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A Neo-Searlean Theory of Intentionality

Nicholas Georgalis

Department of Philosophy, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA
Email: Georgalisn@ecu.edu

Abstract

I present Searle's theory of intentionality and defend it against some objections. I then significantly extend his theory by exposing and incorporating an ambiguity in the question as to what an intentional state is about as between a subjective and an objective reading of the question. Searle implicitly relies on this ambiguity while applying his theory to a solution to the problem of substitution in propositional attitudes, but his failure to explicitly accommodate the ambiguity undermines his solution. My extension of his theory succeeds. I also indicate how the new theory can be deployed to resolve other outstanding problems.

Keywords: Searle; intentionality; intentional object; Crane; thought; thought-token; substitution in propositional attitudes

1. Introduction

It is uncontroversial that intentional states are directed at or about something—their intentional objects. What accounts for this “aboutness” or “directedness” and what can be said of intentional object? Problems stem from the fact that some intentional states are “about” things that do not exist, at least not in the ordinary sense. For example, Ponce de Leon was desirous of finding the Fountain of Youth, even though no such thing exists. This familiar point has led some philosophers to hold that in such cases the intentional object *must* somehow *be* even if it does not exist for, as this line continues, certainly, there was *something* Ponce de Leon was desirous of finding; he was not seeking *nothing*. It led Meinong ([1904] 1960) to introduce a distinction between objects that do not exist and objects that do to accommodate this sort of aboutness. This allowed for the claim that all intentional states have an intentional object, albeit some would be bizarre. Though many contemporary philosophers are unsympathetic to this line of reasoning, the problem that gives rise to this view continues to engender various confusions.¹

Though not exhaustive, here are three basic questions regarding intentional states:

(Q1) Do all intentional states have intentional objects?

(Q2) What are intentional objects?

(Q3) What exactly accounts for an intentional state's being about something?

¹In addition to Crane (2001, 2013) discussed below, see Parsons (1980) and Zalta (1988) for examples of authors who develop the idea of nonexistent intentional objects in considerable detail.

The answer proposed herein to the third question, intentional content, raises another fundamental question:

(Q4) How are intentional contents identified?

Since it is here argued that intentional content is what accounts for what an intentional state is about, it is imperative that we provide an answer to (Q4). The novel answer to (Q4) advanced here is the foundation for a new theory. The new theory is an extension of Searle's. I present Searle's theory of intentionality to answer the first three questions, in part by providing a foil from an opposing theory (Crane 2001, 2013).

As illuminating as I think Searle's theory is, I argue that he fails to address (Q4), nor to my knowledge does anyone else (at least not in the way that I do below). Importantly, I will show that this failure produces a lacuna in Searle's theory and undermines his attempt to deploy it to answer certain classic problems, e.g., substitution in propositional attitudes. What I present here extends Searle's theory in substantial way, a way which provides a solution to the problem of substitution in propositional attitudes.

To be clear, the extended theory developed here maintains that intentionality implies consciousness. Before embarking on the main project, I place this work in a more general context and highlight some differences with some other authors who make the same claim. Over the last two decades or so, there has been much work on what has come to be called *phenomenal intentionality*; these efforts also implicate consciousness in intentionality.² There is a striking difference, however, in how these authors argue for the latter from how I do.

Proponents of this view typically claim that cognitive states have a phenomenological property in virtue of which they are conscious. In support of this, they frequently draw an analogy to how subjective qualitative sensory experiences are identified, viz., by an appeal to "what it is like" to have such experiences. For example, the claim is made that the 'what it is like' operator yields a different phenomenological property when one believes p than when one believes q (Pitt 2004). While I steadfastly agree with these authors that consciousness is implicated in intentionality; still, to my mind, this way of making the point is mistaken and unproductive. It is mistaken because it introduces pervasive vagueness for the alleged phenomenological properties, as these are never specified. Here's why in brief.

The 'what it is like' operator arguably does pick out a (more or less) uniform, type identifiable, subjective property when applied to sensory experiences. It utterly fails to do so when applied to intentional states. These two claims are stated here without argument (but see Georgalis [2006, 60–80] for the argument.) In contrast, I do not rely on the 'what it is like' operator when intentional or cognitive states are at issue. The difference and the method deployed will be evident in [section 5](#). This marks an important difference between my extended theory from the theories that many advocates of phenomenal intentionality maintain.

The difference just indicated supports another important different attribute of the extended theory; this difference explains why the current theory is to be preferred and why the alternative theories are unproductive. Just how the extended theory shows consciousness is implied by intentionality, together with the new concepts thereby deployed, provide the resources to solve a number of philosophical problems (Georgalis 2006; 2015). In contrast, appeal to vague unspecified phenomenological properties of intentional states could—at best, if it would work—be reason to accept the claim that conscious is involved in intentional states, but it would not appear to be able to

²Some examples, Graham, Horgan, and Tienson (2007), Horgan and Tienson (2002), Kriegel (2007, 2013), Mendelovici (2018), Pitt (2004), and Siewert (2011). While I agree with these authors that consciousness is involved in intentionality, typically they attempt to show this by an appeal to "what it is like to be in an intentional state." I argue against this method (Georgalis 2006, 64–76).

advance our understanding of other philosophical problems. It is generally acknowledged that a theory that explains or solves more problems than its competitors is to be preferred.

2. Searle's theory of intentionality

On Searle's theory, intentional states may be represented as an intentional or psychological mode with an intentional or representative content.³ The intentional mode is the *way* the state is directed—a believing, say, as opposed to a desiring. Borrowing an idea from speech act theory, these modes are said to have *direction-of-fit*. He maintains that beliefs like statements can be true or false and have a *mind-to-world* direction of fit. The belief is to accord with the world. In contrast desires and intentions have a *world-to-mind* direction of fit in that satisfaction of the state requires bringing the world into accordance with the desire or intention. States such as sorrow or pleasure have the *null* direction of fit since though such cases presuppose the world is a certain way—an event or state of affairs that one is sorrowful or pleased about—they themselves are neither directed at the world nor is any change in the world required for their satisfaction.

On Searle's theory, it is the intentional content that both specifies what the intentional state is about and accounts for the aboutness of every intentional state. The intentional content is a representation of what it is about under some aspect(s); it provides *conditions of satisfaction* for the intentional state; these are internal to the intentional state (Searle 1983, 11). These conditions may or may not be satisfied. When they are satisfied, whatever satisfies them is the intentional object for that state. When no object satisfies them, the intentional state lacks an intentional object.⁴ He says:

In both the case of speech acts and the case of Intentional state, if there is no object that satisfies the propositional or the representative [alternatively, intentional] content, then the speech act and the Intentional state cannot be satisfied. ... [I]f nothing satisfies the referential portion of the representative content, then the Intentional state does not have an Intentional object. (1983, 17)

For example, the intentional content of Ponce de Leon's intentional state of desiring to find the Fountain of Youth is not satisfied, thus, his intentional state has no intentional object and his desire cannot be satisfied. Even so, what the state is about is *specified* by its (unfulfilled) conditions of satisfaction. In such cases, there is a *purported* intentional object via conditions of satisfaction. In sum, on Searle's theory, every intentional state *must* have an intentional content, which provides the answer to (Q3), and (Q1) is answered negatively. Searle's answer to (Q2) is simply that intentional objects are *whatever* satisfies the intentional content if anything does. Thus, for Searle, intentional objects are nothing unusual; they do not have any special ontological status.⁵ Before examining (Q4), I turn to some objections to these answers.

3. The *idea* of intentional object versus intentional objects

There are those that would argue, contra Searle, that every intentional state must have an intentional object: even thoughts about nonexistents require intentional objects. They thus give an affirmative answer to (Q1). Tim Crane is among those just described. He holds that if an intentional state could

³Searle often uses the terms 'intentional content' and 'representative content' interchangeably, as he does with 'psychological mode' and 'intentional mode' (1983, 6, 11, passim).

