

## Chapter 4

# The Map and the Territory

John R. Searle

I have in my hand a road map of the state of California.<sup>1</sup> Like all such ordinary objects it is philosophically astounding and I am going to explore some of its astounding features. The interest that the map has for me is not just in the specifics of map productions and cartographic representations, but I have a series of questions of a much more philosophical and indeed almost metaphysical kind about the relation between representation and reality and the implications that these have for our relations to the world. For science in particular and knowledge in general, how does the map represent the territory? First of all, we have to make an assumption that there is a territory with more or less determinate features. The map represents that territory in at least certain essential features. In the case of the map of California, there are all sorts of features of California that are left out of the map such as the number of blonde people living in Los Angeles, or the amount of rainfall that occurs in the Central Valley during the winter months. None of these are represented in the map. What is represented? In order to answer that question, I am going to say a bit about the representing relation. There are series of entities in California, call them cities, mountains, roads, coastline, etc. These are represented how? For each of these entities, there is a mark or area on the map and typically a mark or area with a name next to it. Next to one marked area is “Sacramento” and next to another, “San Francisco”. These areas actually stand for Sacramento and San Francisco or whatever else is designated on the map. However, a map is not the same as a list of marks and names. What is added to the lists of marks and names that makes it a representational map? What is added is a *method of projection* of the features of the map to the entities in reality. Naively, we can say that the method of projection is such that, given the method, the relations on the map are identical with

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<sup>1</sup>California, AAA, 12/16-3/18 Printed in the USA.

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the relations in reality. So, Sacramento is north of Los Angeles. In reality, and on the map, it is exactly the same: Sacramento is north of Los Angeles. However, in the map, there is literally no north and south, there is simply the representation of north and south. That introduces a question of what is the method of projection. Well, the method of projection in this particular map is that we assume that the Earth can be represented at least in portions on a flat surface. We assume that the map has a top and a bottom. We assume that north is at the top and south is at the bottom, west to the left as we look at the map, and east to the right. Now, given those relations on the actual sheet of paper, we can say that the relations of the marks, "Sacramento", "San Francisco", "Los Angeles", etc., have to be exactly the same on the map as they are in real life. So, on the map, there is an area on the top half of the map that represents Sacramento and it is nearer to the top than the big blotch that represents Los Angeles. That is exactly what is meant by saying the map represents Sacramento as being north of Los Angeles.

How then does the map represent? Well, it is tempting to say, and to an extent it is indeed true to say, that the map is a kind of picture. There is a picturing relation between the map and the territory. However, it only forces the question back: What is a picturing relation? It is not enough to say that the map looks like the territory, because, of course, from most points of view it does not. However, there are locations in airplanes and rockets from which looking at the territory will be somewhat like looking at the map. The map is a picture, in a sense, of the territory. How? We could say as a start that the relation between the elements of the map is isomorphic to the relation of the corresponding elements of reality. That is right. Now we have to explain "isomorphic". We already started with that when we said that each of the elements on the map represents an element in reality and the relations on the map, given the method of projection, are identical with the relations in the real world. That is what is meant by saying that it is isomorphic and in that sense the map is a kind of picture of the territory. I have in fact an aerial photograph of the Pacific coast line south of San Francisco and use it as a map showing the relations between my home in Berkeley and my coastal place south of Half Moon Bay.

There are other features of the map that are not matters of picturing but more like language. For example, national highways are in red, state highways are in black. This is not because of the different colors of the roads but as a conventional, language like, way of representing the difference.

Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*<sup>2</sup> tried to make the picturing relation of the sort that I have described in maps essential to the nature of meaning and representation. He thought ordinary language sentences disguised the actual logical structure of both the representation and the reality that it represented. Under analysis, he thought that the sentences of ordinary language would be disguised, complex versions of the most basic, elementary sentences, that these sentences consisted of arrangements of names, and that the arrangement of names in the sentence pictured the arrangement of objects in the fact. The basic components of reality for Wittgenstein are not

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<sup>2</sup>Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951.

objects but facts. The object just is constituted by its possible combinations with other objects to exist in facts. Wittgenstein has a problem: what do you do about false statements that are nonetheless meaningful? He says, in order to account for that, you need a distinction between the *Sachverhalt* and the *Tatsache*. *Sachverhalt* is a possible state of affairs. *Tatsache* is an actual state of affairs. If the representation of the possible state of affairs represents an actual state of affairs, then the statement or proposition, the *Satz* is, true. If it does not, that is if there is and a *Sachverhalt* that is not actual, then the *Satz* is false.

