Searle on Intentionality

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ABSTRACT

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In 1983 John Searle claimed that perception is intrinsically intentional. If perception is intrinsically intentional then the content of one’s subjective experiences cannot be separated from the experiences themselves. It is clear that one can have an experience without attaching a specific meaning to that experience. Therefore Searle’s assertion cannot be correct.

In this thesis I analyze both Searle’s theory of intentionality as it relates to perception and Fred Dretske’s criticisms of Searle’s theory of intentionality. It is demonstrated that Dretske’s initial criticisms fail. The merits of his final criticisms are discussed and used to show that intentionality is not intrinsic to perception.

I argue that experience has a derived, but subjectively immediate intentionality. In most common situations experiences appear to directly present their content due to the structure and functioning of the human mind; new or unique kinds of experience display that perception can occur without transmitting intentional content. This shows that perception must have a derived intentionality.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

John W. Bender

Professor of Philosophy
This thesis is dedicated to my loving and immeasurably patient wife Katie. Without her patience and support this accomplishment would not have been possible.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Intentionality</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Intrinsic Intentionality of Perception</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem of Particularity</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism 1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism 2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism 3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism 4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Chapter 2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are We Or Can We Be Hardwired To <em>See That</em>?</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Immediate Experience of Derived Content</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coup De Grace: The Migraine</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concluding Remarks ........................................................................................................ 39
Bibliography ..................................................................................................................... 41
INTRODUCTION

In his book Intentionality (1983) John Searle argues that perception is intrinsically intentional. His claim is that one cannot, e.g. see a dog without seeing that it is a dog. This is not a claim about linguistic comprehension. It is a claim about conceptualization. His claim is that the experience itself conveys intrinsically intentional (proposition-like) content to the perceiver. My aim in this thesis is to show that perception is distinct from experience. I will explain both why experiences are not intrinsically intentional and why Searle is mislead to believe that they are. I will accomplish this by showing that experience has an immediately derived intentionality.

I proceed as follows. In chapter one I present Searle’s account of intentionality. It is not my intent to provide an exhaustive account of Searle’s views on the topic of intentionality. I will instead explain what intentionality is and what constitutes intrinsic intentionality. I will then present Searle’s argument that perception is intrinsically intentional.

In chapter two I will evaluate the challenges leveled against Searle by Fred Dretske in his article “The Intentionality of Perception” (2003). I will argue against Dretske’s first criticisms that the visual experience does have intentionality. I will then use Dretske’s fourth criticism to defeat Searle’s claim that intentionality is intrinsic to experience. I will contend that experience has a derived intentionality.

In chapter three I present reasons why Searle is mislead to believe that experience is intrinsically intentional. I will argue that the brains of human perceivers rewire
themselves, aka learning. I will provide examples that show how learning streamlines actions and experiences until there is no subjective distinction between the information presented by the experience and the semantic content that the experience is imbued with.
In this chapter I explain why Searle believes that perception is intrinsically intentional. I will begin by explaining what Searle means by ‘intentionality.’ Then, what intrinsic intentionality is. After that I will explicate Searle’s claim that perception is intrinsically intentional. Finally I address what Searle calls the problem of particularity.

**Intentionality**

Intentionality is directedness. It is the property of being toward, about, or in reference to some state of affairs. Searle explains that intentionality is representation. A statement, mental state, or experience concerning a state of affairs represents¹ that state of affairs. Searle delineates his brand of intentionality in three ways. (Searle, pg. 1-3, *Intentionality*)

First, only some mental states and events have intentionality, i.e. not all mental states have directedness or aboutness. A general feeling of unease or nervousness may be felt without being directed at anything. Likewise one can be depressed without being depressed about any thing in particular.²

¹ Experience *presents* the state of affairs it is about. This will be addressed later in this chapter.

² The way in which the brain relates to its environment is not the subject of Searle’s inquiry. He is concerned solely with subjective way in which one relates with her environment.
Second, intentionality is not necessarily connected to consciousness, i.e. there are conscious attitudes that are not intentional, and there are intentional attitudes that are not conscious. A general feeling of unease is an example of a conscious attitude that is not intentional, i.e. an *undirected* feeling like unease is not intentional. An example of an intentional attitude which is not conscious would be my belief that nine generations ago two Allen brothers were in a shipwreck on the outer banks of North Carolina. The point is that there are beliefs one holds that are not conscious beliefs. This belief is conscious now as I type it. When I’m not thinking about my paternal ancestry I still hold this belief. I still believe that this is how my forefathers arrived in North Carolina. This example demonstrates that there are intentional states which are not conscious, i.e. this belief is a belief I hold about the two Allen brothers regardless of whether it is present to mind or not.

Third, Searle emphasizes that intentions have no special place in intentionality. Intentions *are* intentional. One cannot have an intention without intending something. Intentions are no more intentional than beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, etc.