⁴To avoid any misunderstanding, I note that Searle uses 'object' here in a very broad sense; he recognizes that intentional objects can be objects, as in things, such as the Eiffel Tower, or states of affairs (Searle 1983, 6–7, 11, 13, 17, passim).

⁵Searle says, "... [A]n Intentional object is just an object like any other, it has no peculiar ontological status at all. To call something an Intentional object is just to say that it is what some Intentional state is about" (1983, 16).

lack an intentional object, we would be “at a loss to say what makes this latter class of states *intentional* ... [and later] ... I don’t see how we should do without the *idea* of intentional object” (2001, 22–23; last italics added. Similar remarks in his 2013, 5).

Crane’s affirmative answer to (Q1) serves another purpose for him: it is the basis for his answer to (Q3), for he holds that it is the having of an intentional object—a nonexistent one if need be—which accounts for an intentional state being *about* something—what it is directed at or to.⁶ Crane’s conclusion that thoughts about nonexistents require intentional objects is ultimately based on two claims: we can and do think about the nonexistent, and such thoughts would not be about anything if they lacked an intentional object. The first is uncontroversial, the second is not. The claim that the idea (concept, or notion) of intentional object plays an essential role in a theory of intentionality is one thing; whether every intentional state *must have* an intentional object is another. One may assent to the former and deny the latter. The idea of intentional object and the existence of an intentional object must not be conflated. Let me explain.

On Searle’s theory, what makes an intentional state that lacks an intentional object intentional is exactly what makes *any* intentional state intentional—intentional content. Intentional content specifies what the intentional state is about via conditions of satisfaction.⁷ As we have seen, if there is an object that satisfies the conditions, it is the state’s intentional object; if no object satisfies the conditions, then there is no intentional object for that state. Nevertheless, in either case, the satisfaction conditions specify what *would be* the intentional object *if* the state had one. Hence, satisfaction conditions implicate the *idea* of intentional object, but they do not, should not, need not, and cannot guarantee that there is an object which satisfies them. Thus, the idea of intentional object plays a role in every intentional state for Searle, whether it is about an existent or not. In no way does Searle’s theory contravene the certainly true claim that the *idea* of an intentional object is required for any theory of intentionality. Crane apparently is under the misimpression that by holding that some intentional states lack an intentional object one is doing without the *idea* of intentional object, but this, I have just argued, is simply false.

A related worry that one might have once one denies that all intentional states have an intentional object is this: if, on Searle’s theory, thoughts about nonexistents do not have intentional objects, how does one distinguish, say, a thought about Zeus from a thought about Pegasus?⁸ Given what has been recently said the answer is clear: intentional contents for thoughts concerning different nonexistents have different satisfaction conditions, thus, though neither Pegasus nor Zeus exist (since the respective satisfaction conditions of either are not fulfilled), they have distinguishable *purported* intentional objects via their different satisfaction conditions.

Thus, Searle’s theory of intentionality clearly accounts for the aboutness of intentionality via intentional content with its conditions of satisfaction. It also uniformly explains thoughts about both existents and nonexistents, explains why some thoughts lack intentional objects, and explains how it is that different thoughts about nonexistents are different—all this without assigning any special or unique type of ontological status to intentional objects. (“Do not multiply entities beyond necessity.”)

⁶Though I find talk of nonexistent intentional objects unsuccessful in explaining the aboutness of thoughts about nonexistents, it must also be noted that Crane does have much of interest to say regarding our talk and thought about nonexistents; for example, he gives a plausible reduction of truths about nonexistent things to truths about existing things (2013, 133–37). Such offerings must not be confused with *showing* that a theory of intentionality *requires* intentional nonexistent objects to account for thoughts about nonexistents, as he maintains. It may, however, be construed as a way of rendering talk and thought of nonexistents harmless and, thereby, an elimination of the need for nonexistent intentional objects.

⁷Direction of fit is also involved, but this is beside the point under discussion.

⁸Crane does raise an objection to Searle along these lines (2001, 25–26).

4. Is intentionality relational?

Intentionality superficially appears to be a relation between an intentional state and what it is about or directed to. Perhaps this partly explains why some think that every intentional state must have an intentional object. The apparent relational nature of intentionality worried Brentano. In the appendix of Brentano's [1874] 1911, he states that mental activity seems to be the relation between a person and what the person's mental activity is about. The problem he saw is that typically two-place relations require both relata for the relation to obtain, e.g., iff 'A kicks B' is true, both A and B must exist. Both relata, a person and what their state is about, may exist for many intentional states, but for others the second relatum does not, e.g., Ponce de Leon did exist, but The Fountain of Youth, which he desired, did not. True negative existentials pose the same but more trenchant problem, for if one thinks that The Fountain of Youth does not exist, what the thought is about—the apparent second relatum—*must not be*, if one's thought is correct. Given these considerations, Brentano concludes, "... one could doubt whether we are really dealing with something relational here, and not, rather, with something somewhat similar to something relational in a certain respect, which might, therefore, better be called 'quasi-relational'" (1911, 212).

The view that intentionality is relational persists in modern times; indeed, it is arguably the orthodox view.⁹ For example, on this view, if Amanda believes that Brentano discussed intentionality, this is explained as Amanda being in the believing relation to a proposition expressed by the sentence "Brentano discussed intentionality"; when the intentional state is directed toward an object—e.g., if Amanda desires the glass of scotch on the table—she is in the desiring relation to the object designated by the definite description. The pervasiveness of the orthodox view that intentionality is relational is what generates the perceived requirement that all intentional states require an intentional object, and, in consequence, some intentional states require nonexistent intentional objects. This is not a productive path. Brentano was right when he expressed reservations whether intentionality is relational and suggested that it is "quasi-relational" since intentionality is "only somewhat similar to something relational in a certain respect..." ([1874] 1911, 212).

The previous two sections explained aboutness or directedness of intentional states in terms of intentional contents and their conditions of satisfaction. Though Searle does not explicitly reject the relational view of intentionality, he avoids presupposing it. On his theory, while every intentional state must have intentional content, the latter's satisfaction conditions are not always satisfied by an object. In such cases, the intentional state simply has no intentional object; even so, the aboutness of the state is secured by the intentional content. No need to posit mysterious nonexistent intentional objects to accommodate the (false) view of the relational nature of intentionality. There is a different problem, however, common to both Searle's theory and the orthodox view since both hold that intentional states are univocal in what they are about. I turn to this, (Q4), next.

⁹Crane is one who holds that intentionality is relational—a relation between the agent and what her thought is about. This is what drives his insistence that every intentional state must have an intentional object, even in cases such as that of Ponce de Leon. This forces Crane to talk of nonexistent intentional objects, rather mysteriously to mind. Aside from Crane, consider the intentional state of believing. It is widely held that when an agent believes *p*, she stands in a relation to the proposition expressed by *p*. Kripke's famous 1979/1994 exposes serious problems with this view, problems which he says leads us "... into an area where our normal practices of interpretation attribution of belief are subjected to the greatest possible strain, perhaps to the point of breakdown" (1994, 378). (I discuss this paper in detail and apply the current theory to puzzles Kripke raises (Georgalis 2015, 86–100). Some who deny that believing is a relation of an agent to a proposition, hold that it is relational nevertheless, e.g., Jubien (2001) takes it to be a multiple relation between the agent, on the one hand, and the object and property their belief is about, on the other. There are exceptions to holding the relational view, e.g., see Soames (2010), where he treats propositions as structured cognitive event types.

5. How the new theory identifies intentional contents

To my mind, Searle's theory of intentionality is of major significance and groundbreaking. It elegantly dispels many longstanding confusions regarding intentionality and intentional objects. Still, I also think there is a fundamental and essential ambiguity between a subjective and objective reading of the question as to what an intentional state is about, an ambiguity that neither Searle's theory nor anyone else's accommodates, though appeal to it is sometimes obscurely and implicitly made; this promotes confusion and untoward consequences.¹⁰ I argue for the ambiguity and present the central ideas that accommodate it. I show how the resulting new theory of intentionality, one which extends Searle's, is successfully deployed to address the problem of substitution in propositional attitudes. I indicate here and develop in detail elsewhere (Georgalis 2006, 2015) how it resolves others. In section 12, I demonstrate a problem in Searle's theory that results from his failure to explicitly recognize and accommodate this fundamental ambiguity.

