Lecture 25
Intentionality

About the Lecture: The concept intentionality is discussed in this lecture with reference to John Searle. Searle gives causal account of intentionality. Intentionality as an intrinsic feature of consciousness is caused by the neurological processes. In other words, the intentional states have a causal grounding on the ontology of the biological or the physical. Intentionality in Searle’s theorization is not transcendental rather causally related to the nature. Because of its intrinsic relation with consciousness it helps in explicating the structure of intentional states/ thoughts and expressions. For Searle, the intentional structure of thoughts is grounded on intentionality.

Keywords: Intentional States, Intentionality, Direction of fit, condition of satisfaction, Psychological Mode, Intentional Content, Propositional Content, Aspectuality.

Intentionality, according to Searle, is an intrinsic feature of the mental, especially conscious-thought-experience. As Searle defines, “Intentionality is the feature of certain mental states and events that consists in their (in a special sense of these words) being directed at, being about, being of or representing certain other entities and states of affairs.”\(^1\) Intentionality is a property\(^2\) of all the mental states and events which represents something about the world. And that representational feature is a part of our conscious activity. Moreover, for Searle, certain not all the mental states are intentional. Some mental states are non-intentional because they don't have specific object of reference. Mental states with specificity of reference can be called genuinely intentional states, like desire, intention, belief, etc. They are intentional because they represent something in the world. Whereas, sudden feeling of joy, or being frightened are not intentional because they are not directed to anything. Those mental states are not proper intentional states. In other words, the representation of mental states must have some object of reference for the direction of fit. That discloses the directedness embedded in the mind-to-the

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\(^2\) Searle writes in his Intentionality that “Intentionality is a property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at, or about or of the subjects of the states of affairs in the world.” Here Searle does not make any distinction between the property and features both are part of the mental states in particular and consciousness in general. See *Intentionality*, p.1.
world. As Searle puts it, “What is a belief really? is taken to mean: what is a _qua belief_, then the answer has to be given, at least in part, in terms of the logical properties of the belief: a belief is a propositional content in a certain psychological mode determines mind-to-world direction of fit, and its propositional content determines a set of conditions of satisfaction. Intentional states have to be characterized in Intentional terms if we are not to lose sight of their intrinsic Intentionality.”³ Condition of satisfaction is an outcome of the logical properties of the representation of the intentional states of a person. That means, there is already an intentional act involved in the very process of representation. In other words, the intentional act of an agent is to represent his mental states in such a way that it should be effective to carry our action. Thereby, intentionality is already acting in the process of representation. Moreover, the logical properties of the intentional states consist in the _psychological modes_ and _propositional content_. Psychological mode of a person determines his relationship of aboutness, i.e., how his mind or mental states are related with the world, which results in bringing about the mind-to-the world _direction of fit_. Whereas, the propositional content of the intentional states determines the _condition of satisfaction_. Furthermore, the content of an intentional state is not determined by one intentional state alone. Rather, the content of condition of satisfaction is determined by the interrelationship with a group of intentional states. In Searle’s words, “Intentional states with a direction of fit have contents which determine their condition of satisfaction. But they do not function in an independent and atomistic fashion, for each intentional state has its content and determines its condition of satisfaction only in relation to numerous other intentional states.”⁴ These numerous mental states have functional correlation with each other. Their functional relationship is nothing but intentional relationship. It is a part of the conscious activities of the person to represent his mental states. Searle, therefore, says, “We might say that his intention refers to these other Intentional states in the sense that it can only have the condition of satisfaction that it does, and thus can only be the intention that it is, because it is located in the Network of other beliefs and desires. Furthermore in any real life situation, belief and desires are the only part of a larger complex of still other psychological states; there will be subsidiary intentions as well as hopes and fears, anxieties and anticipations, feelings of frustration and satisfaction. Searle points out, “I have been calling this entire holistic Network, simply the

