



Mind, Language And Society: Philosophy In The Real World (Masterminds (Paperback))

By John R. Searle



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Disillusionment with psychology is leading more and more people to formal philosophy for clues about how to think about life. But most of us who try to grapple with concepts such as reality, truth, common sense, consciousness, and society lack the rigorous training to discuss them with any confidence. John Searle brings these notions down from their abstract heights to the terra firma of real-world understanding, so that those with no knowledge of philosophy can understand how these principles play out in our everyday lives. The author stresses that there is a real world out there to deal with, and condemns the belief that the reality of our world is dependent on our perception of it.



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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #640776 in Books
- Published on: 1999-12-10
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .50" w x 5.12" l, .44 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 192 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

John Searle's summation of earlier writings is not just an essential tie-up volume for existing readers; it is also a perfect introduction to the work of one of the clearest heads in the philosophy of mind. Searle's book is a riposte to all those academics who make a career out of contradicting and complicating such default positions as the existence of an external reality, the reality of personal consciousness, and the reasonable fit of language to the perceived world. Certainly, we should examine these positions! But the first duty of philosophy, Searle argues, is that it should attempt to accommodate what is known. As far as we can tell, for example, consciousness is a biological product, but there is a long-running contention between the materialists--whose reductive descriptions of consciousness arrive, finally, at an embarrassed denial that consciousness exists at all--and the dualists, who cannot describe consciousness without evoking some supernatural involvement. Neither position is tenable--each offers some corrective to the other. The good explanation is in there somewhere, but the sheer intractability of the debate won't let it be expressed. In situations like this, Searle argues, it is always the terms that are wrong. Terms, mind you, that in this case include "matter," "mind," "physical," and "mental"! Searle--married as he is to common sense--is of necessity one of our most iconoclastic and creative thinkers. --*Simon Ings, Amazon.co.uk*

From Publishers Weekly

For years, Searle (Intentionality; The Mystery of Consciousness; Minds, Brains, and Science), a professor of philosophy at UC-Berkeley, has battled against philosophical fashion to insist that the world is, in fact, intelligible to the human mind. This may sound unremarkable to laypeople. But, as Searle remarks, at a time when postmodernism and deconstruction are in vogue, intellectuals, to be taken seriously, often must believe that different cultures have different rationalities and that the world as a whole is unintelligible. Searle, however, defends the naturalistic belief that there does exist a real world, which is perceivable and comprehensible and is not changed by the angle of our observation. Among his most forceful arguments are that consciousness is a genuine phenomenon caused by knowable physical processes; that intention is real, produced by causal mechanisms in the brain; and that language expands the possibilities of intentionality. In an interesting aside, Searle speculates that contemporary thinkers reject an objectivist theory because of "an urge to power." They don't want to be answerable to the world but for the world to be answerable to them. To Searle, however, realism "is not a theory at all but the framework within which it is possible to have theories."

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From Library Journal

Searle's purpose in this book is to present his views "on mind, language and society, and to explain how they relate to each other, and how they fit into our overall contemporary conception of the universe." He starts by considering the metaphysical concepts of reality and truth, then uses them as a basis for an explanation of the origin and nature of mind, language, and consciousness. Such an ambitious project requires in-depth inquiry, and Searle's attempt to write "in summary form" is indicative of what is wrong with this short work: it contains far too little detailed, rigorous argument to be of use to philosophers, yet not enough elucidation of the philosophical concepts to really be comprehensible to the general reader. This is unfortunate and disappointing, since Searle (philosophy, Univ. of California, Berkeley) has done substantial work in the past. Readers will have to consult his earlier books to understand the positions he deals with so summarily here. Only comprehensive philosophy collections will want to acquire this. ALeon H. Brody, U.S. Office of Personnel Mgt. Lib., Washington, DC

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