Is what an agent's thought about univocal? If having a thought is held to be standing in some relation to a proposition, as Frege and many philosophers do, then what a thought is about is univocal.¹¹ I purport to show that this is a mistake. Let us see why.

I have a thought that I can appropriately express with the sentence "Up quarks have color." An expert elementary particle physicist could utter the same sentence to express her thought. Do we have the same thought? The answer seems to be yes and no. The answer is yes since, in accordance with ordinary linguistic practices of thought attribution, we both can appropriately use the same sentence to express our thought, even though I know next to nothing about quarks or color and the physicist knows much. But the answer is also no since *what I am thinking*—what I have in mind—when I utter that sentence bears almost no resemblance to what the expert physicist is thinking when she utters the sentence.¹²

To reconcile the conflicting answers, I exploit the difference between a *thought-token* and a *thought*. The concept 'thought-token' is used to *indicate the actual content of what one thinks on a given occasion*. Thought-tokens are episodic. The content of a thought-token is something 'going on in an agent' at a particular time. While this locution is vague, it is an undeniable fact that an agent is able from her first-person perspective to *somehow* identify what is going on in her with sufficient clarity to utter an appropriate sentence, as I do when on some occasion I utter 'Up quarks have color.' The fact that an agent has this ability to express what is going on in her—what she is thinking at a given moment—with a sentence which would be deemed appropriate in the context of utterance and would be in accordance with our ordinary linguistic practices of thought ascription suffices for my purposes.

To be clear, when I say that an agent is able to identify "something going on in her," *I am neither saying nor presupposing that she examines and identifies some inner mental content, which she then proceeds to express linguistically*. No examination of an inner-theater is appealed to. What I am saying and claiming is that *something* unspecified occurs in her head/mind which prompted her utterance. Because this something pertains to what one is thinking at a given moment, I label it

¹⁰I think both Searle and Crane are guilty of this. Crane appeals to the more subjective side when he suggests that the agent's understanding of expressions is important in providing an account of intentional states (see, e.g., Crane 2013, 144), though to my mind he does not develop just how this is to function in his theory. Subsequently, I will detail how an agent's understanding of linguistic expressions is crucial to my theory. Where Searle fails to explicitly accommodate the ambiguity will be discussed in detail in section 12.

¹¹This and other claims of Frege's are subjected to extensive criticism by Georgalis (2015, 53–82), in part by demonstrating that he does not adequately address the subjective/objective ambiguity. (Compare below the passage from Dummett on Frege.) I there also compare my theory with Frege's and show that it avoids the criticisms leveled against Frege's. As to whether belief is relational, examples of others who hold that it is a relation between an agent and a proposition are Perry (1993, 1994) and Kaplan (1989), though each of these add a wrinkle (role, character, respectively). I comment a bit on Perry later.

¹²I certainly do not "grasp" the proposition expressed by the sentence, as Frege might hold, not if grasping has anything to do with comprehending, as it should.

'thought-token,' as distinct from a 'thought,' where the latter is not indexed to a moment. (More on 'thought' below.)

As indefinite as "something going on in her" is, it still appears to be a simple fact of the matter that we do express what we are thinking at a given moment in this direct way. An agent is directly aware of her thought-token *to the extent* that if asked, for example, "What were you thinking about?" she would unhesitatingly and unequivocally say she was thinking about up quarks, that they have color, or some such. Without hesitation or inner inspection she gives linguistic expression to her thought-token—what she is thinking at the moment.

I make no pretense of knowing just what *constitutes* a thought-token—neural events, neuronal representations, or something else. Still, it seems unproblematic to suppose, as in the quark example, that *what the two agents are actually thinking* when they utter the same sentence is different and, therefore, that the *actual contents* of their respective thought-tokens are different.

A reader might have noted a similarity between my example and some Stich discussed in his 1983.¹³ Two of Stich's examples are that of Mrs. T, who suffers from dementia—an actual case. Mrs. T. would assent to or assert 'McKinley was assassinated,' while not remembering what dying is or whether an assassinated person dies. Another, one very similar to the quark case, is of a child who believes $E = mc^2$, but knows little of physics.

Stich's purpose was to lay some groundwork to advance a holistic theory against a narrow causal theory of mental sentences. While I am sympathetic to holistic theories, as may be evident in my appeal to the subject's understanding of the terms she utters in expressing her thought-token, I am not arguing for that here, nor does what I have argued presuppose a holistic theory of semantic meaning. Rather, I use these types of cases (more later) to bring out a crucial fact for my extended theory: there is no one–one mapping between thought-tokens and the sentences that express them.

My main point in using my examples is that what goes on in a speaker's head, the content available to the speaker, may well deviate from the semantic content of the sentence the speaker uses to express her content, her thought-token. Whether semantic contents of sentences are holistic or not, my point holds. Should semantic content be holistic, my point is even stronger since, as in the quark case, the semantic relations that hold between the terms 'quark,' 'up,' and 'color' would then be essential to their semantic content and the speaker is ignorant of these relations. So, her thought-token could not possibly map one–one to the sentence she utters. On the other hand, if semantic content is not holistic, there still are cases where the speaker would be unaware of the exact semantic contents of the sentences she would use to express her thought-tokens. This may be due to either ignorance, as in the quark case, or to the speaker's association of collateral information or misinformation on the occasion of utterance (as in the example below of the use of the ordinary term 'elephant'). Therefore, my argument for many–one mappings between thought-tokens and the sentences used to express them is independent of the question whether semantic meaning is holistic.

The quark example is meant to expose two fundamental facts. First, as just indicated, two agents' thought-tokens may significantly differ in content, while the same sentence may appropriately be used to express them. Henceforth, when I speak of 'a sentence appropriately expressing a thought-token,' this is to be understood to mean that *doing so is in accord with our ordinary linguistic practices of thought ascription*. Second, the *semantic content of a sentence* so used to express a thought-token may diverge from the content of the thought-token it expresses. While the content of the expert physicist's thought-token may smoothly map to the semantic content of the sentence used to express it, my thought-token decidedly would not.

¹³I thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out. (On a personal note, though I read Stich's work many, many years ago, I did not remember his examples; undoubtedly, his examples were somehow embedded deep in the recesses of my brain.)

When these factors are overlooked, the single sentence, with its ordinary dictionary meaning, used to express the various thought-tokens *washes out* the individual variation; consequently, attention is focused on the sentence uttered by or ascribed to the thinker and its content, or the proposition expressed, while ignoring possibly significant differences that may be manifest in the respective thought-token's content. The content of the sentence used to express the thought-token then serves as a proxy—an inaccurate proxy—for what the thinker is *actually* thinking. As a result, we illegitimately assume that the content of the agent's intentional state, her "thought," maps one-to-one to the sentence that expresses the thinker's thought-token. This, despite the fact that the agent's thought-token and the sentence contents may radically differ. It is, therefore, a mistake to willy-nilly identify the content of the agent's thought-token with that of the sentence she uses to express it, as is exemplified in the quark case.

The *distinction* between how an agent *understands* what goes on in her head—her thought-token—and, hence, how she expresses it, on the one hand, and the *semantics* of the sentence she appropriately uses to express her thought-token, on the other, plays a crucial role in my theory.

Loar (1988) early on was aware of some such distinction, as he recognized the potential for difference in what he called 'psychological content' and 'social content' of a belief. The work the former locution does in his paper somewhat corresponds to that of 'thought-token'; his 'social content' does similar work as that to which I put the semantic content of a sentence used to express an agent's thought-token. He argued, "... psychological content is not in general identical with what is captured by oblique that-clauses, that commonsense constraints on individuation induce only a loose fit between [psychological] contents and that-clauses ...," which express the agent's belief (1988, 102). My point regarding the many-one mappings between thought-tokens and the sentences that express them is similar to Loar's "loose fit."

