

Review of *Consciousness and Meaning: Selected Essays*, by Brian Loar. Edited by K. Balog and S. Beardman. 2017. New York: Oxford University Press. 330pp.

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This is a preprint of a book review forthcoming in *Philosophy*.

Please cite published version.

This is an excellent book. It draws together fifteen of Brian Loar's previously published essays. It is divided into sections on the philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. The volume also contains extremely helpful introductions by Stephen Schiffer (on language) and Katalin Balog (on mind).

Many of the essays in the volume are from publications that are difficult to track down, so this volume provides a new (and wonderful) opportunity to gain a complete image of Loar's worldview. The ideas in the essays all mesh systematically with each other. I will try to give an impression of the big picture by grouping the essays by theme, rather than chronology.

It must be admitted that some of the essays are challenging to read. However, this is more an artefact of Loar's thoroughness than any kind of style deficiency. For example, 'The Semantics of Singular Terms' (ch.3) draws together issues about singular terms, referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions, and conversational score. Not content to give the bare bones of the theory, Loar elaborates the view by applying it to modal contexts (pp.62-63) and responds to Kripkean arguments against descriptivist views of reference (pp.63-66). As Loar says, the 'account is no more complex than the facts' (p.59). Indeed, Loar's thoroughness often makes the issues *easier* to grasp. Before reading this book, I had never been able to understand Dummett's views on realism. In 'Truth beyond all Verification' (ch.6), Loar explains Dummett's project with admirable clarity, laying out knotty issues such as the link between realism and the law of bivalence. He then considers in great detail two realist responses, before offering his own.

'Reference and Propositional Attitudes' (ch.1) concerns the fact that substitution of co-referring terms in propositional attitude ascriptions can change the truth-value of the ascription. Loar suggests that the problem can be solved by invoking Quine's analysis of sentences such as 'Giorgione was so called because of his size'.

In 'Two Theories of Meaning' (ch.2), Loar attacks the Davidsonian theory of meaning, and aims to replace it with a Gricean use-theory. Loar returns to these themes again in 'The Supervenience of Social Meaning on Speaker's Meaning' (ch.7), where he attempts to reconcile Burge's arguments for externalism about mental content with a modest version of the Gricean view on which speaker intentions (combined with certain other psychological factors) determines meaning, at least in part. In the service of this, Loar claims that speakers' Gricean intentions can be individuated individualistically. The idea is that we could share the same Gricean intentions with a brain in a vat, even though that brain would not have the referential relations to the outside world that we do. Loar summarises the intentions that we share with such brains as '*how* the intention *conceives* its object' (p.133). In a sense, then, the externalists are right if we individuate intentions by their reference, but they are wrong if we individuate them by how the subjects 'conceive' the objects of their intentions. Here we see several ideas that will recur. The first is a rejection of the externalist picture of mental content. The second is the deployment of a phenomenological perspective in expressing what internalist content consists in.

These ideas are elaborated at various places, including 'Subjective Intentionality' (ch.9), where he describes externalists as 'those numerous claustrophobes who in recent years have undertaken to externalize the mind' (p.165). Loar accepts the externalist point that it would be incorrect to describe a twin-Earther as believing that water is delicious. He also accepts that, if we came across a speaker who lives in a community

where ‘arthritis’ can refer to both joint pain and muscle pain, then it would be wrong to say that she believes she has arthritis in her thigh. Nonetheless, he claims that we do share some mental content with such subjects. We and our counterparts share a similarity in how we conceive things as being (p.172). Loar concludes that this shared mental content cannot be captured by ‘that’ clauses. The same ideas are clear in ‘Social Content and Psychological Content’ (ch.8). Here, Loar once again invokes the idea that that-clauses are inadequate to capture psychological content, and he uses this in an extremely ambitious attack on (amongst other things) Burge’s externalist arguments.