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⁴Searle, _Intentionality_, p.141.
Now the question arises: How is this complex mental activity revealed? The structure of consciousness does not provide complete answer to this question. It only shows the structure of mental states having certain basic properties at the micro level. How do the micro properties or the logical properties of intentional states get unfolded? It is through language. Intentional states are expressed in language. More precisely, the speech act expresses the intentional representation of the mental states. There is an isomorphism between the structure of the intentional states and the structure of their linguistic representation. The structural isomorphism shows there is a logical relationship between the two structures. That is, there is continuity between the propositional content and the illocutionary force of the linguistic representation and the representational content and the psychological mode of the intentional states. Searle says, “If I am right in thinking that intentional states consist of representative contents in the various psychological modes, then it is at least misleading, if not simply a mistake, to say that a belief, for example, is a two term relation between believer and a proposition. An analogous mistake would be to say that a statement is a two-term relation between a speaker and a proposition. One should say rather a proposition is not the object of a statement or belief but rather its content.”

That is to say, the content is the essence of intentional states, is concealed to the conscious thought processes, till it gets manifested in the expression. It is not the content alone, but also the mode of speaking or believing is reflected in the very act of as well as the in the part of content formulation. So there are logically correlated with each other. For Searle, content which is a

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p.18.
realized in its manifestation in linguistic representation but content is not identical with it. The content is the intentional property of mental states, which in essence embody intentionality.

Mental states are biologically more primitive than the language use. Searle remarks, “By explaining Intentionality in terms of language I do not mean simply that Intentionality is essentially and necessarily, linguistic. On the contrary it seems obvious that infants and many animals that do not in any ordinary sense have a language or perform a speech acts nevertheless have intentional mental states. ...Language is derived from Intentionality and not conversely. The direction of pedagogy is to explain intentionality in terms of language; the direction of logical analysis to explain in terms of Intentionality.” 7 Language is an instrument of thought process and thereby it is also an instrument of expression of thoughts. Since intentionality is essentially correlated with all of our conscious activities the content formulation is also an aspect of consciousness. So intentionality is logically prior, insofar as the representation is concerned. Thus, for Searle, language is secondary to the intentionality or the content of intentional states. As he writes, “The forms of realization of an Intentional state are just as irrelevant to its logical properties as the forms in which a speech act is realized are irrelevant to logical properties. The logical properties of Intentional states arise from their being representations, and the point is that they can like linguistic entities have logical properties in a way stones and trees can have logical properties) because Intentional states unlike linguistic entities and unlike stones and trees, are representation.” 8 Searle stresses on the continuity of the content as the logical property of intentional states to its representation. Though the intentional states and expressions are two different forms where the content of both the forms remain same. Furthermore, one can apply Searle’s notion of latency and manifestation of unconscious mental states and conscious mental states to the form of intentional states and their expressions. Insofar as the realization of the content is concerned the form is not important. Rather, the properties of the intentional states are significant because the properties are intrinsically related to consciousness. And consciousness is the basic feature of human beings. All the forms of intentionality including the content formulation are part of the basic features of consciousness. Searle explains these forms of the content of intentionality by explicating the notion of perception, action, and causation.

7 Ibid., p.5
8 Ibid., pp.15-16.
In so far as the content of intentionality is concerned, it is vividly reflected in visual form of experience. Perceiver’s vision is directed towards the object of perception. According to Searle, the perceiver is not only seeing the object but also experiencing it. Seeing being a part of conscious experience is intrinsic to the mind. Searle says, “Both belief and visual experiences are intrinsically intentional phenomena in the minds/brains of agents; the ascription of these states and events is to be taken entirely, not just as manner of speaking, nor as short hand for a statement describing some more complex set of events and relations going on outside the agents.”9 For him, experience is a conscious activity. And the intentional feature of experience is clearly shown in the case of visual and thought processes. These are the two basic forms of mental representations. As Searle puts it, “There are perceptual experiences; they have intentionality; their intentional content is propositional in form; they have mind-to-world direction of fit; and the properties which are specified by their Intentional content are not in general literally properties of the perceptual experiences.”10 Though experiencing these properties of consciousness is an inner activity but the properties are reflected in the form of propositional representation of mental states and experiences. Propositional representation is a form of transformation11 that takes place from our visual form of experience to the verbal form of representation. And verbal representation unfolds the content of the experience. One single content can be represented in various forms of linguistic or verbal representation. So the transformation mainly focuses on the different descriptions of the experience. As Searle writes, “There is an additional syntactical argument for the same conclusion. Just as verbs of desire take the temporal modifiers that requires to postulate an entire proposition as the content of the desire, so the verb “see” takes spatial modifiers that under natural interpretation require us to postulate an entire proposition as the content of visual experience.”12 This argument of Searle shows a logical compatibility between the visual experience and its verbal representations. This facilitates the transformation of the visual experience into verbal representations. This logical transformation entails the notion of causal self-referentiality that is involved in the very process of experiencing the content.