There are, however, some important differences with the current work, as Loar does not treat belief/thought as a *façon de parler* (explained below), nor does he embed his ideas in a general theory of intentionality though he sketches features for one. He does say, "The point is that conceptual roles of one's thoughts determine *how* one *conceives* things, and it is difficult to see how one can consider how one oneself conceives things without that in some sense involving what one's thoughts are 'about'" (1988,108). This goes directly to my argument that the question as to what an agent's thought is about is *inherently ambiguous* between a subjective and an objective reading of the question and that both readings are necessary for a proper understanding of intentionality. In marked contrast, Loar claims that "internal intentionality," or the subjective reading, "is a sort of illusion" (136).

The variation in the contents of different thought-tokens that are expressed by the same sentence is widespread. It is not restricted to cases that involve sophisticated or arcane terminology, such as 'up quark.' The same variation in thought-tokens can be manifested even when an ordinary term (e.g., 'elephant') appears in a sentence expressing a thought-token. For, in the first place, a great deal of the words we commonly and correctly use, many of us would be hard put to provide the standard dictionary definition. This is sufficient reason to deny that the actual contents of our thought-tokens always match the standard meanings of the words used to express our thought-tokens. Second, even when one has mastery of the standard meanings of the words used to express one's thought-token, this would not prevent some collateral information or misinformation regarding the referent of whatever term is used from intruding into the actual thinking of the agent on any given occasion and thereby partially constitute her thought-token's content.

Armed with these kinds of cases, I maintain that although different agents' differing contents of their thought-tokens may be appropriately expressed by one and the same sentence, the differences in their understanding from one another are still manifested in differences in each of their actual thought-tokens, and either or both contents of these thought-tokens may differ from that of the content of the common sentence uttered. Thus, in such cases, we may conclude that *whatever* the component contents of the different thinkers' thought-tokens are, *they do not map one-one to the*

contents of components of sentences that express them. Quite generally, there is a *many-one* relation between thought-tokens and the sentences that express them.¹⁴

Once we recognize: (1) the potential differences between the contents of thought-tokens and the sentences which express them, and (2) the proposed account of thought is accepted, any puzzlement regarding the plausibility of both yes and no answers to questions such as, “Does the expert physicist and the novice have the same thought?”—as in the quark example—are substantively explained. Any initial puzzlement regarding this question is based on the mistaken assumptions that what one thinks is a thought, and its content maps one-one to the sentence that expresses it. When in fact, what one thinks is best described as a thought-token that typically does not map one-one to the sentence expressing it.

The point made here is that often, even typically, there is a *divergence between the content of what a speaker understands and the public meaning of the expressions she utters* to express her thought-tokens. My further claim, which I will argue for more fully below, is that *accommodation of such divergences is of the utmost importance in considering various philosophical problems, problems whose adequate resolution depend on such accommodation.*

The divergence between the contents of thought-tokens and the sentences that express them is typically neglected, but I have been gratified to learn that I am not alone in the recognition of its importance. Consider what Michael Dummett has to say on this point in the preface to his 1981:

Since writing ..., [*Frege: Philosophy of Language* (1973)], I have come to see that *the relation of the meaning of a word in the language shared by a community of speakers and the understanding that an individual speaker has of it is far more problematic than I then supposed*, as is also the question whether an understanding of a word or of a language is genuinely a case of knowledge. I further believe that these are prime examples of questions that need to be settled before we can accurately evaluate Frege’s philosophy of language. But they are very difficult questions, demanding extensive discussion; and they are questions about which nothing explicit is said by Frege.” (1981, xiii; italics added)

Thus, no less an authority on Frege’s philosophy than Dummett had come to maintain that an accurate evaluation of Frege’s philosophy of language must wait until the problematic nature of the relation between a speaker’s understanding of the terms of her language community and the public meaning of those terms is addressed, something of which Frege explicitly says nothing.¹⁵

A speaker’s variation in understanding from the public meaning of words is captured by my concept of thought-token and the relation of that to the public language is accommodated by the many-one mappings. However, more must be said of these many-one mappings. Two other factors relevant to these many-one relations is the agent’s understanding of her *circumstances* and required *restrictions* on many-one mapping. (Both of which will be explained below. The first factor is addressed in the Al, Bob, and Sam cases, and the second, when I consider substitution in propositional attitudes.) But before developing these conditions and restrictions, let us consider what *thought* is on my theory.

What exactly is my sense of ‘thought,’ as distinct from that of ‘thought-token’? I maintain that though we undeniably *have* thought-tokens, we *do not have* thoughts. The locution ‘thought’

¹⁴It is widely accepted that there is variation between what an agent thinks, and the sentence uttered to express it when indexicals are involved, as when different individuals utter the sentence ‘I am hungry.’ (See, e.g., Kaplan [1989] or Perry [1993]). The above discussion, however, indicates that such variation in thought-tokens, even while the same sentence may appropriately express them, is manifested in many other types of cases beyond the use of indexicals. Yet other types of such variation between the content of an agent’s thought-token and the sentence which expresses it will be described below.

¹⁵Compare note 11.

is just a *façon de parler*. The expression ‘thought’ is, of course, useful, but on my theory, it should be understood simply as the ordinary-dictionary-meaning-of-a-sentence-appropriately-and-accurately-used-to-express-an-agent’s-thought-token-on-some-occasion.¹⁶ To say that someone “has” the thought, say, that some apples are red, when not entertaining it, is just to say that under appropriate conditions the agent would have a thought-token that she would appropriately and accurately express by uttering or assenting to the sentence ‘Some apples are red.’

Frege also denied that we have thoughts; he held that thoughts are abstract objects that we *grasp*. Consequently, there is a question for him concerning just how we can grasp abstract thoughts, which exist apart from us. There is no such problem for the current theory in ‘grasping’ either thought-tokens or thoughts, for the former are episodic occurrences in us, which *directly* prompt the sentences we utter to express them. I have been careful not to talk of thought-tokens in an ontological vein. For me, they are simply subjective concepts that play a role in an analysis of intentionality. From a subjective point of view—*something going on in us* prompts the sentences we utter. Nor is there a problem on my theory of grasping thoughts, since ‘thought’ is simply a *façon de parler*. (Compare the earlier definition of ‘thought.’)

My contention is that to have a satisfactory theory of intentionality, we must accommodate the distinctions between thought, thought-token, and the sentence used to express thought-tokens, as well as the many–one mappings that obtain between the latter two. Toward that end, on my theory the question as to *what an intentional state is about* is viewed as *inherently ambiguous* between what an agent’s intentional state is about (a) from her own subjective perspective, what she herself is thinking, her thought-token and (b) from the perspective of an objective observer of the agent.¹⁷ These different points of view frequently, even typically, result in the same answer. However, when the answers diverge and the question of aboutness pertains to *what the agent herself is thinking*, the subjective reading is paramount. Generally, which answer is relevant would depend on the context in which the question is raised.

Ignoring the ambiguity when such divergences occur is a deep source of philosophical conundrums; the ambiguity is importantly manifested in the problems of substitution in propositional attitudes, distinguishing speaker’s referent from semantic referent, Donnellan’s alleged referential/attributive distinction, and Kripke’s puzzle about belief, among others.¹⁸ One need not reflect too deeply to realize that a central source of these issues is the discrepancy between the content of an *agent’s thought-token* or how *she understands* either *the sentences she utters* or the *circumstances prompting her thought-token* and, thus, what words she chooses to express it, on the one hand, and what an objective observer would ascribe to the agent, on the other. In such cases an objective observer might well express what the agent’s “thought” is about differently than the agent herself. (Scare quotes here used because of my different accounts of thought-token and thought.)

