Searle on Intentionality[i] - 30/05/2020

Firstly let's define the terms of the title: intentionality and Searle general position according to what Ronald McIntyre[ii] said in the intro of his article.

Intentionality is the apparently relational property wherein certain mental states (e.g. perceptions and beliefs) are characterized as _being 'of' or 'about' objects_ of various sorts, especially extra-mental things and states of affairs.

Searle is a physicalist but not a reductionist[iii]. For him, _Intentionality_ is an 'intrinsic' feature of certain mental states but cannot ultimately be explained away. However, 'Intentional states are both caused by and realized in the structure of the brain'. Also Intentionality is crucial for developing a _theory of mind_ , including belief, perception, intentional action, causality, meaning, and reference.

Especially here in this post our intention is to understand, from McIntyre, the relation between Husserl and Searle. Husserl called intentionality 'the principal theme of phenomenology' though Searle does not explicitly invoke the classical phenomenology. For Searle, the 'Intentional content' is a mental state, by virtue of its own internal character and its relationships to other mental states. Thus, he believes, the Intentionality of a mental state is _independent of what is in fact true about extra-mental reality_ and the mind's actual relationship to it. This aspect of Searle's work places it in close affinity with the _phenomenological tradition_.

Some other points of Searle conception are:

·   He explicitly rejects the view that the problems of Intentionality are basically linguistic or semantic problems.

·   The problem of Intentionality is not a problem of explaining why sentences about Intentional mental phenomena violate certain logical principles (intensionality-with-an-s). Rather, it is the problem of explaining how those Intentional mental phenomena themselves relate to the states of affairs they are 'of' or 'about'.

**   The Nature of Intentional States: Searle's Key Concepts. **The central notion of a mental state is its nature or its 'Intentional content'. Two others contribute to it creating a kind of _internal holism_ : the _Network_ , a system of Intentional mental states in which the given mental state occurs and the _Background_ , a system of non-Intentional mental capacities corresponding to the subject's bodily skills and know-how.

Searle appeals to his _speech-act theory_ to explain Intentional content, one dependent on two things, its 'illocutionary force' (varies with the kind of _speech act performed_ : asserting, promising, ordering, etc.) and its 'propositional content' (varies with just _what it is_ that one asserts, promises, orders, etc.). For each speech act is the propositional content that makes the assertion true satisfying some state of affairs. The propositional content of a speech act determines its 'conditions of satisfaction'; and each speech act is thereby said to 'represent' the state of affairs that would satisfy it. The illocutionary force affects the 'direction of fit' of propositional content that can be 'word-to-world' (assertion) or 'world-to-word' (order).

We can carry over the speech-act theory to intentional states because they have similarity conditions: a speech act with a certain propositional content purports to express an Intentional mental state with that same propositional content. This content occurs in mental states called 'psychological modes': belief, perception, etc., but not intrinsically linguistic. To summarize: 'Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in the same sense of "represent" that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs'. These are the 'direction of fits' for intentional states of the psychological modes:

·   Beliefs and perceptions: 'mind-to-world'.

·   Intention and desires: 'world-to-mind'.

Thus, Searle's explication of the Intentionality of a mental state consists in specifying these various relations for that mental state – specifying:

·   its psychological mode;

·   its conditions of satisfaction;

·   its direction of fit;

And, elaborating on these as necessary.[iv] This first intro is enough so far and we can go ahead later with the other topics: the similarities and differences between Searle and Husserl and also the details of the Searle's concepts.

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[i] Available on:
http://www.csun.edu/~vcoao087/pubs/searle.pdf,
Accessed on May 12, 2020. Ronald McIntyre, "Searle on Intentionality,"
Inquiry, 27 (1984), 468-483.

[ii] Ronald McIntyre: Professor Emeritus - Department of Philosophy, California State University, Northridge. Available on:
<http://www.csun.edu/~vcoao087/> and accessed on May 12, 2020.

[iii] John Searle has a concept of biological naturalism (it refutes both dualism and materialism) where mind, as a biological phenomenon, is part of the nature. One important point of this concept is that we don't say that consciousness is not physical; instead we say it is physical with an ontological part. See on:
<https://www.investigatingtheworld.com/2018/09/uniqueness-of-consciousnessi.html>.

[iv] However, not all _Intentional_ states so neatly fit this speech-act model. Also, it is hard to understand Searle´s notions of speech-act theory at the first time. Even though the Searle´s non-reductionism it is difficult to refrain from wondering just what the propositional or Intentional content of a mental state is. Searle believes he can resist such questions, partly on the grounds that his basic notions are 'logical' rather than 'ontological' ones. But McIntyre will go on this later.