It is fair to say that Wittgenstein's effort to get a general account of language using this apparatus failed. Why? The most obvious answer is that there are all sorts of relations represented in language which the picturing model does not work. Think of the sentence, "Trump's elections revealed dissatisfaction among the white middle classes." How would you draw a picture of that? Or even a simpler component of it, "Trump was elected." How do you draw a picture of that? Even if you break it down into individuals voting, how would you have a picture of the individuals that could amount to saying, "Trump was elected". The interesting thing is to see how far the Wittgenstein model does work for maps. Can we think of an actual arrangement of objects in the world as a *Tatsache* and the arrangement of elements in the map as a proposition, a *Satz*, that represents the *Tatsache*? Up to a point, I think it works. The problem is, it does not yet account for the essential thing, the representing relation. The idea that Wittgenstein has is that the fact of isomorphism already constitutes representation, but of course, it does not. There are various ways of showing this. One is, if you think that the isomorphism between map and territory was sufficient to guarantee representation, then why is the territory on the earth not a representation of the map? That is, isomorphism is symmetrical. A is isomorphic to B implies that B is isomorphic to A. But the representing relation is not symmetrical. The fact that the map represents the territory does not imply that the territory represents the map. The isomorphism does not yet guarantee the representing relation. What fact about the map makes it a representation of a territory, given that the isomorphism is not sufficient? The answer, I believe, to that question is to invoke the fundamental notion implicit in all of this and that is the intentionality of the user. It is only a map if it is intended to have certain conditions of satisfaction. Indeed, that is the case with meaning in general. Meaning is the imposition of conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction. The production of the map is the condition of satisfaction of the intention to produce it, but in addition to the production of the map, we have a further set of conditions of satisfaction. Namely that there should be a matching relation between the elements of the map and the elements of the territory. Don't worry if you do not understand this jargon of "conditions of satisfaction". I will explain it later.

Wittgenstein's effort to reduce meaning to isomorphism is one of a long history of efforts to explain meaning in nonsemantic, non-intentionalistic terms. Like all other such efforts it fails. Meaning cannot be reduced to something non-intentionalistic. Why would anyone want to do this reduction? The feeling is that if meaning really exists then it must be reducible to some non-intentional

phenomena. In a world consisting of basic phenomena, as described for example by physics and chemistry, meaning cannot be one of the basic phenomena. In short the reductions are motivated by the traditional reductionist urges. I want to argue on the contrary that we have to recognize that intentionality is a basic feature of reality, not reducible to something else. Along with life and consciousness it is a biological phenomenon. Like consciousness it is not reducible to something else. But why should it be? It is just a fact about how nature works that human and some animal brains create consciousness and intentionality. Meaning is a form of derived intentionality in a way I will shortly explain. The *derived* intentionality of maps, pictures, sentences and signs can be explained in terms of the more basic *intrinsic* intentionality of perceptions, beliefs, desires, etc.

Once we have introduced the notion of intentionality, we then get a much simpler analysis of meaning from the one in Wittgenstein. It does not solve all of our problems by any means, but at least it avoids the obvious counterexamples and inadequacies of the *Tractatus*. The obvious counter examples are that there are lots of representing relations that are not isomorphisms. But furthermore, if the map represented the territory, the territory would have to represent the map, and that is how the *reductio ad absurdum* works. Isomorphism by itself is neither necessary nor sufficient for representation.

If the map model does not work for meaning in general, how does meaning work? I think of linguistic meaning as an extension of a more biological basic phenomenon of the capacity for human minds to represent objects and states of affairs in the world. The unfortunate name we have given to this is “intentionality”, and I will continue to use that word with the usual proviso that there is no special connection between intentionality and intending. Intentionality includes not just intending, but also beliefs, hopes, desires, perceptions, the emotions and lots of other mental phenomena. Intending is just one kind of intentionality, among many others.