In brief, what has emerged in this section is that intentional states are ambiguous between subjective and objective readings. The intentional content of an intentional state, therefore, has two readings also. The subjective reading of intentional content is identified by the agent’s thought-token, while the objective reading is identified by the public sentence that appropriately expresses the agent’s thought-token.

¹⁶Multiple hyphenation is used to stress that I am not identifying thought with the ordinary dictionary meaning of a sentence *simpliciter*, but only *when* a sentence is appropriately and accurately used to identify a thought-token on some occasion. The importance of the qualification ‘accurately’ goes to the requirement of restrictions on permissible mappings in some cases discussed. It will be clearer in the discussion below of substitution in propositional attitudes.

¹⁷By ‘objective observer’ I simply mean one who is “in the know” regarding the circumstances of the agent’s utterance.

¹⁸See Georgalis (2015) for detailed arguments showing how my theory, which explicitly recognizes and accommodates this subjective/objective distinction regarding aboutness, solves or resolves these and other problems.

6. Ignorance of circumstances as a qualification on specifying intentional states

To get clearer on the ambiguity at issue, I start with a simple example used by Kripke, though he uses it to a different end.¹⁹ The quark case brings out both the ambiguity in the question as to what a thought is about and the importance of many–one mappings. The Kripke case highlights the alleged ambiguity, though it does so in a different way since it does not require many–one mappings. Instead, it demonstrates a further requirement for some types of cases: *the consideration of the conceived circumstances of utterance*. The new qualification applies in mundane cases of agents mistaking their circumstances.

Suppose Al and Bob see a man in the distance who happens to be Smith, but they mistake him for Jones, and Al asks, “What is Jones doing?” Bob responds, “He is raking leaves.” Now if you were to ask Al or Bob who they were talking about, they would unhesitatingly say, ‘Jones.’ Just as clearly, we, who are in the know—that is, objective observers—would say their thoughts are about Smith; after all, he is the guy who is raking leaves. We might even correctly say, though Al and Bob think they are talking about Jones, they are mistaken.

But focus again on Al and Bob for a moment and put aside what they *said*. Is it Smith who *they themselves are thinking about*? Do they have Smith in mind on this occasion? Clearly, if asked “Are you thinking of Smith?” each would unhesitatingly say “No, I’m thinking about Jones and what he is doing,” or some such. The subject or topic of each of *their respective thought-tokens* is not Smith but Jones. They have Jones in mind; neither of them has Smith in mind. This certainly provides some reason for holding that *who* their thought-tokens are about is *Jones, not Smith*.

Consider another simple example: suppose Sam is stimulated in such a way that he utters, “The orange on the table is small.” Clearly, *as Sam conceives* the situation, he is talking about an orange. Part of the intentional contents, satisfaction conditions, *to his mind* specifies an orange. Suppose in fact that what is on the table is not an orange but a kumquat. Again, an objective observer would rightly hold that Sam is talking about a kumquat, though Sam himself mistakenly takes it to be an orange. Neither answer should be faulted, but which is *appropriate* depends on the context in which the question “What is Sam thinking about?” is raised. Does the question concern what Sam, *himself*, is thinking, or does it concern what is objectively prompting Sam’s utterance?

These simple examples are unlike the quark case, where both the physicist and I intend to speak of the same thing—up quarks. That case exemplified the importance of recognizing many–one mappings of thought-tokens to sentences expressing them. The recent examples further exemplify the importance of accommodating the stated ambiguity in what a thought is about, while at the same time recognizing *how the agent conceives her circumstances* may be also relevant. They illustrate that what an agent is actually thinking about—what she has in mind—may well differ from what is prompting what she thinks on a given occasion and, hence, what an objective observer would say her intentional state is about. Of course, where there is such divergence, the agent is factually mistaken, but *her* thought-token—that which *she herself* is entertaining at the time, what *she thinks it is about*—cannot be appropriately characterized by a term for the objectively prompting object; that is why she is mistaken. While it may seem platitudinous to point out such divergences, not only can the consequences of such differences prove to be of great importance, but they also go to the *very heart of the question* as to what an agent’s intentional state is *about*. The question of aboutness has been widely thought to have a univocal answer; I take such cases to illustrate that this is mistaken.

¹⁹Kripke (1990, 248–67) himself used this example in the development of his distinction between speaker’s referent and semantic referent. These locutions may appear to indicate some subjective/objective distinction but this, I elsewhere argue, is mere appearance given the way Kripke explains the difference. More importantly, I argue that his account of speaker’s referent cannot do the work that Kripke intends for it. (See Georgalis 2015, 127–36.)

7. Required concepts for the new theory: *minimal content and objective content*

My extension of Searle's theory of intentionality accommodates this ambiguity. As we have seen, a fundamental idea of the extended theory is that of the distinction between thought-token and thought. A further crucial idea of my theory concerns a fine-grained component of thought-token, the subject or topic component of thought-token: I call it 'minimal content':

Minimal content represents the subject of the intentional state as the agent conceives it.^{20,21}

Were the agent to express her minimal content she would use a noun or noun phrase which, being part of a public language, would have its standard meaning or reference. While the agent deploys a linguistic expression that appropriately expresses her minimal content, her understanding of it may not coincide with the public meaning or reference of the expression, as in the quark case.

The objective correlate to minimal content of the inherent ambiguity is indicated by what I call the 'objective content':

Objective content indicates the subject an objective observer of the agent would ascribe as the subject of the agent's intentional state.

I stress that the concept 'objective content,' as here used and as in the case of minimal content applies only to the topic or subject of the agent's intentional state, not the entire thought-token. A noun or noun phrase, which has public meaning or reference, would be used to express the objective content.

Both the agent and an objective observer may appropriately use the same linguistic expression to express the subject of the intentional state. Even here, however, the agent's understanding of the linguistic expression used may deviate from its standard meaning, as in the quark case. The variation that gives rise to the ambiguity in what an intentional state is about may have a different source though. In the Al, Bob, and Sam cases the referent of each noun or noun phrase used is clear to the speakers and is in accord with the public referents of the names; Al and Bob just misidentify who is raking leaves. They misidentify the circumstances. Either inadequate understanding of terms or misidentifying the circumstances of utterance may give rise to the ambiguity. We will soon see a third source (section 10).

Searle's modeling of his theory of intentionality on speech acts represented an intentional state as $S(r)$, where S is the propositional attitude and r is the representative or intentional content (1983, 6). The distinction between minimal and objective content forces a modification in his theory. Accordingly, $S(r)$ should have two decompositions: $S(r(m))$ and $S(r(o))$, where ' $r(m)$ ' represents the subjective intentional content of the agent's intentional state, her thought-token, and ' $r(o)$ ' represents the objective intentional content of the agent's intentional state.

²⁰In both this and the subsequent definition of 'objective content,' the term 'subject' simply refers to the topic of the thought, not the agent whose thought it is. One might ask, "Why use the term 'minimal' and not just 'subjective'?" What dictated my choice is that to think anything at all one must somehow conceive the subject or topic of one's thought, and to do so from one's own subjective perspective. *It is a bare minimum requirement on thinking anything at all.* Moreover, what that subject or topic is which is thusly thought may be distinct from anything external to the thinker on the occasion of thinking it. A further reason is to distinguish it from the concept of thought-token, for while both minimal content and thought-token are subjective concepts, the latter requires the former as a component.

²¹I note that the terms 'minimal' and 'minimalism' is prominent in the recent literature regarding the distinction between semantics and pragmatics, e.g., Borg (2004) argues for a minimal account between semantics and pragmatics. Minimal semantics for Borg is restricted to what the speaker literally says, not what she may mean. My use of 'minimal' and the use of the term in the semantics/pragmatics literature is clearly different

8. Objectual intentional states?

While I am sympathetic to the idea that there are merely objectual intentional states, intentional states that are about an object or kind of object, rather than states of affairs, e.g., wishing to ride Pegasus or fearing lions, as opposed to, say, believing that it will rain, respectively. I do not argue for that here. Nor does anything that I have said here commit me to either affirming or denying such a claim. Nevertheless, I sketch how one would represent objectual intentional states within the view presented here.

