

My Searle's Oslo Talk Notes:

Philosophy often starts with a paradox

There is a class of facts in the world that are **only what they are because you think that they are—because of human subjective agreement.**

Eg: money

Leads to a crucial distinction: There are two senses to the objective/subjective distinctions

1. Epistemic Sense
- Objective:** we have epistemic objectivity when I say Rembrandt was born in 1606 --that is a matter of objective fact.
 - Subjective:** If I say Rembrandt is a better painter than Vermeer that is a matter of subjective opinion.

This distinction between epistemic objectivity and subjectivity is based on a more profound distinction between modes of existence.

2. Ontological Sense (modes of existence)
- Objective:** Atoms, molecules and tectonic plates exist no matter what anyone thinks
 - Subjective:** Itches, tickles and pain only exist in so far as they are experienced by humans or animal subjects

The epistemic is based on a profound distinction: modes of existence

Note: As a result you can have an epistemic objective claim about a domain that is ontologically subjective.

This bears on the mind/body problem:

It is said by some that consciousness is subjective and that science only deals with the objective. Therefore, it is claimed there can be no science of consciousness

Searle disagrees with that. He says you can have an epistemically objective science about a domain that is ontologically subjective (like consciousness).

Searle asserts it is true we are trying to find objective truths (science) about a domain that is ontologically subjective.

Searle says we tend to forget this, but we study economics but forget it, too, is an epistemically objective study about a domain that is ontologically subjective. The domain they study is created by human ontological subjectivity: money, property, exchanges, and the stock market...and all the rest of it...

Now we can go and ask, what is it about these facts that make them epistemically objective? How does it work?

It is by the application of certain principles. Here is a list:

1. That we are making a distinction between **observer relative** and the observer independent. This is important because of what he just said: **the phenomena we are going to be studying are observer relative**: money, property, government, marriage, etc.

We are discussing a class of observer relative facts.

2. These **facts** require the existence of human cooperation—what he calls **collective intentionality**. It is only because we collectively agree or we “accept” that this is money, that this is Oslo University...and so on. In addition, it is only by the collective intentionality of observers that these facts exist.

Collective intentionality is used for? Now we get into more detail. Human beings and some animals have the capacity to assign functions to certain objects, where the function is always observer relative.

For example, Searle and we carry around in our wallets certain objects that perform function (driver’s license, money, etc.), where we have assigned the function to the object. The functions are always observer relative.

3. We typically **assign the function** in virtue in **virtue of physical structure**.

However, the genius of the human circle:

Human beings as far as he knows are the only animals that have the capacity can assign functions where the function is not performed in virtue of or performed solely in virtue of the function the physical structure; but rather, that there is a **collective assignment** to the object or the person of having a certain status.

4. Status function

In addition, with that status a function that can only be performed in virtue of that collective acceptance. Eg. money → not in virtue of physical structure, but because of status assigned.

- a. Status functions are pervasive
- b. How does the ontology of status function work?

He thought he had a neat answer (but was wrong)—all status functions were a result of the application of a simple principle; it seemed to him there were two kinds of rules:

- 1) Rules that regulate antecedently existing forms of behavior (like driving on the right);
- 2) there are ones that create the very possibility of the behavior, like rules to a game like a game of chess.

5. Constitutive rules

These rule always have the same structure: x counts as a y in context c. (like moves in a game)

This seemed beautiful him → you gradually build up human society with repeated applications of this constitutive rule

It has two formal features:

- a. It iterates upward: like the language used to get married → words count as promises in a certain context, which counts as a contract of the form: x_1 counts as y_1 in context c, which leads to x_2 counts as y_2 ...
- b. It also spreads out laterally → you never have just a single institutional fact; it is imbedded in a complex interlocking structure. A widespread network of status functions... society is amazing has so much power when it is so invisible.
- c.

He liked that theory—a single devise that is repeated over and over.

However, after publishing this he received criticism for the following reasons:

He realized on his own that sometimes you just create an institutional fact. Eg. Sally is going to be the chairman (chairperson, hehe) of the meeting. He calls things like this, “ad hoc” cases.

Another one_ - → sometimes you can create an institutional fact without having an x term.... There is what Barry Smith calls the ‘ freestanding y’ term. eg. money.

