

John Searle on the Background and Realism

Wan-Chuan Fang

Abstract

For John Searle, a famous American philosopher, one of the main purposes for introducing what he calls the Background is to give support to realism, a view which affirms the existence of the external world. But his notion of the Background is vitiated by the fact that it is strangely based on some Cartesian assumptions. In this paper I argue that, because of this, his views face the following difficulties: (1) he cannot successfully explain how the literal meaning of a sentence or an utterance is to be learned; (2) one of his views runs counter to some of the findings in cognitive sciences; (3) the support his notion of the Background gives to realism is less than what he has expected. To see what significance the notion of the Background may have for philosophy in general and for realism in particular, we may need to find a better way of understanding the Background than what Searle has offered.

Key Words: John Searle, Background, Realism, Cartesianism