**Intrinsic Intentionality**

How are mental states about states of affairs? Searle’s answer is that mental states are about states of affairs in the same way that statements are. (Searle, pg. 4, *Intentionality*) The statement ‘the cell phone is on the coffee table’ is about a cell phone. This statement represents the state of affairs that the cell phone is on the coffee table. The statement has truth conditions. If the cell phone is on the coffee table then the
statement is true. The statement is considered true when it accurately represents its conditions of satisfaction.

To anticipate, statements (e.g. utterances) are not in-themselves about anything. They are merely sets of sounds or scribbles on paper. Statements derive their meaning from those who perceive them. ‘The cell phone is on the table’ has meaning because there is a language/culture/group of perceivers who interpret the statement as having meaning.

Searle argues that intentionality is representation. Intentional states and events represent their conditions of satisfaction. The conditions of satisfaction of an intentional (mental) state or (mental) event are the conditions which must obtain in order for a given mental state to be veridical. Thus if I have a mental state, e.g. belief, and the intentional content of that belief is that it is raining, then the condition of satisfaction necessary for that belief to obtain (be veridical) is that it actually be raining.

Belief and desire are Searle’s paradigm cases of intentionality. The reason these are paradigm cases for Searle is that they are intrinsically intentional. To say that a mental state is intrinsically intentional is to assert that the mental state is inseparable from its conditions of satisfaction. Unlike statements which derive their intentionality, i.e. can be separated from their intentional content, a belief always represents a state of affairs.3 The hallmark of intrinsic intentionality is an iff relation between a representation and its content.

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3 An intentional state never represents just an object. It always represents a state of affairs.
I cannot believe raining. I must believe that it is or is not raining. A belief is its conditions of satisfaction. For example, if I have a belief that it is raining the representation (i.e. the belief) is equivalent to its conditions of satisfaction (that it is raining.) If it is raining then the conditions of satisfaction for that belief obtain, i.e. the representation is veridical.

Once again, intrinsic intentionality is when the property of directedness is impossible to separate from that which has the property. Utterances have derived intentionality because words do not inherently refer; they are tasked with reference by language users. Mental states (that are intentional) have intrinsic intentionality. Belief, fear, and hope always refer. I cannot simply be in a state of belief which has no referent. I can only be in states of belief wherein I believe something. That belief in something is the representation/conditions of satisfaction.

The Intrinsic Intentionality of Perception

In order to explain Searle’s claim that perception is intrinsically intentional it is first necessary to define Searle’s use of ‘perception.’ This will entail an explanation of precisely what experience is for Searle. Once this has been accomplished I will explain why he believes that perception is intrinsically intentional.

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4 Searle’s examples in *Intentionality* are of visual perception and experience. He explains that though he uses these examples his arguments should work for experience and perception in general.
Searle argues that ‘perceive’ and ‘see’ are terms of success. If one visually perceives a state of affairs, this means that the content of the visual experience is veridical, i.e. perception is veridical experience. Searle distinguishes perception and experience when he says, “one can have an experience without succeeding, i.e. without perceiving.” (Searle, pg. 38, Intentionality) The experience itself conveys content. Perception is achieved only when the content, which is conveyed by experience, is in accord with what the content is a presentation of. What is visual experience? There is a scientific response that has to do with systemic organic components like visual cones and wavelengths of light. This type of analysis only provides an explanation of the physical components that constitute our experience. However, the objective account of what goes on physically during a visual experience is not sufficient to explain my experience from a subjective point of view. If one investigates the biological makeup of another person they may be able to explain certain actions, make correlations between phenomena, or even make predictions. One cannot know what it is to be that person. Likewise, though I may see by way of light waves, cones, optic nerves, etc. this is not sufficient to explain the qualitative subjective experience through which I conceptually relate to the world. It is important to note that, for Searle, subjective experience is not subjectively reducible to its physical constituents. i.e. one does not experience wavelengths of light one experiences colors. I have been told by trusted figures of authority that my experience of color is constituted in part by the wavelengths of the light which my eyes encounter and I believe that this is the case. It remains the case that I cannot see wavelengths. I can only see subjectively available information.
For Searle experience is a mental event. (Searle, pg. 40, *Intentionality*) Searle claims the intentional content of mental states and events is the representation of states of affairs. However, Searle is quick to note that ‘representation’ does not appropriately describe experience per se because an experience is an experience of a state of affairs, i.e. when one sees an object in front of oneself they are actually seeing that object.⁵

If Searle claims that intentionality is representation the he has a problem. The problem is this: if the visual experience is representational then our experience is of both a state of affairs and its representation. Searle is quick to qualify that the visual experience has a presentational ontology. (Searle, pg. 37-40, *Intentionality*) When analyzed his claims boil down to this: experience is representational in every way but name.

The terminology used here (‘present’ instead of ‘represent’) is Searle’s way of avoiding language that would suggest we perceive an intermediate thought-object which resembles the state of affairs in addition to, or in the place of the state of affairs being perceived. Searle’s account of visual experience is one of direct realism. Because of this he must qualify concerning his description of visual experience as intentional. Thus Searle claims that visual experience has a presentational ontology and that presentation is a subspecies of representation.⁶

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⁵ Experiences are necessarily of a state of affairs. In this thesis I often talk of seeing an object. This is done for expediency’s sake. It should be noted that I never intend to claim that experiences are anything but experiences of states of affairs.