When the intentional content is not propositional, the two readings of the intentional state would be represented simply as $S(m)$ and $S(o)$. When there is an intentional object to an objectual intentional state, it is the state's objective content. As I will presently make clear, in states directed simply at an object, the 'm' and 'o' in ' $S(m)$ ' and ' $S(o)$ ' involve features of the purported intentional object and are not propositional in form.

There are two issues to be addressed here: (1) Searle's theory and my extension of it hold that intentional content specifies satisfaction conditions: How could that work when the intentional content is not propositional but objectual? (2) If the subject of an objectual intentional state does not exist as, say, in wishing to ride Pegasus or Macbeth wanting to clutch the dagger he hallucinates, then wouldn't the extended theory require nonexistent intentional objects? The answer to (1) will, together with the theory, provide the basis to negatively answer (2).²²

Can one be in an objectual intentional state without having any feature or purported feature of it in mind? Can I think of Pegasus without, ipso facto, thinking of a winged horse or some such? Similarly, can I think simply of Jones without thinking of any feature of his, say, that he is my friend? Can one think of such without thinking of it "under some aspect," as Searle would put it? In objectual intentional states, are the individuals we think about to be featureless, *bare particulars*? I doubt that anyone would wish to answer the latter affirmatively and while the same responses to the other questions may not be quite as evident as it is for the last, they are the same.

Even in the extreme, when we have virtually no information about an existing object, as when I am not hallucinating (to be considered presently), and I think about the object over there but have no clue what it is or what features it has, I am aware, at the very least, that it is a spatial object and has a certain spatial relation to me.

In the case of fictitious objects, the aspects under which they are thought provide the satisfaction conditions which constitute the intentional content. Satisfaction conditions are also required to distinguish one fictitious object from another—say, Pegasus from a centaur. The features of Pegasus and a centaur are different, and they provide distinct satisfaction conditions for any intentional state regarding either. (Compare the criticism of Crane in [section 3](#).)

What was just said applies as well to hallucinations. When Macbeth hallucinated a dagger before him, there were certain dagger-features he was aware of; they were not, say, axe-features. His minimal content would be indicated by 'dagger.' The intentional content constituted by dagger-feature satisfaction conditions are eminently sufficient. Thus, whether an objectual intentional state is directed at an actual, fictitious, or hallucinated object satisfaction conditions apply. Objectual intentional states in the latter two cases would lack an intentional object, though all three would have intentional contents, satisfaction conditions.

Importantly, intentional states regarding fictions or hallucinations fail to have any intentional object. For according to Searle's and the extended theory, though all intentional states, objectual or otherwise, *must* have intentional content to secure their aboutness, there is no need for them to have mysterious nonexistent intentional objects. Indeed, the latter are proscribed.

²²I thank an anonymous referee for his/her concerns about these two issues.

9. Further explanation of the new concepts and brief recap of recent examples

Let me try to clarify what I mean by the concepts of thought-token and the content of a thought-token. The concept of thought-token is a theoretical construct introduced to indicate certain complex empirical facts related to what one is episodically thinking: whatever is going on in the head when one expresses what one thinks on a given occasion. Whatever that is, it is not something the agent internally inspects; instead, they are brain events of which the agent is unaware that directly prompt utterances of sentences.

Consider what happens when engaged in a discussion: one utters a temporal sequence of sentences. These are not first internally and serially inspected as mental sentences or neural representations in the head that the agent then “translates” into public sentences. Rather, the uttered sentences flow in consequence of the agent’s understanding or misunderstanding of whatever is being discussed. I assume this flow of sentences is a result of (1) various dynamical processes occurring in one’s head, (2) these processes are constrained by one’s understanding or misunderstanding of whatever is being discussed at the time, (3) such dynamical processes can change over time as one’s understanding increases or one gets confused, (4) they can prompt utterances of sentences.

The concept thought-token is meant to capture the agent’s understanding on an occasion, which is manifested in such dynamical processes. As such, thought-token is an idealization of a brain event at a point in time that directly prompts or would prompt an agent to utter a public sentence. The concept thought-token factors in the agent’s understanding as shaping such dynamical processes. It thereby serves to mark what she is actually thinking on a given occasion as a function of her degree of understanding and accounts for how its content may vary from the content of the sentence she may utter.

There is, then, an intrinsic vagueness in the theoretical construct ‘thought-token,’ as the dynamical processes are left wholly unspecified. Still, I think that there can be very little, if any, doubt that such processes occur which directly prompt our utterances; this is sufficient for my purposes.

When I speak of the ‘content’ of a thought-token, this is to convey what the agent is *actually* thinking and, to repeat, *what* the agent is actually thinking is determined by the extent of her understanding or misunderstanding of the topic of which she is thinking. It is the subjective reading of the intentional content. Cases like that of the quark example, clearly indicate differences between what agents may be thinking, and yet they may still appropriately use the same sentence to express their thought-tokens. Hence, the possible variation in the thought-token content from the publicly identifiable sentence content uttered to express it.

Even so, the subject or topic of a thought-token is rather determinate from the agent’s subjective point of view: she *directly knows* what she *thinks* she is talking about. (Of course, the agent can be wrong as to what is actually prompting her thought-token, as in the Bob and Al case.) The direct knowledge that the agent has of the subject of her thought-token is one reason why I introduced the concept of minimal content as conceptually distinct from, though a conceptual element of, the concept of thought-token. A more important reason for singling it out from the concept thought-token is because of the central role this aspect of thought-token, the concept of minimal content, plays in the application of my theory to other philosophical problems to which I allude at various points in this paper.

Highlighting some key features of the current theory, intentional states have both subjective and objective readings, similar to the intentional contents of intentional states. A thought-token is the subjective reading of intentional content, the subject of which is the minimal content. The objective reading of the intentional content of an intentional state is what an objective observer would ascribe to the agent, the subject of which is the objective content.

Lacking mental telepathy, to communicate, we express with words what we or others are thinking about. The earlier examples (Al/Bob and Sam) have been offered as an attempt to make

it plausible that *sometimes* it would be in accord with our linguistic practices to give two different linguistic expressions, which designate different objects, to specify what is the subject of an agent's intentional state. This allows us to characterize the agent's intentional state from her own subjective perspective—what she is *actually thinking* on a given occasion—on the one hand, and what it is about from an objective perspective, on the other.

As we have seen, Al and Bob would express the subject of their intentional states with the proper name 'Jones,' as it would more accurately represent their minimal content—*who they* were thinking about. Note that in this case, the subjective reading of the subject of their intentional states would fail to have an intentional object, as Jones is not in the vicinity. Whereas on the objective readings of the subject of their intentional states there is an intentional object, viz., Smith raking leaves. Thus, the objective content, the objective subject of their intentional states, would be more accurately expressed by the name 'Smith,' as this is the individual (and what he is doing) actually prompting their thought-tokens, even though Smith is not who they had in mind. Similarly, Sam would express the minimal content of his thought-token, the subject component, using the expression 'orange,' not 'kumquat,' though the latter would be a more accurate expression of the objective content of the subject of his intentional state, what was prompting it.

As Al/Bob and Sam cases illustrate, an agent in linguistically expressing what he himself is thinking about might well use a nonequivalent expression to that which an objective observer would use. When there is a divergence between the subjective and objective reading of the subject of an intentional state, which linguistic item more *accurately* expresses the intentional content would depend on which reading of the question is at issue: Is the point of the question to get at what the agent actually has in mind and, therefore, might govern what she might further say or do, or is it to get at what is actually prompting her? In cases such as those considered, there is no correct univocal answer. The answer depends on which reading of the question "What is the agent's intentional state about?" is at issue.

The Al/Bob and Sam cases presented were cases where different linguistic expressions were required to appropriately express the subject part of the intentional contents, depending on whether the subjective or objective reading was at issue; moreover, the expressions were not extensionally equivalent. Importantly, the same points sometime apply even when the differently linguistically expressed sentences are extensionally equivalent. A familiar example of this occurs with substitution in propositional attitudes, to which I now turn.