For instance, the electronic symbol creates the fact I have a certain amount of money. The symbol does not create anything structurally, but it does create the status of having money—**an electronic trace that represents a certain amount of money**. The magnetic trace is not money; it just represents an amount of money.

He thinks this is a “stunning” fact that institutions are based on things like this. It exists only by the fact it is **represented**; but the representation does not represent anything but itself! It creates the fact by representing the fact.

Corporations are an example of this. Searle thinks that the limited liability corporation is one of the most ingenious creations of the human circle. The corporation has no physical existence...it is true that the corporation has offices but legally (in California) all you need to do is perform a speech act (file for it).

Therefore, it ended up there were ad hoc cases and what he called “free standing cases.”

To explain all that (above) he needs to say a few more things about language. Intuitively we feel you cannot have these institutional facts without language, in a way that you can have language without these other institutional facts. You can imagine a society that had language did not have government, or private property or marriage.

However, you could not imagine the elaborate institutional facts in a society without language. What is about language? To describe how institutional language works, Searle wants to talk about language generally.

From an evolutionary point of view, **language is built on top of pre-linguistic biologically more primitive forms of intentionality.**

He defines intentionality as the ability of the mind to represent objects in space and affairs in the world and includes things like beliefs, and hopes and desires and perception....

The term ‘intentionality’ is confusing for English speakers because intending is just one facet of intentionality. (Digresses into mentioning how this ambiguity came about in English, which owes its roots to the German language, where the intentions in intentionality and philosophical intentionality are not ambiguous in their language.)

(Primitive intentions are expressed in speech acts by making noises—apparently, the noises are given meaning when the truth conditions of the speech act are satisfied.)

Intentionality has the property of a state that can be signified like this: S (p)

Goes to chalk board and draws:

Where (p) is the state of affairs where it is raining.

S intentional states are like: I believe it is raining, I fear it is raining, I hope it is raining...

Speech acts have the same structure F (p). Now the ways to get from S (p) intentional states to speech acts like F (p) are that you learn to make noises with our voice; you say things like....

In those cases, you create meaning by imposing the conditions of satisfaction—that is the truth conditions on to your utterance. You represent how things are by intentionally producing a noise that enables you to represent how things are. You can represent how things are by a convention.

(S) P (speech act P)

(F) P (fact satisfying the conditions given in the speech act)

Perceptions, love, hate, lust, disgust, etc. represents states of intentionality when they express things they way the are or the way you would want them to be...all of this is pre-linguistic.

What happens when you get language? **You take this pre-linguistic form of representation and you make it explicit.** These things with this structure, the structure “that it is raining” they have conditions under which they are true or false. **He calls these “conditions of satisfaction.”**

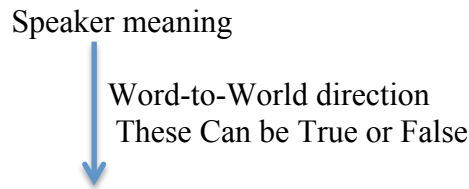
The belief will be satisfied only if it is true. The desire will be satisfied only it is fulfilled. The intention is satisfied only when it is carried out. (Therefore, you need truth conditions.)

The secret of understanding speaker meaning is that we have conventions and we have learned to make noises through our mouth that have conditions of satisfaction. The same conditions of satisfaction as the intentional states, so that if I believe it is raining, my belief is satisfied only if it is raining; but if I make noises, “it is raining” I impose those conditions of satisfaction onto the noises. **That is a major human achievement**, that is, the creation of meaning—speaker meaning.

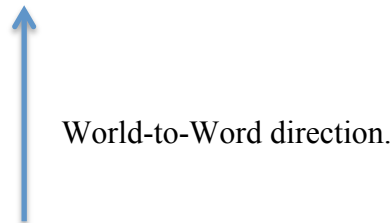
Okay, then, next step. How many ways do we have of doing that?

Well, there are at least two ways of doing that:

1) If you make a statement or an assertion, or a description, you present me with a noise that is supposed to represent how things are in the world. The conditions of satisfaction go from the “noise” to the world. Searle calls that the “word to world” direction of fit?. Noises are supposed to represent how things are in the world.



Now many utterances that we make do not have that “Word-to-World” direction. Things like orders, commands, promises where the aim is not to have the representation of the world, but instead of representing how we would want the world to be or intend the world to be. Searle says of this latter category that they have the upward direction – the “world-to-word” direction of fit



Notice we do not say of these orders, commands, and promises, etc. that they are true or false, but that they are of the obey or disobey category (or broken).