⁶ Searle suggests that the term ‘presentational’ should be used to describe visual experiences as a way of distinguishing between experiences and mental states. The etymology of present vs. represent is not an issue in this discussion.
Searle says that visual experience presents its conditions of satisfaction, i.e. the visual experience presents a state of affairs which must be the case in order for the intentional content of the visual experience to be veridical. Also, just like the intentional attitude of belief, the intentional content of a visual experience must be equivalent to a proposition which represents an entire state of affairs. A visual experience cannot be separated from its conditions of satisfaction. One cannot have a visual experience without its being an experience of some x, y, or z. One can close one’s eyes (in which case one is no longer having a visual experience), but once one opens them that experience will necessarily be of a state of affairs. That is, provided there are sufficient conditions for a visual experience; sufficient light to see, a state of affairs to be experienced, etc.

One key difference between the intentionality of experiences and mental states is that experiences are caused by their conditions of satisfaction (Searle, pg 47 - 48, *Intentionality*). A mental state only represents its conditions of satisfaction. An experience *presents* its conditions of satisfaction because the experience is caused by those conditions. This will be addressed further in the following section about the problem of particularity.

Visual experiences are never simply of a singular object, but are of a state of affairs. Hence, the intentional content of an experience will necessarily be described only by propositions concerning states of affairs. Just as a belief must always represent a complete state of affairs, the visual experience will always present a complete state of affairs. I can’t believe raining. I can believe that it is or is not raining. In the same way
a visual experience of a car is an experience of an entire state of affairs. I can not see a
car. I can see that a car is in front of me, is red, is or is not my car, etc.

Thus the visual experience has intentional content in the same way that
(intentional) mental states have intentional content. Just like a belief is inseparable from
its conditions of satisfaction, visual experience is inseparable from its conditions of
satisfaction. Searle claims that we cannot separate the content of experience from
experience itself any more than we can separate a belief from its content.

It is in regards to similarities such as these that Searle argues that visual
experiences are intrinsically intentional.

The Problem of Particularity

The problem of particularity is this. We experience the world as subjective beings
whose mental states and events are about the world. Searle claims that all believing
(desiring, intending, hoping, etc.) is believing that. Likewise all seeing is seeing that.
Searle changes the question concerning what it means to see from the potentially
objective “Do I see such and such?” to the necessarily subjective “Do I see that such and
such?” Searle claims that defining experience as purely subjective requires that causality
must be incorporated into subjective experience. As a result Searle faces the problem of
describing the subjective experience as encompassing and displaying its own cause.

Causal relation is necessary for the understanding that an object of experience is a
particular object. Searle’s rejects the use of third person accounts as justification that an
experience is an experience of a particular object. Experience is not some entity which
exists between a perceiver and her object, i.e. it is not a two term objective relation. One has an experience of an object. Through experience one gains information about the objects of her experience. Searle claims that part of the content of an experience of an object is that this object caused my experience of it. (Searle, pg. 122-123, Intentionality)

The experience presupposes its conditions of satisfaction. This is why Searle claims that experience presents its conditions of satisfaction. If the conditions of satisfaction of a visual experience had not been the case then it is presumable that the experience would not have occurred.

If one sees that a laptop is in front of her then the intentional content of that experience is equivalent to the proposition, ‘there exists an x such that x is a laptop (this laptop) and x is in front of her.’ This experience implies that there is a specific laptop and moreover that specific laptop is the cause of one’s laptop-like experience. Hence, just as a belief that one’s laptop exists has the conditions of satisfaction that her laptop exists, so too her experience of the laptop has the conditions of satisfaction that the laptop exists in front of her. Thus, the laptop is in an appropriate causal relation with she and her experience is of it. If these conditions of satisfaction do not obtain for the visual experience, then the experience is not veridical, i.e. if the conditions of satisfaction do not obtain then the laptop did not appropriately cause one’s laptop experience.

Searle calls perception causally self-referential. When one perceives a state of affairs one’s knowledge of that state of affairs is both suggested and affirmed by the visual experience of that state of affairs. When I have the visual experience of a Coke can on my coffee table I am directly aware of the fact that there is a Coke can which is on
my coffee table and moreover that the Coke can is the cause of my visual experience of it. Why do I think that? How do I know that? The answer to both questions, for Searle, is the same: because I have a visual experience of the Coke can. Thus the visual experience both suggests the cause of the experience and serves as the means of confirmation by which I know (as much as my subjective self can know) what the experience is caused by.