10. A restriction on many-one mappings and the substitution problem

Frege famously proposed a solution to the substitution problem based on his sense/reference distinction. For Frege, what mattered to thought's content is not its reference but its sense—how its reference is thought about. My way of solving this problem relies not on sense, but on my concept of thought-token and permissible mappings from thought-tokens to sentences which express them. What an agent expresses is her thought-token, not abstract senses or propositions. Unlike Fregean senses, thought-tokens are decidedly subjective; they may vary considerably from one agent to another and still map to the same sentence to express them, as in the quark case. In such cases, *many-one mappings* are crucial. In the Al/Bob and Sam cases, what was central is not the many-one relation between thought-tokens and the sentences that express them, but how the agent's *understood their respective circumstances*. My treatment of the substitution problem turns on a yet different condition on mapping, viz., the previously mentioned *restriction on permissible mappings*.

Consider Sally who believes that Mark Twain was a great American author though she does not know that 'Mark Twain' is a pseudonym for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, nor has she ever heard the name 'Clemens.' Now familiar ground. We may express this by saying:

- (1) Sally believes that Mark Twain was a great American author.

Since the sentence ‘Mark Twain = Samuel Langhorne Clemens’ is true, substitution in (1) yields:

- (2) Sally believes that Samuel Langhorne Clemens was a great American author.

Now while (1) would be clearly true in the described circumstances, (2) must give pause.²³ If Sally were asked “When did you learn Samuel Clemens was an author?”, she would be perplexed, likely saying, “Who’s he?”, or some such, as Sally has never heard the name ‘Samuel Clemens’ prior to this occasion. She herself would never express or assent to the subordinate clause of (2), while readily assenting to or asserting the subordinate clause in (1). Though the two subordinate clauses are extensionally equivalent, the subordinate clause in (1) *accurately and appropriately* expresses Sally’s intentional content *as she conceives the subject of her thought*—her minimal content—while the subordinate clause in (2), though objectively correct, *fails to either accurately or appropriately express the subject of her thought—token as she conceives it*—her minimal content—and, thus, fails to express what she is actually thinking.²⁴ It is clear that were Sally not ignorant of the relevant fact, either of the subordinate clauses would be appropriate expressions of her subjective intentional content. But if some such ignorance is operative, we must accommodate this limitation, *if we are to express accurately and appropriately* what the agent *herself* thinks.

In short, when the candidates for a linguistic expression to be used to express an agent’s intentional state are extensionally equivalent, but the agent is unaware of this, we must recognize the ambiguity in the question as to what an agent is thinking about and accommodate her limitation; we must restrict the range of mappings to sentences that do not mislead regarding the content of her *actual* thought-token. It is evident that the source of problems generated by substitution in propositional attitudes is the disconnect between how an agent subjectively conceives the subject of what she thinks—minimal content—on the one hand, and what would be a perfectly acceptable objective characterization of it—objective content—on the other.²⁵

11. Does the new theory presuppose a theory of proper names?

How one understands proper names is obviously relevant to the recent example. My claims regarding the minimal content associated with a proper name might well lead one to suspect that I am sympathetic to a descriptivist’s view of proper names.²⁶ The suspicion is correct, and this may

²³Of course, some would say that on a ‘transparent’ reading of (2), it is true. Be that as it may, Sally *herself* would not assent to or assert the subordinate clause of (2). How the transparent, opaque distinction should be understood on my theory is discussed in (Georgalis 2015, 190–92).

²⁴John Perry (1993), among others, is sensitive to the idea that in consideration of the attitudes one needs to accommodate *how* the agent believes the propositional content of the attitude or the *role* it plays for the agent, and not the propositions itself, since he holds that propositional attitudes are “local mental phenomena” (1994, 187). He appears to be onto something here akin to thought-tokens, though he glides over them by appealing pragmatic considerations. On my view, the issue that such alleged pragmatic considerations are intended to address are partly accounted for with the less vague many–one mappings of thought-tokens to sentences that express them.

²⁵Georgalis (2015, 181–85) expands this case: Sally learns some things about Samuel Langhorne Clemens but none such that she realizes the identity. Now Sally would have minimal content associated with both names but may still demur from the subordinate clause in (2). She could have minimal content associated with each name but fail to realize the identity. Think of an ancient’s understanding of the names ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus.’ Some of these ideas are also applied to Frege’s puzzle regarding identity in Georgalis (185–90). While the concepts of minimal content/thought-token are radically different than Frege’s concept of sense, they are deployed to do similar work that sense does for Frege’s theory. Clearly my concepts are set in a significantly different theoretical framework than Frege’s. Some possible parallels with Recanti’s mental files (2012) are also relevant here, but space does not permit further discussion.

²⁶See Georgalis (2015, 158–80) where I argue for a significant modification of Searle’s theory of proper names. The result is a hybrid Searlean/Millian account, which also stems from the distinction I draw between how an agent conceives the subject of

cause some readers to think that what I have presented must be flawed, for it is widely held that Kripke's 1972 refuted descriptivist theories of proper names. First, it is fair to say that Kripke refuted Frege's and Russell's theories; I think Searle's theory of proper names is significantly different and is not subject to the same objections.²⁷ That aside and more importantly for the current discussion is the fact that no matter how effective or ineffective Kripke's objections are against Searle's theory proper names, or descriptivists generally, what I want to stress is that they are *irrelevant* to what I have said regarding substitution in propositional attitudes. For my discussion of the problem of substitution in propositional attitudes *did not rely on any theory of proper names*; instead, it relied on what an agent is *thinking*, how she *understands* her thought-token and, thus, is independent of this or that theory of the *semantics* of proper names; indeed, it is also independent of how the referent of a name is determined.

This independence from any particular theory of proper names is a consequence of the crucial role played by the distinction I draw between the *contents of thought-tokens* and *contents of sentences that express them*, together with the many-one relation between them. Contents of thought-tokens are determined by what is going on in the agent's head, her understanding, no theory of proper names here. A theory of proper names, or more generally, a semantic theory, bears on *sentence* content. Whatever might be the content of a sentence as delivered by, let us say, a correct semantic theory, it may well significantly diverge from the content of an agent's thought-token notwithstanding the fact that the sentence is appropriately used to express an agent's thought-token.

In the next section, we will see that Searle himself does not separate his theory of proper names from his theory of intentionality. Nevertheless, he tries to show why his theory of intentionality can resolve the problem of substitution in propositional attitudes while denying that descriptions that are associated with a proper name (or, as in his 1983, intentional contents associated with a name) give the name's meaning. I attempt to provide additional support for my alternative theory by arguing that though Searle was on the right track, his account fails in this attempt and fails precisely because he does not explicitly accommodate the inherent ambiguity in the question as to what an intentional state is about.

12. Subjective and objective interpretations of intentional content: Searle's implicit but unsupported reliance

As just explained, my theory of intentionality is completely independent of any semantic theory of proper names. Searle, in contrast, joins the two: his 1958 theory of names is merged with his theory of intentionality in his 1983. The connection is clear since, for him, names have associated descriptions and intentional contents generally can be expressed using descriptions. Thus, he frequently speaks of intentional contents associated with a name in his 1983, as well as descriptions.

her thought and what it is objectively. This requires that while proper names in *sentences themselves* contribute only their referents to the semantics of sentences, *sentences considered as accurate and appropriate expressions of an agent's thought-token must accommodate the descriptions she associates with the proper name*, as is brought out in the Sally case. Importantly, this much is independent of the separate questions as to how the referent of a name is determined and what a name contributes to the semantics of a sentence, as the focus is on *an individual's understanding*.