The first downward direction is characteristic of assertions; the second upward direction is characteristic of commands, promises, pledges and so forth. They are given in order to change the world to match the words.

Then there comes an amazing development! In addition, as far as he knows only humans can do this. **We have a class of utterances that make something the case** and thus they achieve the upward or world to word direction; **but, they do it by representing the thing we are trying to make to be the case as already being the case.** And Searle thinks that is amazing.

Moreover, it turns out that you have both directions of fit?



Once they create a reality—they create a reality and thus achieve a world to word direction—but they do it by representing that reality as existing. Searle says, “I just call this “Declarations.” This is where you create a reality by declaring that reality as existing. He seems to be saying the “direction” is both ways, word to world and world to word.

He uses a different term, “Assertives” where you assert something is the case and it is either true or false. (**Word-to-world** direction.)

By contrast, the **world-to-word** direction is described in two categories:

“Directives,” which are orders or commands,

or the “Commissives,” which are promises, vows, and pledges.

My Summarizing on this so far:

There is a double direction (as pictured by the arrow above pointing up and down) direction that he calls –“Declaration”

There is also the word-to-world direction he calls “Assertives”

In addition, there is a world-to-word category, which can be broken down into two groups, the “Directives” and the “Commissives”.

Now he wishes to advance a very strong thesis: all of human institutional reality (driver’s licenses, money, cocktail parties, summer vacations) is created by repeated representations that have the logical form of “Declarations.” That is, declarations that creates status functions.

He thus calls them all **Status Function Declarations**.

So, institutional reality is both created in its initial form, but also maintained in its existence by repeated application of representations of this logical form: the logical form of creating reality by representing that reality as existing... He wonders if this isn’t some kind of word magic? Creating reality just by saying something?

His old professor at Oxford, Austin, did the earliest investigations of this. He discovered what he called a **performative utterance**—where you make something the case by saying it is the case.

Egs.: this meeting is adjourned, I promise to come and see you, I declare war

All those have a explicit verb that identifies the speech act that you are performing.

All of those performative utterances are declarations, but not all declaration contains a performative verb—that is, a verb that names a kind of speech act that you are performing and thus creating.

There are many declarations that look quite innocent: he cites utterances on pieces of money, a dollar bill—**this note is legal tender for all debts public and private**. That is not a discovery; they declare it...and, so on with private property, marriage, government and all the rest of it....

Egs:

Barack Obama is president not in virtue of any **physical** fact that he has, or his having presidential DNA. He is president by virtue of the fact that there is a **collectively accepted status function declaration** that makes him president.

Not only do we create an institutional reality by status function declarations, we maintain it in its existence by the continuing applications of the representations that have the form (it need not be explicit) but they have the form of status function declarations. That is, they have both directions of fitness.

- 1) All human institutional reality is created in its initiation existence by representations that have the logical form of status function declaration. That is, they have both direction of fitness. It does not have to be explicit; it could be implicit.
- 2) Regarding the continuation of the institutional fact, it is accomplished by the continuous representation (utterances and thoughts) that has the logical form of the status function declaration. That can be harder to show...

He thinks this is made more obvious if you looked at social change: For example, the change in the position of women that has occurred in the United States and Europe over the past 50 years or so.

One of the things that the feminists recognized early on **was the crucial function of the vocabulary**. They did not want one people to continue to refer to “ladies and gentlemen” (now he thinks it has become harmless) but at the time they were threatened by it because that **marked an existing system of social status functions** that they wanted to overcome.

Similarly, when the Bolsheviks took power in Russia they wanted to abolish all of the traditional forms of address that marked people's status within an aristocratic or peasant hierarchy. They wanted everyone to just be known as comrade. Those are not harmless. It is an important shift, because a shift in vocabulary marks a shift in the status function.

If you get control of the vocabulary then you have gone a long way toward control of the status function.

So the central thesis which he is now advancing (the old thesis was that all of human institutional reality was created by speech acts of the form x counts as y in context c), the next step he is advancing is what kind of speech act is that anyway? What is the direction of fit?

And the answer is it is that it is a declaration, but unlike other sorts of declarations (digresses to discussion of religious speech acts—humans can't make light by declaration).