10 Searle, Intentionality, p.45.
12 Searle, Intentionality, p.41.
The causal self-referentiality is involved in the process of transformation. It is because of the structural similarity between the properties of the visual experience and the properties of linguistic representation. The causal self-referentiality is caused by the intentionality of consciousness and reflects the intentionality or aboutness. The referentiality properties reveal the condition of satisfaction. As Searle rightly says, “The verbal representation that I have just given of the visual intentional content is not in any sense a translation. It is rather a verbal specification of what the intentional content requires it be to be satisfied. The sense then in which the visual intentional content of self-referential is not that it contains a verbal or other representation of itself: it certainly performs no speech act of reference to itself! Rather, the sense in which visual experience is self referential is simply that figure in its own condition of satisfaction.”

Linguistic expression is not, thus, identified with the content of the intentional states and experiences. It is because the content posits the notion of aspectuality and phenomenality. When a person sees thing, he sees the thing as something or some aspects of it. It is always specific to the person’s point of view. And that specificity is intrinsic to the conscious experiences which constitutes the content of experience and determine the condition of satisfaction. The expression of content in terms of language reveals the content but it does not represent it completely. The self-referentiality is a part function of content formation and thereby it is part of consciousness and intentionality.

Similarly, the content is also embedded in action. The intentionality in the case of human action is equally posited with its logical properties. The content of action is part of the structural framework of the intentional states and processes. The processes of intentional states or content signify transition, i.e., content persists from prior intentional states to the present intentional states. Because, intentional sates cause action and each action is a consequence of the realization of the intentional states, which is a cause of that action. Searle says, “My intention is satisfied iff my action represented by the content of intention is actually performed.”

So it shows that the content of an action is revealed the action of the agent and by performing the action the agent experiences it. Experiencing the content of intentional states, as the cause of action is part of conscious experiencing which results condition of satisfaction. However, every action presupposes two things such as prior intention and intention in action. The prior intention

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13 Ibid., p.49.
14 Ibid., p.9
reveals the structural framework of intentional states. Planned action is constituted of many sub-intentional states, which determine the very course of action. And sub-intentional states are put in a sequential order where one follows the other. On the other hand, intention in action is part of realizing the very process of action. As Searle makes the difference, “All intentional states have intention in action but not all intentional action have prior intentions. I can do something intentionally without having formed a prior intention to do it, and I can have a prior intention to do something and yet not act on that intention.”

Searle emphasis here is on the realization of the content of action. Insofar as the content of action is concerned it is expressed is the very process of intention of action. It is because each action whether intentional on non-intentional will have intention in action. That is, a person will have a reason to describe his cause of performing the action. Prior intention of actions changes because the agent doesn’t find suitable conditions of representing the intention. The change is always context dependent. Moreover, it is the intention of action which reveals the real content of action. That is, it involves two things, the intentional component of action which represents intentionality showing how mind is affecting the world; secondly, the condition of satisfaction action performed (includes the bodily movements) by the agent is realized by the agent. Thus, the conceptual connection between them is: [Prior Intention] → causes [Intention in action] → causes [bodily movement].