To understand intentionality<sup>3</sup> you need a few basic notions: first, *the distinction between content and type*. The three types of Intentional states—beliefs, perceptions and desires have the same content when I believe that it is raining, wish that it were raining and see that it’s raining,. We can represent these as Bel (It is raining), Des(It is raining) and Visual Experience (It is raining). The general form is S (p), where the “S” marks the type and the “p” the propositional content. Second, the distinction between different directions of fit applies. Beliefs and perceptions are supposed to fit how the world is: they have the mind-to-world direction of fit. Desires and intentions are supposed to represent how we would like the world to be or intend to make it be. They have the world-to-mind direction of fit. Third, the notion of conditions of satisfaction: If the fit actually comes about, if the belief is true, the intention carried out, and the desire fulfilled we can say in each case that the intentional state is *satisfied*. We can say that every intentional state with an entire

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<sup>3</sup>The account which follows is a summary of the account in Searle, J.R. *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983. For more details see the original version.

propositional content and the direction of fit of either mind-to-world or world-to-mind is a *representation of its conditions of satisfaction*. This is the key to understanding intentionality. Intentionality is mental representation and the most important intentional states, those that have an entire propositional content and a direction of fit, are representations of their conditions of satisfaction.

If we assume that the mind represents the world in perception as well as in thought, then we have a notion of intentionality as a matter of representing and we can think of linguistic meaning as an extension of that more biologically basic notion. How exactly is it extended? Well, if I look outside and see that it is raining then I have a visual experience whose intentional content is that it is raining and the experience is caused by that fact. I put this by saying that the *conditions of satisfaction* of my visual perception are that it should be raining and that this very experience should be caused by the fact that it is raining.

VisExp (It is raining and the fact that it is raining causes this VisExp)

Because the Causally Self Reflexive feature is common to all visual experiences I find it useful to put the notation CSR into the intentional type. The notation above might mistakenly suggest that you have to see the causal relation. So I prefer this notation:

VisExpCSR (It is raining.)

This means exactly the same as the original, but I hope it is clearer.

So there is a self reflective or self referential component in the intentional content of the visual experience: the conditions of satisfaction of my visual experience require reference to the visual experience itself. Now, if I then, on the basis of my seeing that it is raining, I form the belief that it is raining, the belief that it is raining has the same condition of satisfaction but without the causally self reflexive feature. The condition of satisfaction of the belief is simply that it is raining.

Bel (It is raining)

But suppose I utter the sentence “It is raining”, then what have I done? What is in common to the utterance of the sentence and to the belief that it is raining? Well one thing, obviously, is that the utterance itself has the same condition of satisfaction as the belief. The condition of satisfaction of the belief is that it is raining. The mental state has the form S (p). The utterance has the form F (p) Where the “F” marks the Force of the utterance, that of a statement, command, etc. and the “p” the propositional content. Thus the form is

|- (It is raining)

We uses Frege’s assertion sign, “|- ”, to mark the force of assertion.

In this case the utterance, an assertion, has the same conditions of satisfaction as the belief. But how did that utterance get those condition of satisfaction?

The intentionality of beliefs, perceptions, desires and intentions is as I said earlier *intrinsic* or *original*. It could not for example be that very belief if it did not have that intentionality. The intentionality of sentences, pictures, maps etc. is *derived*. That very sentence, "It is raining" could have meant something completely different if a different meaning had been imposed on it. The name for such derived intentionality is "meaning."

The utterance gets the condition of satisfaction, gets its meaning, because we have intentionally imposed that condition of satisfaction on the utterance. In this case we are using an existing sentence, "It is raining" which already has that it is raining as its standard sentence meaning. But imagine a case where we don't have that. Where I just make a gesture or signal to someone that it is raining and I expect that the hearer will understand what I *mean* when I make the gesture. Then what it is about that gesture that makes it meaningful? What makes the otherwise meaningless gesture meaningful? It has the same condition of satisfaction as did the original belief, just as the belief had the same condition of satisfaction, minus the causally self reflexive feature of the visual experience. This is the essence of speaker meaning. We intentionally impose conditions of satisfaction on our marks and on our utterances, and we can say that meaning consists of the intentional imposition of conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction. Why do we say it that way? Because the production of a mark or the utterance is the condition of satisfaction of the intention to produce it. Thus the intention to produce it has the condition of satisfaction that it should be produced. But if it is meaningful, then it has additional conditions of satisfactions, it has truth conditions in this particular case.

You can see this more clearly if you look at the use of actual sentences in existing languages. Suppose I am learning French, and I practice saying to myself, "il pleut, il pleut, il pleut", then the conditions of satisfaction of my intention is just to produce the utterance. I am practicing pronunciation, but I do not mean what I say. But if I say "il pleut" and mean it, I actually mean that it is raining, then the conditions of satisfaction are not just that I produce the sentence "il pleut", but that the utterance has the additional condition of satisfaction that it is raining; and this reveals the point I was trying to make earlier, the essence of speaker meaning is the intentional imposition of conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction.

