopher's, attention as if they were of primary philosophical importance in themselves. Philosophers tend to become perplexed and fascinated by these "tool"-concepts as well — sometimes so much so that they seem to them to be as important as, or even more important than, the ones they were designed to help us clarify. In doing philosophy, we discuss a lot of derived, technical and would-be technical, issues; which is fine and even inevitable, to some extent. Yet continually addressing them, as we sometimes do, as if they were issues of the same philosophical standing as the "genuine" issues may blind us, in the long run, to what philosophy is, and ought to be about primarily. Part of what makes doing philosophy difficult is having to find a way between, on the one hand, naively addressing the genuine issues, as if there were no technical refinements involved in their today's best discussions, and, on the other hand, losing sight of those issues: drowning in the technicalities. — In John Searle's philosophical work, it seems to me, there prevails a robust and sober sense of first-things-first with regard to all this. He admirably masters this difficulty: he is both inventive and critical as regards the technicalities, but he never loses sight of what is genuinely at issue.

A second point concerns a remark John Searle made in reply to this paper at the symposium in Bielefeld. He remarked, in effect, that all this may be fine, but is not of much use if one does — as he said he prefers to do — speech act theory "from a

strictly first person point of view". If you take this point of view, there is, supposedly, no problem about the difference between what your behaviour merely indicates and what it expresses (or what it even may optimally express); you just simply know what you want to get across by doing what you do.

Well, if there should be such a point of view, I most probably lead my whole life in this way. Including the periods in which I am thinking about speech acts.

But whatever one's point of view, be it "first person" or what have you, the concepts I've mentioned are just there. They should be taken seriously, as long as we do not know how to do better without them. If they are distinct, they should be distinguished. Even if it were to make no difference, "from a certain point of view", with regard to what I do in doing what I do — whether I merely provide evidence that I believe that so-&-so, whether I express it, or whether I express this very belief optimally —, still I'd be doing different things. Part of the joy of doing speech act theory, from my strictly first person point of view, is becoming more and more remindful of how many surprisingly different things we do when we talk to each other.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Except for the last section, "Two more remarks", this is pretty much the paper I presented at the colloquium in Bielefeld. I had been asked by Günter Grewendorf and Georg Meggle to address an issue pertinent to John Searle's account of illocutionary acts, in about ten minutes. What could be easier?

Thanks to Nikola Kompa and Mark Siebel for helpful comments on an earlier version.

<sup>2</sup> Searle, John. *Expression and Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979, p. 4

<sup>3</sup> Searle, John. *Intentionality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983, pp. 9/10

<sup>4</sup> Not all analytically true statements are obviously analytically true (in fact, some may not even be obviously true). By speaking of "incontestable" ones, I want to rule out those which are controversial or too demanding. If it would take an Aristotle or a Grice a week of pondering, it is too demanding. If it takes you and me just a moment of concentrated reflection, it is what I call incontestable. Of course, there's a whole lot in between; so be it.

<sup>5</sup> It is common ground among people that  $p$  iff (i) each of them firmly believes that  $p$ , and (ii) nobody among them believes of anyone else that he does not believe that  $p$ , and (iii) nobody among them believes of anyone else that he does not believe of anyone else that he believes that  $p$ , and so on. Hence for any two people,  $A$  and  $B$ , the following infinite series is true. Stage #1:  $\text{Bel}(A,p)$ ,  $\text{Bel}(B,p)$ ; stage #2:  $\sim\text{Bel}(A,\sim\text{Bel}(B,p))$ ,  $\sim\text{Bel}(B,\sim\text{Bel}(A,p))$ ; stage #3:  $\sim\text{Bel}(A,\sim\text{Bel}(B,\text{Bel}(A,p)))$ ,  $\sim\text{Bel}(B,\sim\text{Bel}(A,\text{Bel}(B,p)))$ ; and so on. Notice that this series contains no higher order beliefs but only excludes a certain infinite class of such beliefs. — Clause [2b] is meant to account for the incontestability of the  $cp$ -analyticity of the generalization in question (i.e.: "Whenever a member of  $P$  does  $X$ , he  $\psi$ s that  $p$ ").

<sup>6</sup> As you can see, I assume the following as a sufficient condition for  $X$ ing to count in  $P$  as an expression of the  $\Psi$  that  $p$ :

It is common ground among normal members of  $P$  that the following generalization is  $cp$ -analytical: Whenever a normal member of  $P$  does  $X$ , then he  $\Psi$ s that  $p$ .

<sup>7</sup> A context (whatever this may be in the final analysis) is a  $P$ -context iff anyone involved in it is a member of  $P$ , and it is common ground among the people involved that anybody involved is a member of  $P$ .

<sup>8</sup> If  $S$  says "It's raining", doesn't he thereby, in the normal course of things, also express a lot of other beliefs? For example, the belief that his utterance is relevant, or the belief that his addressee will understand him? No, not according to the explication suggested here. First, remember that "obviously acting on the assumption that  $p$ ", or "obviously taking it for granted, in doing what one does, that  $p$ ", signify concepts distinct from the concept of expressing the belief that  $p$ . Secondly, it is doubtful that



generalizations like the following are merely *cp*-analytical:

If a speaker of English says "It's raining", then he believes that his utterance is relevant.

If a speaker of English says "It's raining", then he believes that his addressee will understand him.

Thirdly, it is even more doubtful that these generalizations are *incontestably cp*-analytical. And lastly, even if they were, they clearly lack the feature of belief-expressive disquotationality; and that is to say: A speaker who says "It's raining" does not thereby, in the normal course of things, *optimally* express the belief that his utterance is relevant. In order to do that, he would have to say something else — something which would sound fairly queer in a normal context.

<sup>9</sup> Here "*p*" is to be replaced inside and outside the quotation marks by any standard English sentence which is neither ambiguous nor inappropriately context-dependent.

<sup>10</sup> Saul Kripke, "A puzzle about Pierre", in: A. Margalit (ed.), *Meaning and Use*, (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978), 239—283.

<sup>11</sup> Why the question mark? Well, manifesting an intentional state by doing something would be, to my mind, a conceptual impossibility if somebody's manifesting something, whatsoever it may be, were to unexceptionally entail his having it. (Like manifesting an ability, for example, entails having it.) If this supposition were correct — i.e. if "*S*, by doing *x*, manifests *y*", *without exception*, entails "*S* has *y*" —, then one probably could not manifest any of one's beliefs, for the simple reason that there seems to be nothing one can do which would entail that one believes that so-&-so.

Yet there seems to be a weaker sense of "manifesting" — a the sense in which it means something like "giving strongest possible evidence". In this sense one may, by doing what one does, manifest courage, for example. In this weaker sense one may also manifest one's belief that *p*: by doing what I have called "optimally expressing the belief that *p*". — My command of English is too poor to arrogate myself an opinion about whether the weaker sense of "manifesting" is a literal sense in its own right, or just the product of a relaxed manner of speaking. Hence the question mark.

<sup>12</sup> It is obvious, for example, that [9] entails [10]. See footnote 4 above.