Further, according to Searle, the cause of the experience is not some third-person objective fact about the world. The cause is something that is understood from a first person perspective. When I see my wife Katie I know that it is she. Searle argues that the network of intentional concepts and background of non-representational facts that I have as an individual allow me to perceive that this type identical experience of my wife is an experience that my wife is here now. He claims that this experience does not present to me that someone who is type identical with my wife is standing before me. Searle believes that my visual experience of Katie contains intentional content which proclaims “I am you (particular) wife.” Implicit in this is that the experience has content which tells me that my present experience of Katie is not merely an experience which is type-identical with previous experiences of Katie-like-phenomena, but that this Katie is the Katie that has always been Katie to me. Searle believes that the previous experiences of Katie provide a network of intentional states (e.g. beliefs concerning Katie-like phenomena under appropriate circumstances) which enable me to believe that these type-identical experiences of Katie share the same Katie-cause.
I this chapter I have defined intentionality, explained intrinsic intentionality, presented Searle’s argument that perception is intrinsically intentional, and discussed the problem of particularity.
CHAPTER 2

Fred Dretske provides several levels of criticism concerning Searle’s theory of intentionality. In this chapter I will employ Dretske’s criticisms to help delineate the issues surrounding Searle’s claims concerning the intentionality of perception. I will introduce, explain, and evaluate the criticisms from Dretske’s essay “The Intentionality of Perception.” I will evaluate Dretske’s criticisms by responding to them in the order that he presents them. They are numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively.7

In criticisms 1 through 3 Dretske presents the argument that seeing is not intentional and that seeing describes a purely causal relationship. I argue that these three criticisms do not defeat Searle’s claim that perception is intentional. I also respond to the incorrect assumptions (concerning the nature of experience) that inspire Dretske to claim that seeing describes an unadulterated causal relation.

In criticism 4 Dretske argues that intentionality is not intrinsic to experience. In this matter Dretske’s intuitions match my own. I will present Dretske’s examples and argue in favor of them. This will show that perception is not intrinsically intentional.

Criticism 1

In his first criticism Dretske argues that the aboutness of a photograph is a matter purely for causation. Assuming that this is true of photos, Dretske asks why this is not

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7 Dretske does not number his criticisms, nor does he present them as distinct criticisms. I have made the distinctions in an effort to address the individual thrusts of his argument. The early claims are too strong. The later criticisms are decidedly adequate for their intended purpose and do defeat Searle’s contention that perception is *intrinsically* intentional.
also the case for experiences. I contend that the aboutness of a photograph is not purely a matter for causal relation. Appropriate causal relation is necessary, but insufficient in-itself to explain *how* a photograph represents its conditions of satisfaction.

What makes a photograph of a yellow station wagon a photograph of a yellow station - indeed, a photograph of my (not your) yellow station wagon - are facts about the causal origin of the image on the paper. (Dretske, pg. 156, “The Intentionality of Perception”)

His argument is this: what makes a photograph a photograph of a particular thing is that the photograph is caused by an object at the beginning of an appropriate (i.e. non-deviant) causal chain. If this works for pictures why doesn’t it work for perceptual experiences?

This does not work for photos. Photos have a derived intentionality. Photographs, like all other (exterior) representations, derive their intentionality. A picture is a picture of an object only because there are entities that think about pictures as having intentional contents. A picture in-itself does not relate to anything. A picture is simply an artifact in the world. At best it is merely a part of some state of affairs that one may experience. One can separate a picture from its conditions of satisfaction.

Causal connection is not equivalent to aboutness. A picture of a house is distinct from a house picture. This is especially so in art. An artist may take a picture wherein

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8 Dretske clearly expresses that he does not believe that an experience is somehow a picture in the mind.
the causal relationship is one thing and the representational content is something completely different.

Intentionality is necessary for experience to have the kind of content one needs in order to successfully interact (consciously) with one’s environment. Causality is not a sufficient replacement for intentionality. This is because causality does not in-itself convey content.\(^9\) Without intentional content our experiences could not mean anything. If our experiences meant nothing to us then we would be unable to (consciously) interact with our environment. We do consciously interact with our environment. Thus, the relation between a normal human perceiver and its environment cannot be unadulterated causal chains.

Now, if Dretske’s claim that photos and experiences represent their content in the same way is coupled with the fact that photos have derived intentionality it provides an interesting implication. If photographs have derived intentionality and represent their conditions of satisfaction in the same way that experiences do then experience has derived intentionality.

Dretske considers this possibility later in his essay. He does not argue for it. I will at the end of this chapter.

\(^9\) ‘Content’ should not be confused with information. In Dretske’s book *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (1999) he makes an insightful distinction between information and that which is understood from the information.
Criticism 2

Dretske charges that Searle changes the question of perception from, “what it takes to see Sally, to what it takes to think one sees Sally.” (Dretske, pg. 158, “The Intentionality of Perception”) He believes that Searle does this in order to provide some work for intentionality to do.

There is a disconnect between Searle and Dretske in this particular situation. It is a different use of ‘see’ and ‘perceive.’ If Searle were to respond to Dretske’s allegations above he would say that the question has not been changed. These are two distinct questions. The first regards what it takes to have a visual experience of Sally. The second, what it takes to perceive Sally.