‘Must Beliefs be Sentences?’ (ch.4) and ‘Names in Thought’ (ch.5) are directly at the interplay of language and mind. In the former, Loar argues that the conceptual role of a belief determines its ‘general’ truth conditions (p.73). Very roughly, the general truth conditions of a belief are the *context-free* contributions that constituent concepts place on propositions’ truth values (pp.72-73). For example, when two people both utter a sentence such as ‘I am witty’ they have in one sense said the same thing: their utterances have the same *general* truth conditions (general truth conditions are similar to Kaplanian characters in this respect). Notice how Loar is yet again attempting to isolate the particular contribution that *individualistically individuated* states make to meaning. In ‘Names in Thought’, Loar aims to explain Kripke’s ‘Pierre’ case. The solution draws on two things we have already encountered: the conceptual role of beliefs, and the way that subjects ‘conceive’ of things.

‘Phenomenal States’ (ch.10) is probably Loar’s best known paper, and with good reason. He proposes that we can respond to anti-physicalist arguments by saying that there is an important difference between physical and phenomenal *concepts*, rather than by accepting a difference between physical and phenomenal *properties*, as the dualist proposes. Loar suggests that phenomenal concepts (such as ‘pain’) are a special kind of concept, and that propositions containing such concepts cannot be deduced from propositions containing physical ones (such as ‘c-fibres firing’) even though the two concepts are co-referential. This paper does not just give a particular position, but a distinctive *way* of approaching the mind-body problem: accept the dualist’s claim that we could not deduce truths about consciousness from truths about physical matter, whilst retaining a hard-nosed ontological physicalism about consciousness. Loar’s general approach is now the overwhelmingly preferred view amongst physicalists. In re-visiting this paper after seven years, I was struck by the broad range of issues that it discusses. As well as using phenomenal concepts as a tool for physicalists, Loar also examines the concept ‘phenomenal concept’ itself, modes of presentation, knowing how and knowing that, third person ascriptions of phenomenal concepts, and various other issues. This essay is absolutely wonderful, and has proved influential and inspirational for the physicalist project in the philosophy of mind. A true classic.

Loar also considers other philosophers’ views in some depth. ‘Can We Explain Intentionality?’ (ch.11) is a thorough examination and critique of Fodor’s theory of intentionality, whilst ‘Elimination versus non-reductive Physicalism’ (ch.12) considers Schiffer’s physicalist view. This latter essay deserves to be better known than it is. Schiffer’s view embraces a nominalism about properties. Strictly speaking (the view goes) there are no properties and hence no mental properties, but there can still be true ascriptions of mental predicates. The similarity to Davidson’s ‘anomalous monist’ view of the mind is striking. Davidson was, after all, a nominalist and so anomalous monism and Schiffer’s view share some very substantial overlaps. For these reasons, much of Loar’s discussion of Schiffer would apply also to Davidson, and so this essay has a much wider scope than it may initially appear.

The culmination of the collection is three essays on Phenomenal Intentionality: the view that phenomenology has an essential role to play in explaining intentionality. In these, Loar picks up on many of the threads that have been developed over the course of the book. In ‘Reference From a First-Person Perspective’ (ch.13) he argues that we can use phenomenal links between concepts and their referents to solve Quine’s indeterminacy of reference problem. Again, this essay deserves to be better known, as it constitutes nothing less than an argument for the claim that intentionality and reference must (in part) be explained in terms of phenomenology. ‘Transparent Experience and the Availability of Qualia’ (ch.14) concerns the connection between the transparency of experience and the representational nature of

consciousness. He argues that we have two ways of attending, one in which qualia are transparent, and one in which they are discernible. This is extremely plausible, though I wonder who would deny it. Loar sets himself up against representationalists such as Tye and Harman (p.274) but I am unsure that they would find Loar's view objectionable. Of more substantive interest is Loar's idea that qualia are intrinsically 'directed'. That is, they essentially purport to refer to entities in the world, but we can conceive of them as occurring in the absence of any such referential relations actually holding. Many of these ideas are revisited in the final essay, 'Phenomenal Intentionality as the Basis of Mental Content' (ch.15), which contains Loar's most detailed explanation of his phenomenal intentionality view.

It should be obvious even from these short summaries that Brian Loar's work was wide ranging, systematic, challenging, and deep. This is an important book, and will hopefully lead to Loar's work being better known, and better appreciated, in future.