Not all meaningful utterances have an entire propositional content. "Hurrah for the team" or "Down with the Fascists" do not have an entire proposition. Their form is not F(p) but F(n). Some speech acts have no propositional content at all, "Hurrah" "Damn" or "Ouch" but the general phenomenon of language is representation and meaningful speech acts with direction of fit and entire propositional content have conditions of satisfaction, and represent, in the different possible speech act modes, states of affairs in the world.

We can now understand the "meaning" of the map. The conditions of satisfaction of the map are that the objects and relations in the world should be isomorphic to the objects and relations in the map. The map has the map-to-world

direction of fit, and given its meaning we can use it to contain real information about the world.

This gives us a very general account of meaning in language.

I said that Wittgenstein's efforts in the *Tractatus* to explain the essence of language failed. In his later work the *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>4</sup> he gives up on the idea that there is an essence of language. He thinks that there are countless (Unzählige) different ways of using language, different kinds of language games, and he thinks it is a mistake to look for an essence of language in the way that I have been doing. I think his later account is also mistaken. It is true that there are lots of different uses of language but the culturally and biologically most fundamental are in the performance of speech acts that have a propositional content. These come in large numbers: consider some names in English. There are statements, assertions, questions, orders, commands, requests, hypotheses, promises, avowals, pledges, apologies, thanks, congratulations, vows, threats, etc. But though large the numbers are by no means infinite nor even so large as to be unmanageable. When you consider in detail how it works in the speech acts that have the structure F(p) it turns out that there are five and only five basic speech act types and I will simply list these;

First, Assertives. Their purpose is to tell us all things are in the world. The philosopher's favorites are statements and assertions. These have the word-to-world direction of fit and they take any propositional content. Using Frege's assertion sign "I-": For the Assertive type we can say they have the form:

I- (p).

Second, Directives. Their purpose is to attempt to get the hearer to do something. Favorite examples are orders requests and commands. They have the world-to-word direction of fit and their propositional content always refers to a hearer and a voluntary act by the hearer. Using the shriek mark for the type, the general form is

!(H does A).

Third, Commissives. Their purpose is to commit the speaker to doing something. The philosopher's favourites are promises, but vows threats and pledges should be included. The propositional content is always that S does A, and the direction of fit is world-to-word. So the general form using "C" for the speech act type is

C (S does A).

Fourth, Expressives. The purpose of these is just to express some feeling or attitude typically about a state of affairs which is presupposed to exist. In almost all cases

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<sup>4</sup>Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1953.

these are about the speaker or hearer. You *apologize* for something you have done and *thank* for something the hearer has done. Welcoming and congratulating are other famous examples. Typically the fit is presupposed. So the general form is to attribute some property to S or H and express an attitude. The general form is thus:

E (S/H + property).

Fifth, Declarations. The purpose of these is to create a new state of affairs by representing the state of affairs as existing. Adjourning the meeting by saying “I adjourn the meeting” or declaring war by saying “War is declared” are examples. They have both directions of fifth because they make something the case—and thus achieve the world-to-word direction of fit by representing it as being the case, by the word-to-world direction of fit. Any propositional content in principle can occur in the Declaration but for humans the possibilities of what we can create by Declaration are severely limited. Not so for gods. When God says “let there be light” that is a Declaration. It makes light exist by declaring it to exist. The general form is:

D (p).

Contrary to Wittgenstein’s claim that uses of language are “countless” and that there is no essence of language we see that the representing relation is pervasive in language and it is marked by the occurrence of a propositional content in just about all of the most important uses of language: Assertives, Directives, Commissive, Expressives and Declaratives. It doesn’t matter whether we call this an “essence”. The important thing is to see that in an understanding of the functions of language it is essential to see that the representing relation, which is the biologically essential feature of intentionality, is extended in language and made much more powerful than in the prelinguistic forms. Prelinguistic animals in cooperation can do a lot. But they cannot create nation states, operate universities, organize wars, stock markets, literary festivals or write books on philosophy.

Back to the map and the territory: We can see that the representing relation, though a paradigm, is not a model for all language but is a special case based on resemblance.

I have tried to explain some more general properties of meaning and intentionality. In intellectual life one of the worst things we can do is give our readers the impression they understand something when they do not. Based solely on reading this article you do not have a thorough understanding of intentionality and meaning, but I hope you do understand two things that I’m trying to get across. Intentionality is a basic biological phenomenon, as much a part of the natural world is digestion or photosynthesis. Linguistic meaning is a form of derived or imposed intentionality.



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Exploring the Foundations of Science, Thought and  
Reality

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