Searle clearly defines ‘perception’ and ‘seeing’ as terms of success. Furthermore, for Searle one sees iff one perceives. To see (and to perceive) is to have a veridical visual experience. Searle’s ‘visual experience’ is equivalent to Dretske’s use of ‘see’ in the above quotation. When Dretske talks about seeing Sally he is talking about having a visual experience of Sally. Searle’s visual experience is everything that Dretske believes seeing should be. It is brute experience. An experience that occurs regardless of comprehension and is in general the result of an appropriate causal relation.

Criticism 3

What are the truth conditions for the statement ‘S sees x.’? Searle asks this question and comes to the conclusion it ought to have the same truth conditions as ‘S sees that (x).’ Dretske abhors this move. His claim is that seeing is not equivalent to seeing-
that. He returns to an analysis of seeing as a two term causal relation. Dretske believes that the criteria for what one sees is completely determined by objective fact. He argues that the ability to substitute identicals for one another in statements such as ‘S sees x’ suggests that the statement is intensional. Dretske says,

doesn’t is suggest that...“S sees x” (like “x killed S”) is extensional because it describes a causal relation between S and x? S sees x because x affects S in the right way, and if x affects S in that way, y affects S in that way if, indeed, x is y. (Dretske, pg. 164, “The Intentionality of Perception”)

It should be noted that this account works only in the third person. Dretske’s use of ‘see’ doesn’t is suggest that...“S sees x” (like “x killed S”) is extensional because it describes a causal relation between S and x? S sees x because x affects S in the right way, and if x affects S in that way, y affects S in that way if, indeed, x is y. (Dretske, pg. 164, “The Intentionality of Perception”)

Dretske wants to answer this question by appealing to the objective fact of the matter. If S sees x and x is y then S sees y. This is because ‘seeing’ (Dretske claims) represents a two term objective relation. ‘Seeing’ is a term which we use to represent the relationship between S and x (or y.)

Searle want to define ‘seeing’ as something that one does. ‘S sees x’ describes an accomplishment of S’s. When S sees x S has an experience of x. Moreover S has an experience of x that is not shared with anyone else. This suggests to me that the relationship described by ‘seeing’ is not an objective relation. To see something is to have a subjective experience of that thing.

10If S sees x and x is y then S sees y.
Searle defines ‘experience’ as a *conscious* mental event. (Searle, pg. 45, *Intentionality*) In Dretske’s statement above he says that ‘S sees x’ is the same kind of relation as ‘x killed S’. This is not the case. S can be killed by x without being conscious of it. To say that S sees x is to say that S has had a conscious mental event of x, i.e. S cannot *see* x without being *conscious of* x.

Dretske has elsewhere claimed (e.g. *Naturalizing the Mind* (1995), *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* 1999) that one can have experiences without being conscious of them. He claims that if a system has the capacity for sight and the ability to cognize then that system can perceive without cognizing.\(^{11}\) (Dretske, pg. 153, Knowledge and the Flow of Information) I personally cannot comprehend the meaning of ‘I can have an experience without being conscious of it’. To my mind, this is a contradiction. I can certainly have things happen to me that I am not aware of, but this is not equivalent to having an *experience*.

Dretske has conflated causal relation with experience. Many causal relations do not qualify as experience. If S sees (is aware of) an ant and then steps on it S is causally related to the death of the ant and has the experience of stepping on the ant. If however S steps on an ant without realizing it then S is causally related to the death of the ant and S has not had the experience of stepping on an ant. Once again, this is from a first person point of view.

\(^{11}\) I am critical of this view. I will explain in greater detail my criticisms of this account of perceiving in Chapter 3.
Visual experience is a conscious mental event. If S is not conscious of an object then whatever the causal relation between S and that object may be, S has not had an experience of that object. Assuming that S knows x but not y, and S is conscious of x, it is wrong to assert that if x is y and S sees x then S sees y. This is because of the subjective nature of a conscious mental event. If S is conscious of x as x, and it is an objective fact that x is y, it does not follow that S is conscious of x as y. Dretske is incorrect in his assertion that ‘seeing’ represents a purely objective relation between a perceiver and an object of perception.

I have endeavored to show that seeing is not simply an external relation. ‘Seeing’ is certainly used this way in language. However, when addressing the question of how a normal human perceiver conceptually relates to the world this use of ‘see’ is inappropriate and fruitless.

Criticism 4

Dretske suggests that if one considers an experience misleading then it is misleading in the same way that photographs, reflections, and recordings are misleading. (Dretske, pg. 165, “The Intentionality of Perception”) Photos, reflections, and recordings have a derived intentionality. If experiences are intentional in the same way that photos are intentional, then experience also has a derived intentionality.

