
It has long been a preoccupation of John Searle to answer the question “how do the various parts of the world relate to each other – how does it all hang together?” In his newest book, he focuses on the aspect of the world composed of facts which exist in virtue of human cognition. He refers to this aspect of the world as social reality, and he attempts to lay bare the foundations of its ontological analysis. He puts to use, in an original and useful way, the tools which he developed in the course of dealing with issues pertaining to the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language.

In suggesting that human cognition is the criterion which allows us to divide nature from culture, Searle builds upon the distinction between brute and institutional facts, which he developed and discussed in his influential *Speech Acts*. In his analysis of this distinction, Searle also makes use of his theory of intentionality, which he developed in another influential book, *Intentionality*. One valuable contribution of *The Construction of Social Reality* is to bring explicit unity to different aspects of Searle’s work.

Brute facts exist independently of human cognition and they are the paradigmatic component of nature, whereas institutional facts depend on human cognition for their existence, and are the paradigmatic component of social reality. ‘The heart pumps blood’ states a brute fact; ‘The function of the heart is to pump blood’ states an institutional fact. Searle deems this distinction crucial for his aims. Indeed, this distinction informs the slogan which Searle incessantly repeats: “X counts as Y in context C” (28, and passim). This rectangular sheet of green paper (brute fact X), counts as money (institutional fact Y) in the United States (context C).

‘Counting as’ is the essence of all social reality. And Searle tells us that the “apparatus necessary to account for social reality ... requires exactly three elements. The assignment of function, collective intentionality, and constitutive rules” (13). Regrettably, Searle is not clear regarding the definitions of, and the relationships between, these elements. Yet, Searle does state that the assignment of function is a “feature of intentionality” (14) and that constitutive rules are, in some cases, the result of intentionality (43 ff.). Since it turns out that two of the three elements are contained in the other one, we might as well focus on this more general element: collective intentionality.

When two or more individuals (humans or otherwise) share intentional states, we are in the presence of collective intentionality. According to Searle, a mental state is intentional when it is “directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world”. Searle’s thesis regarding social reality, then, is that a given piece of paper counts as money if and only if some human beings (at least two, but more commonly ‘many’) have a certain intentional state (typically, but by no means necessarily, a belief) that it is money.

In light of this thesis, two interrelated questions suggest themselves. 1) Whose intentional states are relevant in deciding, say, whether or not a piece of paper is money? 2) To what extent do intentional states have the efficaciousness Searle claims they have in creating institutional facts (does the belief of merely two people that the sheets of paper in front of them are money make them money)?

It is clear that Searle requires that the intentionality involved in the creation of social reality be collective intentionality.
But while this requirement certainly excludes the possibility of lone individuals creating institutional facts, much more is needed. If my circle of friends and I believe that the sheets of paper on my desk are money, are they money? This problem is not at all trivial, as more poignant examples make clear. Think of the Basques, or the Palestinians (or the Israelis under British mandate), or the Republican Irish, etc. These are groups which collectively believe that such and such territory, currently a part of another nation, should count as their nation. Yet, in these cases, collective intentionality is clearly not sufficient to create the sought after institutional fact. Age-old conflicts over sovereignty as well as intricate landed property disputes have scarcely been, and probably will never be, solved by merely appealing to collective intentionality.

Moreover, the case at the opposite end of the spectrum which Searle excludes from the scope of his inquiry, that of a lone individual creating a piece of social reality, also poses problems. It is possible, I think, to have institutional facts arising from mere individual intentionality. Buying flowers for my partner is an act of love; and it is an act of love simply because of my own intentional states, and it is clearly not a brute fact. So if it is a social fact, it would be one based on individual rather than on collective intentionality. Of course, Searle can claim that this is not really a social act, but precisely whether and why this is not a social act, are crucial questions which Searle does not address adequately.

Closely related to the problem of whose intentional states are relevant for the creation of this or that institutional fact, is the problem of the efficaciousness of intentional states in creating or altering social reality. If all the members of a given community suddenly believed that there was no private property, or that sheets of white paper should count as money, this would not thereby, *eo ipso*, transform the legal status of land parcels, or of sheets of paper. Searle disagrees with this conclusion. He tells us: "The moment, for example, that all or most of the members of a society refuse to acknowledge property rights ... property rights cease to exist in that society" (117). Property rights in land, for example, are typically granted in virtue of complicated networks of registry entries, such that no intentional state can affect the status of that property right without using the tools afforded by that very network. The ontological complexity of this sort of network, incidentally, is not discussed by Searle.

Intentional states seem to be more important to the construction (the bringing into being) of social reality, than to what Searle (in spite of the book's title) discusses more: the continued existence (the maintaining in being) of social reality. The distinction between the construction and continued existence of social reality is one which Searle does not analyze deeply. The little he tells us about this crucial issue is unhelpful. "The secret to understand the continued existence of institutional facts is simply that the individuals directly involved and a sufficient number of members of the relevant community must continue to recognize and accept the existence of such facts" (117). If this is all there is to it, why even call it a secret? Notice, moreover, the vagueness of the expression 'sufficient number' and 'relevant community' in this passage, and of 'most' in the previous quotation, and, e.g., the fact that the number of people might be very small if the right people still do the recognition, accepting, etc.

In addition to presenting these foundational elements of the ontology of social reality, institutional reality and collective intentionality, Searle also sketches the logical structure of institutional reality. "There is exactly one primitive logical operation by which institutional reality is created and constituted. It has this form: We collectively accept, acknowledge, recognize, go along with, etc., that (S has power (S does A)) [where