Furthermore, Searle considers an action as a unit, represented by prior intention, which includes the experience of acting, and the intention in action. For example, prior intention represents the whole of action along with the conditions of satisfaction but intention-in-action only presents the action without representing it. Representation is part of experiencing the intention. Prior intention and intention in action are causally self-referential even though they look outworldly different. The whole unit of action is the intentional object of prior intention, whereas the bodily movement is the intentional object for intention in action. Intention in action determines only conditions of satisfaction. In this regard there can be only a conceptual difference between prior intention and intention in action. As Searle puts it, “prior intention causes intention in action. But transitivity of intentional causation, the prior intention represents

15 Ibid., p.85
16 I have elaborated it in my M.Phil. Dissertation, “Searle’s Concept of Intentionality” p.20. For clarification also see, Searle’s Intentionality, p.93.
and causes the entire action, but intention in action presents only bodily movement."\(^{17}\) As we have mentioned earlier, the transitivity of actions refers to a sequential process. That is, intentional states follow up one another in sequential order. Searle remarks, “Where we have a sequence of causal by-means-of relations the initial term of which is an experience of acting, the Intentional content can include each of the various steps – the intention can be, for example, to break the vase by means of hitting it with a hard object, by means of moving the hard object, by means of moving the hands holding the hard object. But the steps beyond the movement of the hand are all causal steps and the same causation which is part of the content of the experience in manipulation be observed in cases where there is no manipulation.”\(^{18}\) From the frequent observations of the happenings of two different phenomena, i.e., the process of one phenomenon is resulting in producing the phenomenon. We find that there is the entailment of causal relationship between the two phenomena. Each intentional state is the cause of producing action as an effect. Our observation of one event causing some other event is not just simply observing the sequential order of the events but also experiencing the relation of causality. It is because the causal relationship that follows from experiencing such events is part of the content of one’s experience. Thus Searle extends the notion of intentionality to cover the notion of causality.

Experiencing the causal relationship is part of the conscious thought experience. The explanation of causation, according to Searle, undergoes an intentional process, i.e.; intentionality is presupposed in the mind-to-world and world-to-mind relationships. Searle internationalizes the very notion of causality. Intentionalisation refers to the structural explanation of mental states causing the actions as well as realizing the very notion of intention-in-action, which is the content of action. As we have discussed already intention in action is a part of the conscious process of action. An intentional state causes action is nothing but a feature of mental causation. Experiencing the intentional transitivity of an action is the same as experiencing the causal order of the mental states causing other bodily movements or action. Searle rightly says, “I get direct experience of causation from the fact that part of the Intentional content of my experience of acting is that it causes the bodily movement, i.e., it is satisfied only if bodily movement is caused by it; and I get a direct experience of causation from the fact that part of the Intentional content of my experience of perceiving is caused by the object perceived,

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p.95
\(^{18}\)Ibid., p.129.
i.e., it is satisfied only if it is caused by the presence and features of the object. Now, what counts as the conditions of satisfaction of my Intentional events are indeed determined by intentional events, but that intentional event in fact satisfied is not itself part of the content. Actions and perceptions are in my account are causal and Intentional transactions between mind and the world, but that the transactions are actually taking place in not up to the mind. And indeed this fact is a consequence of the fact that there is nothing subjective about causation. It is really there.” ¹⁹ Causation is internalized in the case of action and perception. To experience the content of the causal order means to experience the changes that occur in the phenomena of causation. It also happens that one particular intentional state brings out another mental state or states. This is called as experiencing the mental states and events. In both these the experiencing the phenomenon of change means to capture the content of change occurring in the phenomena of action and perception. And, moreover, experience in both the cases is part of our conscious activity. So experience includes intentionality.

However, causal explanation is usually understood as a relationship of cause and effect. For instance, when a particular billiard balls A hits at other billiard ball B, it generates movement in B. Here, A is the cause of generating such movement in B. So there is a causal relationship between the two events; event A is causing the movement in event B but before B’s movement both are in their respective states. If the similar changes occur in a regular basis, i.e. whenever a billiard ball [b¹] hits another billiard ball [b²] then there will be certainly a movement in the ball, which is hit. This is how we precisely talk about a causal law. Searle, however, makes a distinction between the notion of causing and the causal relations. For him, causal relations operate within the events, i.e., a causal force acting within the very nature of things. In other words, causal force of an entity signifies its potentiality to bring out certain effect. The neurophysiological processes of the brain have the causal capacity to generate conscious mental states. Causal force is embedded in the very nature of object. Another example is that of milk causing curd. Milk has the potency of causing curd, which is something different from what milk is not. Thus, the notion of causing shows that both are logically independent of each other. It is because; properties of milk or neurological process are different from the properties of curd and conscious mental states respectively. Moreover, at the same time, all the things in the earth are