Dretske does not assert that this is the case; only that experience, if intentional, is more likely to have a derived than intrinsic intentionality. Dretske presents this as a mere

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12 Searle explicitly states that the goal of his project entails explaining the truth conditions of ‘S sees x’ by conceptual means. (Searle, pg. 37, Intentionality)
possibility. Dretske believes that a yellow station wagon seen at six hundred yards is an experience of a yellow station wagon that is not illusory and does not present its conditions of satisfaction. At six hundred yards, a yellow station wagon doesn’t look like a yellow station wagon. Nor is the experience misleading. The experience is what it is. The fact that the yellow station wagon is a yellow station wagon instead of a red convertible does not change (at this distance) the experience.

But this is precisely what Searle does not claim in regards to the problem of particularity. Searle claims that the experience conveys content.

In chapter one of this thesis I explained that intentionality is intrinsic when the property of directedness is inseparable from its conditions of satisfaction. As I explained, Searle claims that visual experience is intrinsically intentional because one cannot have an experience without corresponding conditions of satisfaction. If I experience a duck, the experience will be veridical iff a duck is in front of me. My very experience of a duck cannot be separated from the conditions of satisfaction that there is a duck.

Furthermore, Searle’s claims concerning the problem of particularity are that the particularity of objects must be a part of the intentional content. In Dretske’s example, the cars’ distance makes the experience of a yellow station wagon indistinguishable from the experience of a red convertible. Because of his solution to the problem of particularity, Searle claims that the experience conveys content.

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13 I believe that experience is not intrinsically intentional. That experience does have a derived intentionality.
particularity, Searle would say that the experiences are two distinct experiences from a first person point of view. Therefore if the speck in the distance is a yellow station wagon then that is a part of the content of the experience (according to Searle’s theory).

If there is a problem with particularity then, Dretske feels, a causal theory solves it quite nicely. In situations where there are two (or more) indistinguishable possibilities, the facts can distinguish between them. Searle’s theory of intentionality will not allow third-person pov facts of the matter to determine difference because it is a matter for content. If one has the experience of a speck in the distance (specific content unknown), the conditions of satisfaction can only be determined from a first person pov. However, Searle claims that the experiences are distinct because the cause is a part of the content of the experience.

How can I subjectively distinguish between seemingly identical experiences with different causes? Instead of addressing this question, Searle instead claims that because the experiences have different causes they have different conditions of satisfaction. If I do not have access to the information that the causes are distinct, then I cannot know that the experiences have different conditions of satisfaction. Without access to this information, I cannot distinguish between qualitatively identical experiences with differing causes.

Thus, because the conditions of satisfaction in qualitatively identical experiences are contingent upon what I know, and not what causes the experience. I conclude that experience is not intrinsically intentional.14

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14 Experience is not intrinsically intentional as Searle defines it. Intentionality, if defined simply as directedness, is intrinsic to all experience. However, experience is not a vehicle of causal content in the
Summary of Chapter 2

In criticism one of this chapter I responded to Dretske’s claim that the aboutness of a photo is a purely causal relationship. I claimed that a picture in-itself is not about anything and explained that causal relation is a necessary, but insufficient condition for aboutness. Thus, there must be something in addition to causal relation to explain the understanding of experience, i.e. there must be content.\(^{15}\)

In my response to Dretske’s third criticism I argued that the truth conditions for statements like ‘S sees x’ are the same truth conditions that apply to ‘S sees that x’ or ‘S sees x as x’. My reason for this claim was the subjective nature of the relation that ‘seeing’ describes.

In criticism four Dretske leveled the claim that if experience is intentional it has a derived intentionality. I agreed with Dretske and showed that experience is not intrinsically intentional as Searle defines the intentionality of perception.

In Chapter three I will make the case that experience has a derived and qualitatively immediate intentionality.

\(^{15}\) By ‘content’ I mean intentional or representational/semantic content. Content must not be conflated with information. Information is in the world. Content is in the mind.
CHAPTER 3

In this chapter I will present an explanation of why it is that the intentional content of our conceptual experiences seem as if they are (in general) intrinsically intentional. I will argue that the reason intentionality seems to be an intrinsic part of experience is because of the way our (normal human perceivers) brains learn. I will begin by addressing the question; can we be hardwired to see that?

In that section I will address a language-learning example to show how a task, which is laborious at first, becomes easier with time until it requires little to no effort. I will then explain the phenomenon of what I call the immediate perception of derived content.

The visual experience has derived intentionality. Because we interpret information via learned hard-wiring it may seem as if the visual experience has intrinsic intentional content. This simply is not the case. As with any learned or acquired skill the first steps are always awkward. Learning to juggle for example takes time and focus to learn. If one keeps juggling they will eventually train themselves to juggle better. There will come a point at which she will no longer have to think about where to move her hands or how much force to throw with. After a time these skills come quite naturally, I just pick up three (or more) balls (pins, flaming torches, etc.) and decide to start juggling. My hands go to the right place to catch the balls, and they generally throw the balls in the right trajectory with the appropriate amount of force. Does this mean that juggling is an intrinsic skill? No.
A phrase becoming more common in current neuroscience is ‘the brain that changes itself.’\(^{16}\) It is often talked about in terms of the mind changing the brain. I feel this is not an appropriate description. I agree with Searle’s description of consciousness; i.e. consciousness is caused by and constituted in the chemistry of the brain. To state that the mind changes the brain employs a two-term relation within what I believe to be a singular entity. This however is not the argument of the present thesis. It suffices to say that the phrase ‘the brain that changes itself” presents\(^{17}\) the intentional content under the proper illocutionary force for my taste.