²⁷Kripke (1972) only makes a passing mention to Searle's theory of proper names and does not consider any of its distinctive features. Instead, he gives a general characterization of something he calls "the cluster theory" by presenting six theses, and readers are led to believe that the six theses capture the "descriptivists view," including Searle's. Kripke then proceeds to refute these theses. I have argued in detail that Searle's theory remains unscathed (Georgalis 2015, 159–72). To briefly mention here but one example, Kripke's "Feynman example," offered as a counterexample to thesis 2, does not apply to Searle's theory, since Searle provides for what he calls *parasitic uses* of proper names (1969, 170–71). Neither Frege nor Russell had this concept, so the counterexample is effective against their theories. ('Parasitic use' is explained in section 12).

Searle's 1958 explicitly argues against the claim that descriptions associated with names constitute a name's meaning; his 1983 similarly denies that intentional content gives the meaning of a proper name.²⁸ Despite this, he maintains that the intentional content associated with a name can contribute to the propositional content of a statement made using a name. More precisely, he says:

[*][1] ... the Intentional content associated with a proper name can figure as a part of the propositional content of a statement made by a speaker using that name, even though [2] the speaker's associated Intentional content is not part of the definition of the name. (Searle 1983, 256; numbering inserted)

If this is true, then it would appear that Searle can provide answers to the classic problems along Fregean lines, including the problem of substitution, even while denying that he is giving a theory of meaning of proper names. If correct, this would refute Kripke's (1972) claim that any apparent advantage the descriptivist has in solving the classic problems requires that associated descriptions give the meaning of names.²⁹

As promising as [*] would seem to be to provide a solution to the problem of substitution along Fregean lines while denying that descriptions associated with a proper name give its meaning, there is a serious problem with it—it seems impossible for something to be part of the propositional content of a statement but not part of its meaning. Consequently, clauses [1] and [2] would appear to be irreconcilable. I think the source of this difficulty is Searle's implicit vacillation between subjective and objective readings of 'intentional contents.' Let me explain.

Clause [1] arguably pertains to an objective interpretation of 'intentional content.' I say this for two reasons. First, if intentional content is univocal, as it is for Searle, there should not be any subjective variation in the intentional contents of two individuals who would express their respective intentional contents with the same linguistic expression. This is reinforced by the fact that the phrase "the propositional content of a statement made by a speaker" (as in clause [1]) normally does not depend on the speaker, on what content the speaker might associate with the name used in the statement made.³⁰

My second reason for my claim that Searle sometimes treats 'intentional content' objectively is that he argues that there are *parasitic* uses of proper names. (1969, 170–71; he quotes this in his 1983 [242–43, 252, passim]) A parasitic use of a proper name occurs when a speaker knows very little about referent of a name she uses. She is unfamiliar with many of the objective intentional contents (descriptions) associated with the name and may associate some which do not apply; nevertheless, she can still successfully refer to the referent with the proper name but only because objective intentional contents are associated with the name. She succeeds although she is not privy to these and, hence, they are not in her mind. Her use of the name in expressing her intentional content is parasitic on those who know the objective intentional contents associated with the name.

In contrast, clause [2] rather clearly requires the subjective interpretation of 'intentional content' since it is "*the speaker's associated intentional content*" (italics added) that is appealed to there.³¹

²⁸Searle argues that if descriptions defined a name, then the linguistic function of naming would collapse to describing, and this is unacceptable. (Searle 1958, 170–72; Searle 1983, 250, 260)

²⁹In a later work (1994, 358–59), Kripke says he has since come to realize that even when the descriptivist's theory of proper names is taken as giving the meaning of names, it does not have the advantage it is commonly thought to have regarding the problem of substitution, indeed, as he himself earlier thought. While I find Kripke's argument here persuasive as against Frege's and Russell's version of descriptivism—again—he does not consider the specifics of Searle's theory, as he failed to do in his 1972. (Cf. note 27.)

³⁰This is a complicated matter, one which ultimately depends on how we are to analyze 'the statement made by a speaker.' I have given a detailed analysis of this elsewhere. (Georgalis 2015, 109–20). Present purposes do not require this discussion.

³¹That Searle sometimes intends the subjective interpretation of 'intentional content' is also evident when he addresses various alleged counterexamples to his theory of names (1983, 250–58). He says that the counterexamples are not effective

The possible variation in a speaker's associated intentional content for a given proper name from that of others in her community is, of course, what makes it subjective.

Thus, Searle requires and implicitly deploys subjective and objective concepts of intentional content in his discussion. The shortcoming in his theory is that he fails to explicitly recognize and accommodate the distinct roles each of these two concepts play. This lacuna undercuts his claim (*), viz., that the intentional content associated with a name can be both part of the propositional content of a statement using that name and yet not be part of the meaning of the statement made by the speaker. The agent's subjective understanding of her thought-token, her subjective intentional contents, is, I think, what Searle was trying to get at when he says that the intentional content associated with a name can be part of the propositional content without being part of the meaning of the sentence used to express her thought. His mistake was attempting to locate that intentional content in the propositional content of the statement made. This made [1] and [2] irreconcilable.

His dilemma is that, on the one hand, he needs the subjective intentional content to indicate *how the agent conceives* the subject of her thought, which is crucial to the solution of the substitution problem but, on the other hand, this cannot be part of the objective content of the statement which expresses her intentional content. On my theory, the subjective intentional content constitutes the agent's thought-token, while the objective intentional content constitutes the semantic content of the sentence that appropriately expresses her thought-token, even while the two may differ in content. What Searle should have said is that the speaker's subjective intentional content is what *she* was thinking—*her thought-token*—rather than its being *part of the propositional content of the statement made*, as [1] in the quotation maintains. This distinction is one my extended theory insists upon. Showing that thought-tokens map many-one to sentences that express them avoids the problem confronting Searle, since while the content of an agent's thought-token is appropriately expressed by some public, objective sentence, the latter's content may differ from the former's. Thus, my theory explicitly incorporates subjective intentional content implicit in Searle's theory, while also accommodating the objective content.

13. Concluding remarks

A theory of intentionality must incorporate the concepts of subjective intentional content and objective intentional content because of the inherent ambiguity in the question as to what intentional states are about. From the perspective of my theory, the context in which the question of aboutness arises is what determines whether it is one or the other or both that is relevant to the discussion at hand. The distinction between the contents of *thought-tokens*, on the one hand, and that of *sentences* which express them, on the other, is fundamental to my theory, as is the distinctively different roles they play. It is the *many-one mappings* between thought-tokens and the sentences that express them that enables their playing these different roles. It also proved important to distinguish the subject or topic of an intentional state according to whether the objective or subjective reading is at issue. This is accomplished with the concepts of *objective content* and *minimal content*, respectively.

An individual's understanding both of her thought-tokens and her circumstances is, indisputably, central to what *she is thinking*; they are determinants of the content of her thought-token. On my theory: (1) subjective intentional content of intentional states is explicitly addressed by focusing on thought-tokens; (2) how the contents of thought-tokens may differ from the sentences which express them is accounted for via the concept of many-one mapping. Importantly, the way this second feature is secured does not wash out what the agent is actually thinking.

against him because, "... in each case reference is achieved only because the object satisfies the *Intentional content in the mind of the speaker*" (1983, 250; italics added). This is clearly a subjective reading of 'intentional content.'

These two features are in accord with our ordinary linguistic practices of thought ascription, and together they explain the relation between one's understanding of the expressions of her language, on the hand, and their public meanings in her language community, on the other. As the passage from Dummett quoted earlier indicates, I am not alone in recognizing the utmost importance of having a clear view of this relation. I have provided an account of this relation and it is incorporated in my theory of intentionality. I maintain that failure to explicitly accommodate it is at the core of many problems in the philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. I also contend that the proposed theory has the resources to recast and resolve many of these problems.³²

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Nicholas Georgalis is Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy at East Carolina University. His main research interests are at the intersection of the philosophy of mind and philosophy of language. He has authored two books. Degrees: PhD (philosophy), University of Chicago; MA (philosophy), Lehigh University; BA (mathematics), University of Minnesota.

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³²As indicated in various places throughout, Georgalis (2006, 2015) attempts to substantiate this ambitious claim and develops the proposed theory in more detail.

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