¹⁹Ibid., p.130.
gravitationally attracted to the centre of it. That is to say the gravitational force is operating in every field of existence. The force shows that there is a causal relationship that is operating in the universe. Within the universe there are many things, which are causing some other things. Searle remarks, “Causal relations are holding only between the events, but causal relation exists between things which are not events” (op. cit., p.116).

The notion of intentional causation, as Searle suggests, is a relationship between the cause and effect; effect is not an entailment from the cause. Rather, it is a logical relationship that holds between the interrelationship between the intentional states and the conditions of satisfaction. Searle says, “The experience of something red, when satisfied, is not literally red, but it is literally caused. And the paradoxical aspect of the asymmetry is this: on my account the concept of reality is a causal concept. Part of our notion of the way the world really is, is that its being the way it is causes us to perceive it as being that way. Causes are part of reality and yet the concept of reality is itself a causal concept.”

As we have discussed earlier phenomenality and the aspectuality of the objects of experience are intentional. Intentionality is logically presupposed in the case of all experiences. And so is the notion of causality. The cause of our seeing or experiencing the object as is a feature of intentionality. It is because the intentional representation of it results in direction of fit, i.e. the mind-to-world relationship. However, he also suggests that not all cases of intentional causation involve self-referential intentional content. The intentional causal conditions that he puts forwards are as follows: To quote:

“1. Either (a) \( x \) is an intentional state or event and \( y \) is (or a part of) the conditions of satisfaction of \( x \).

2. or, (b) \( y \) is an Intentional state or event and \( x \) is (or a part of ) the condition of satisfaction of \( y \).

3. if (a), the intentional content of \( x \) is a causally relevant aspect under which it causes \( y \), if (b), the intentional content of \( y \) is causally relevant aspect under which it is caused by \( x \).”

\(^{20}\)Ibid., p.131.
\(^{21}\)Ibid., pp.122-123.
This notion of causal capacity between $x$ and $y$ or $y$ and $x$ shows the referential feature of the causal capacity of the phenomena of causing. Insofar as mental causation is concerned the self-referentiality is the causal capacity of the intentional states. Realization of intentional states results in condition of satisfaction. So both causing something and realizing it have same locus, i.e. they are intentional features of consciousness. The conception of causal experience and experiencing causality refers to the causal nexus related with content of experience. Searle writes, The causal nexus is internal to our experience and not to its object. … On my account one does not observe the ‘necessary connection’ between events, rather one event, e.g., my experiences of acting, is a causal Intentional presentation the of the other event, e.g., the movement of my arm and the two together make up the composite event, raising my arm.”\textsuperscript{22}

When someone is intending to raise his arm to convey some message to his fellow beings; his intending is a conscious activity and act of raising arm is also a conscious activity of the person. When he conveys the messages by raising his hand his intention is satisfied.

Thus, according to Searle, intentionality is intrinsic to the structure of mental states and its various forms are revealed in the forms of experiences like perception, action, and causation. For Searle, these forms of experiences are realized because they are the very features of intentionality. So, intentionality plays a double role, at one point it is reflected in the visual experiences, intention-in- action and mental causation. And secondly, realizing the state of intentionality which it results in conditions of satisfaction one understands the notion of intentionality \textit{per se}. In other words, \textit{self-referentiality} is the logical feature of intentionality. Conscious beings’ mind is not only directed about the states of affairs of the world, but also the whole of iteration or participation of a being in the world reveals that the world is acting on the mind of conscious beings. Searle’s theory of intentionality tries to unfold this essential \textit{link} between mind and the world. The link can be called the \textit{connecting principle}. Moreover, intentionality by itself revealing its form becomes an independent feature of the mind. Since intentionality is intrinsic to consciousness, it never becomes independent of consciousness \textit{per se}. Rather; intentionality as such is the basic feature of consciousness.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p.125