**Are We Or Can We Be Hardwired To See That?**

If it is the case that the brain changes itself, then are we (i.e. normal human perceivers) or can we be hardwired to see that? To clarify, the question is not, are we phylogenetically hardwired to see that such and such is the case, but rather are we hardwired because of our experiences to see that? It is uncontroversial that normal human perceivers are phylogenetically hardwired for sentience, i.e. to experience sensation and feeling. A far more interesting, and currently more applicable question is: does experience hard-wire Sapience? Can experiences cause a change in the brain that fundamentally alters the aspectual nature of my subjective experience? If it does then in what way or ways?

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\(^{16}\) There is a book currently out under that title. It presents accounts of patients who suffered major brain damage and were able, through habituation, to build new neural pathways and regain abilities they had lost entirely.

\(^{17}\) I say ‘presents’ here because in specifying as a statement, ‘the brain that changes itself’ I have *presented* the representation of the content.
If I do not know Mandarin (and I don’t) and someone speaks Mandarin to me, I will not understand what she is saying. It will seem to me only a sequence of sounds and will convey no propositional content. Imagine that I then learn Mandarin and the same set of sounds is repeated to me. It is now the case that what was once inane babble to me is now a statement which represents propositional content. It is clear that my initial experience of Mandarin can be summed up as an auditory experience without propositional content. I will assume that the speaker expressed propositional content both times, i.e. the speaker both meant to express a proposition both times and did express a proposition both times. Now, in these situations can it be said that I the interpreter directly experienced propositional content? I argue no to the first, and yes to the second.

My first experience of Mandarin was an auditory experience of a set of sounds. Is the second experience also only an experience of a set of sounds, or is it an experience of a proposition? If the experience is an experience of a proposition, i.e. not merely an experience of some ribbon of sound, then my experience is an experience of the intentional content. It is my contention that when we (normal human perceivers) engage in conversations our brains automatically interpret (via learned hard-wiring) sets of sounds so that what our minds perceive of the language exchanges are the content of propositions. Yes, we are aware of the objective fact that propositions are conveyed through sound sequences, and yes we are aware (via current scientific knowledge) that

18 Sounds qua sounds do provide intentional content as pure auditory experience. An utterance is a case of a presentation (sound) of the representation (statement) of propositional content.
our ears sense via tiny vibrating hairs which digitize sound waves into neural signals (sounds)… etc. The issue at hand is not a third-person/objective account of the stages and processes in the brain which enable perception. The issue is what we experience conceptually. My conceptual experience of ‘the Atlanta Braves are a baseball team’ is the content which is expressed, i.e. the Atlanta Braves are a baseball team.

When one visually experience a duck she does not perceive the duck as undetached duck parts. The experience, when described from a third-person perspective cannot be differentiated, e.g. a radical interpreter would be unable to distinguish the way she conceptualizes a common object of experience. However, her subjective experience will be a product of her expectations. It will be in accordance with the conventional understandings that she has learned. Her conceptual experience of a duck is holistic. I experience the learned concept in an immediate sense. The intentional content does not jump out at me (though this may seem to be the case.) The visual experience can only present a state of affairs.\(^{19}\) I intrinsically perceive the duck as a duck, but not because the experience ‘tells’ me that it is of a duck. I have learned (been wired) to see it as such. Learning does not alter the visual experience qua visual experience. It is the hard-wiring or training to focus on certain aspects (the gestalt) which provide us the holistic subjective experience with which we are accustomed. It is this immediate holistic perception that leads Searle to believe that the intentional content equivalent to the statement, ‘I am a duck’ is somehow in the experience itself.

\(^{19}\) A visual experience cannot convey semantic content, but conveys information. This was addressed in chapter two.
The Immediate Experience of Derived Content

I argued in the previous section that language learning reaches a point at which utterances are understood as the content that is expressed. There is an immediate understanding of the utterance in the mind of the interpreter. I argued that this is a result of learning, and that learning is the physical hard-wiring of neural processes. This causes an immediate processing of information, which when dealing with familiar experiences leads one (like Searle) to feel that they experience phenomena as the concepts that he views them as.

The language learning example deals with learning a second language. When I speak German (as a novice) I do not think in German. I hear a series of representative sounds and connect them with corresponding representations in English. If I continue to speak German there will come a point at which I no longer translate the phrases before I understand them. I begin to think in German.

When I see an object for the first time I am not presented with an immediate concept in the experience itself. With repetition the cognizing of the experience as such and such becomes more streamlined until there is no apparent distinction between the experience of and the experience as.

