BOOK REVIEW

The Construction of Social Reality

John R Searle

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Reviewed by
John Barnes, Ph.D.
Lecturer, Graduate School of Business
Assumption University of Thailand

The reviewers' interest in this topic derived from a study of perception and use or misuse of that term in the Tourism and Hospitality literature. One of authors on the subject of perception is John R Searle, the author of the book under this review.

Berger and Luckmann in 1966 pioneered publication in this field with their Social Construction of Reality, which spoke to how individuals construct their own social reality. The book under review here brings us up-to-date to the subject.

The volume of 241 pages comprises a Table of Contents, Acknowledgements, and an Introduction. The book comprises nine chapters, a Conclusion, End Notes, Name Index and a Subject Index.

Searle has written in plain English and in an easily understood and logical manner, on what is undoubtedly a complex subject. Searle breaks down this complex topic and divides complex arguments into smaller *bite-sized pieces* to make it easier for the reader to digest.

Chapter 1 The Building Blocks of Social Reality is dissected into The Metaphysical Burden of Social Reality; The Invisible Structure of Social Reality; Fundamental Ontology; Objectivity and our Contemporary World View; The Distinction Between Intrinsic and Observer-Relative Features of the World; The Assignment of Function; Collective Intentionality; Constitutive Rules and The Distinction Between Brute and Institutional Facts.

> An interesting insight by the author here is: It is not always immediately obvious whether a feature is intrinsic or observer relative. Colors are a good example. Prior to the development of physics in the seventeenth century, people thought of colors as intrinsic features of the world. Since then, many people have come to think of them as properties that exist only relative to the observers. It is intrinsic that light differently scatters when reflected from surfaces, and intrinsic to people that they have subjective color experiences caused by the impact of light on their visual systems. But the further attribution of color properties to objects in the world is observer relative, because it can be made only relative to the experiences of observers as caused by the impact of light. …. page 11

An example here could be the color we identify compared with the color of that same object as identified by a color blind friend

Chapter 2. Creating Institutional Facts comprises: Some Apparent Features of Social Reality; From Collective Intentionality to Institutional Facts: The Example of Money; Constitutive Rules: X counts as Y in C; Why Self -Referentiality Does Not Result in Circularity; The Use of Performative Utterances in The Construction of Institutional Facts; Systematic Relations and The Primacy of The Act, Over The Object.

Chapter 3 Language and Social Reality is discussed under the following sub headings: Language Dependent Thoughts and Language Dependent Facts; Why Are Any Thoughts Language Dependent? Games and Institutional Reality; Does Language Require Language? Other Use of Language in Institutional Facts;

Chapter 4 The General Theory of Institutional Facts: Part I Iteration, Interaction and Logical Structure; Generalizing The Analysis; Codification; Some of The Issues at Stake in The Analysis; Some types of Imposition of Status-Functions; Conclusion.

> An example by Searle from Some types of imposition of Status-Functions involved four issues of which one is 2. Deontic Powers: The creation of Rights and Obligations: a specific example is
> John has one thousand dollars in the bank.
> Tom is a citizen of the United States.
> …..
>
> Each of these assigns rights and responsibilities. The first example assigns to John the right to buy things or employ people with his money and the duty to pay taxes on interest earned by the money. The second example assigns to Tom the right, among many others, to vote in elections and the obligation, among many other, of getting a social security number.
> ……   p.101

I personally find this very interesting, as it aligns with my teaching of deontological theory as developed by Immanuel Kant which speaks to rights and obligations being *two sides of the same coin.* It is apparent to me that today many people speak of their rights but less to their obligations as members of a community and society.

Chapter 5 The General Theory of Institutional Facts: Part II: Creation, Maintenance and The Hierarchy which comprises discussions on: The Creation and Maintenance of Institutional Facts; The Hierarchy of Facts: From Brute to Institutional; Institutional Facts and The Background of Capacities.

Chapter 6 Background Abilities and The Explanation of Social Phenomena comprises discussions on: Constitutive Rules and Causation; What is The Background and how does it work? Background Causation;

Chapter 7 Does The Real World Exist? Part I: Attacks on Realism; Some presuppositions of Our Contemporary World View; What is Realism; The Arguments from Conceptual Relativity Against Realism; The Verificationist Argument; The *Ding* and *Sich* Argument; Diagnosis of The Problem.

An example of Presuppositions of Our Contemporary World View. Here Searle dissects the subject into six parts of which I have singled out for brief discussion the second part here namely:

> 2. Human beings have a variety of interconnected ways of having access to and representing features of the world to themselves. These include perception, thought, language beliefs, and the desires as well as pictures, maps diagrams etc. Just to have a general term I will call them collectively "representations." A feature of representations so defined is that they all have intentionality both *Intrinsic intentionality*, as in beliefs and perceptions, and *derived intentionality*, as in maps and sentences. Pp. 150-151.

My brief comment here, relates to exploring our world. In antiquity people believed the world was flat and drew maps accordingly. Much later and in our own time with the aid of cameras inside space craft we received confirmation was approximately spherical in shape and maps were refined considerably and GPS technology has added a whole new dimension to locating ourselves.

Chapter 8 Does The Real World Exist" Part II Could There Be A Proof of External Realism? Is discussed under the following sub-headings: Realism as a Background condition of Intelligibility; A Transcendental Argument for External Realism; The Distinction Between Brutal Reality and Socially Constructed Reality; Strengths and Limitations of The Foregoing Arguments.

Chapter 9 Truth and Correspondence, is discussed under The Intuitive Idea of Truth as Correspondence; Strawson's Objections to The Correspondence Theory; Truth, Facts, Disquotation, and Correspondence; Designing a Language; Appendix to Chapter 9 The Slingshot Argument.

Conclusion

I hope the detailed table of contents and my own observations of just a couple of the issues raised by Searle will attract readers to take the opportunity to read this book and from it develop a deeper appreciation of our beautiful and complex world and beyond.

This book will prove useful to all of us working with people in Psychological, Human Resources, Organization Development and Consumer Behaviour research and applications.

References

Berger, Peter, L., Thomas, Luckmann, (1966), *Social Construction of Reality,* Random House, New York City.

Searle, John, R., (1995), *The Construction of Social Reality*, The Free Press, New York City.