However, humans have a similar “supernatural” power; they can make money, cocktail parties, marriage, etc. Searle asserts that is the essential feature of human civilization whereby we differ from other sorts of animals.

Next question is, how does it work. Why does it work?

So you have these status function declarations, in creating these status functions we have created institutional facts. All institutional facts = status functions.

What is the point? When you create status functions, you create power!

All institutional reality consists of various forms of powers (positive and negative), much of it invisible.

There are negative powers: obligations.

There are positive powers: a right.

I am entitled to salary or something like that...is a positive power.

Status functions create **deontic powers**. Deontic powers are rights, duties, authorizations, permissions, requirements, and authority...and as far as he knows it, no animals have that.

There are alpha males and females and beta alpha and females, etc.—thus you do get power structures within (other) animals, but **you do not get an deontology**. Nobody says we have to go along with Fred because he is the alpha male, because being an alpha male does not mark an institutional fact.

To illustrate that he suggests an example:

Think of the difference between Barack Obama and an alpha male in a group of primates. In the primate group, the alpha male rules by being tougher than anybody else and lasts as long as he can be tougher than the others. His being an alpha male does not mark an institutional effect.

But Barack Obama does not get up in the morning and ask, can I still beat up everybody else? He does not have to worry about that because he has this **deontic power**.

Deontic powers create a human civilization. Why? Because they lock into human rationality and when you recognize something as a status function, then by rationality you have to recognize that it gives you desire independent reasons for action.

Searle illustrates this by pointing to his accepting of an invitation to speak at Oslo University. He has made in effect a promise to do so, (he doesn't have to worry about what he's going to do at that time—he's obligated because he has created a reason to give that lecture). He has created an action that is independent of his immediate inclination.

Thus, the structure of deontology that comes out of status functions, that comes out of institutional structures, gives us reasons for action that are peculiar (as far as he knows) for human beings.

He does not think other animals can do so because he does not think they are capable. That is because obligations, rights, duties and responsibilities **can only exist if they are represented as existing**. They are observer relative in the crucial way, but they are language relative because without the concept of an obligation cannot you can't operate without ???. You cannot reflect—you do not even have the word—you have to have some concept of an obligation so you can reflect on your obligations (including conflicting obligations) and decide on the basis of that what you're going to do.

Okay, he says what he maintains now is that our original idea of how you can explain human civilization—the structure of x counts as y in context c—is not a bad start, but you have to ask yourself the next question: What kind of speech act is that? What is it when you create a status function?

It is a peculiar speech act...it's a declaration. It makes something the case by representing it as being the case. The point of doing that is to create sets of power relations (positive and negative, conditional and conjunctive—all of the usual logical operations) are performed on institutional powers—on deontic powers. Those deontic powers are the glue that holds human civilization together. That is because it gives reasons for people acting that are independent of their immediate inclinations.

He raises the question, how do you apply this analysis (digresses to his fascination with reading the newspapers in light of this)...what happened in Tunisia and Egypt are interesting because the system of intentionality was undermined.

Collective intentionality only works as far as it continues to be shared. But where you give people power over you—where they submit to general power—collective intentionality becomes crucial.

They have to think it is okay for these people to have power over us. Eg. a single kid set himself on fire and that undermined the entire system of status functions. And it spread like wildfire in the Arab world.

His favorite example of the withdrawal of status functions is that marvelous series of events that took place in 1989. The Soviet Empire collapsed. Searle goes on to say that his generation thought the division in the world was permanent.

Searle says that he thinks when Gorbachev lost his confidence; that loss caused a loss of confidence among the elites in the institutions and when that happened the whole system unraveled.

He thinks political power is accepted status functions backed by the police and army and they too are systems of status functions. The notion of human rights is a system of status functions.

People, he asserts, think of human rights as something that they are born with (like a thumb), but he thinks it is a collective acceptance—he thinks an ingenious idea—that being a human being is a y term. Thus, a human being is a bearer of status function, thus a bearer of human rights. He doesn't know where that idea came from, but he thinks around the 18th century or earlier, but it is an Enlightenment idea.

His hope is that he has not just given you a story, but that he has given them a tool to analyze human civilization.

Note to self: this last part really crystalizes the idea he has been developing that human beings create their own status functions (a constructivist view) and that status functions are not inherently a part of human beings in themselves (a non-constructivist discovery view).