Conclusion

Searle argues that perception is intrinsically intentional. That the content of perception cannot be separated from the conceptual experience of optical stimuli. If we see (hear, smell, taste, feel) then our experiences of sensory information must not only
present their conditions of satisfaction, but be inseparable from them. The experience always presents its conditions of satisfaction (i.e. that such and such is the case) and the conditions of satisfaction either obtain or they do not.

Intentional content cannot be represented (or presented) without being represented in some way. The conditions of satisfaction of a statement are always represented with illocutionary force, i.e. the propositional content (intentional content) of a statement is always represented as a promise, a threat, etc. Intentional mental states always represent their conditions of satisfaction with a psychological mode. Intentional mental states must represent their conditions of satisfaction as a belief, a fear, an intention, etc. Because Searle claims that perception is intentional, its content (if he is correct) must be presented under some aspect. Thus, to perceive a state of affairs is to perceive it as a sheep, a chess piece, a yellow station wagon, etc.

The further argument is that perception is intrinsically intentional. He claims that one cannot perceive without perceiving *that* such and such is the case. In other words, one cannot perceive an object (state of affairs) without perceiving it *as* such and such.

There are two types of intentionality according to Searle, derived intentionality and intrinsic intentionality. Statements and utterances have a derived intentionality. A statement whether uttered or written down is merely a physical object in the world. If we think of a written statement, it is only some marks on paper. These marks contain no meaning in and of themselves. When I go to the local Chinese restaurant, the Campus Garden my receipt is written in Chinese. These marks, though I visually perceive them
as containing propositional content, represent no content to me\(^5\). After learning a language I am able to impose meaning upon the characters so that they do represent propositional content to me. In this scenario, I understand the content of a given proposition because I have the appropriate conceptual framework (the background knowledge, i.e. learned language) to interpret the marks on paper.

Intentional mental states have intrinsic intentionality. This means that they cannot be separated from their conditions of satisfaction. If I have a belief that it is raining I cannot separate that belief from the representation of that belief. That is, I cannot believe it is raining without believing *that it is raining*. This innate property of certain mental states’ aboutness is what Searle calls intrinsic intentionality.

Searle argues that perception is intrinsically intentional. That experience (the vehicle of intentional content) is inseparable from its conditions of satisfaction. E.g. I cannot see a dog without perceiving that it is a dog. If I do not experience the optical stimuli as a dog then I do not see a dog.

I have argued that perception is not intrinsically intentional and that the content of an experience can be separated from the experience itself. I have done so by drawing attention to Dretske’s counter examples. My intent has been to provide subjective counterexamples to Searle’s claims about our conceptual experience of phenomena. This was accomplished through multiple examples of experiences whose content can only be defined as a ‘something I know not what.’

\(^5\)There are two levels of intentionality in this example; perceiving the characters as characters, and comprehending the meaning of the characters. The first is visual content and the second is propositional content.
I then proposed that perception has derived intentional content. I explained physical systems that account for this perspective. I also provided examples of language use and acquisition that demonstrate how representations that are understood to have derived intentional content will, through learning, come to be experienced as if their intentionality were intrinsic.

In sum, I have shown that perception is not intrinsically intentional. That perception does have derived intentional content. In addition, I have offered an explanation that shows why Searle believes himself justified in his account of perception as intrinsically intentional, i.e. the immediate cognizance of derived intentional content.

The Coup De Grace: The Migraine

For those in still in doubt I offer this account. When I have a migraine the pain sometimes reaches a level at which I no longer know whether my eyes are open or not. Like a thunderbolt which erases all traces of darkness, the pain of a migraine consumes me. The pain does not have conditions of satisfaction, it is pure experience which presents no content. In those moments there is no conceptualizing the pain as a migraine, only the experience which I refer prior to and after the fact as a migraine.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the course of this thesis I have argued that intentionality cannot be intrinsic to experience in the way Searle describes. In chapter one I delineated Searle’s account of intentionality, intrinsic intentionality, and expressed why Searle believes that experience has intrinsic intentionality. In chapter two I presented Dretske’s arguments against Searle’s claims expressed in chapter one. I argued, against Dretske, that ‘seeing’ does not describe only a causal relation. I then argued in accord with Dretske that the visual experience, if it is intentional, has a derived intentionality. In chapter three I provided an explanation as to why experience seems to be intrinsically intentional and argued that our immediate experience of intentional content is a product of empirical experience, i.e. learning.

If this thesis is correct then there remains the problem of how humans learn in the way that I claim they do. How does one move from conscious observation and interpretation to subconscious understanding?

It must also be noted that in a forthcoming book, The Vision R(evolution) 2009, cognitive scientist Mark Changizi will discuss his claims that the human brain compensates for the time delay between when the visual system receives information and normal human perceiver experiences it (about 100 ms). He claims that to perceive the present the brain must predict what the stimuli will be, i.e. what is the case.

Changizi’s claims may entail that the visual experience is created by the mind. I believe that the mind will only predict visual information from which the perceiver will
derive content. However, this may have further implications upon whether experience has intrinsic or derived intentionality.


