



## Precis of The Construction of Social Reality

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## Précis of *The Construction of Social Reality*

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This book is primarily about the ontology of social and institutional facts. How can facts in the world such as the fact that I am a citizen of the United States, or that this is a twenty dollar bill, be objective facts if they are in some sense facts only by human agreement?

The ontology of institutional reality can be explained using exactly three concepts: collective intentionality, the assignment of function and constitutive rules of the form, "X counts as Y in context C." Functions are observer-relative, they exist only relative to observers, or agents and are not intrinsic to the entities in question. Collective intentionality is a primitive notion in the sense that it does not reduce to individual intentionality. This is consistent with methodological individualism because collective intentionality exists entirely in the heads of individual agents. Constitutive rules of the form "X counts as Y in context C," not only regulate but constitute social institutions.

The key to understanding institutional reality is to see it as a class of functions imposed on entities where the functions cannot be performed solely in virtue of the physical constitution of the entities, but require the collective acceptance of the imposed status and function. These collective impositions of what I call "status functions," are of the form "X counts as Y in context C." In working out the exact logical structure of human institutional reality, we need to account for at least the following six features:

1. The self-referentiality of social concepts. For example, something is only money or property if people think it is money or property.
2. The use of performative utterances in the creation of institutional facts.
3. The logical priority of brute facts over institutional facts.
4. The requirement of systematic logical relationships among institutional facts.
5. The primacy of social acts over social objects.
6. The linguistic component of many institutional facts. Language not only describes but is partly constitutive of institutional reality.

With this apparatus in hand, I construct a general theory of institutional reality which includes a taxonomy of different types of facts. The aim is to show how it all hangs together, how a world of brute facts can give rise to intentional facts which in turn can give rise to social and institutional facts.

I then go on to explain the role of what I call "the Background," the set of pre-intentional capacities, abilities, and dispositions that enable human intentionality to function in the construction of institutional reality.

I conclude the book in the final three chapters with a defense of external realism, the view that there is a reality that exists totally independently of our representations of it, and a version of the correspondence theory of truth, the idea that statements, if they are true, are true in virtue of how things are in the world that exists independently of the statement.