The Construction of Social Reality.

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Apart from these concerns, the essays offer numerous insights and critical observations. These are found, for example, in his discussions of the workings of organizations and in two theoretical pieces on "Consumer behavior" and "Leisure." In the latter essays we are presented with provocative analyses of consumption as a style of life, the historical development of leisure before and after the industrial revolution, the relationship of consumption and leisure to social structure and influence by elites, and the ways in which contemporary leisure resembles social ritual.

This interesting and useful book deserves to be read. Not only do we gain a sense of how this author's thought has developed through the years, but also we are presented with the careful and scholarly treatment of a number of issues that have concerned sociologists in the post–World War II era. This is not to say that the work could not be improved. Greater elaboration of key themes dealing with styles of description, explanation, and understanding would have enhanced the reader's understanding of and appreciation for these modes of analysis. And greater attention to how these different forms of inquiry are related to each of the papers in this collection would have helped clarify and, therefore, strengthen the overall project. Nevertheless, this book has much to offer those with interests in the specialized topics it addresses, as well as all who respect the efforts of a scholar of this stature at sociological investigation.

Microsociologies

The Construction of Social Reality, by **John R. Searle**. New York: The Free Press, 1995. 241 pp. $25.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-02-928045-1.

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Analytic philosopher John Searle seeks in this book to develop a "general theory of the ontology of social facts and social institutions" (p. xii). He uses tools drawn from the philosophy of mind, extending his previous work on intentionality. The resulting arguments echo and develop the claims of social theorists from Durkheim and Mead onward. Since the ontological grounding of sociological claims is rarely discussed, and the tools of analytic philosophy seldom brought to bear on issues in social theory, Searle brings a fresh perspective to a number of common sociological presuppositions. But his broader purpose in developing this perspective suggests that contemporary social theorists may see in this book more challenge than confirmation.

Social facts are possible, Searle argues, by virtue of a basic capacity for collective intentionality well developed in humans, but also shared by some other creatures. Institutional facts, like money or marriages, are an important subset of social facts, and the main focus of the analysis. They emerge within shared systems of constitutive rules, which assign new status to phenomena that could not otherwise possess that status. Thus, green paper becomes money. Unlike other social facts, institutional facts depend on the capacity to symbolize as well as on collective intentionality.

The basic logical structure of institutional facts—"X counts as Y in context C" (p. 55)—may be iterated indefinitely, so that institutional fact Y can itself become the grounding for new institutional facts. For instance, the creation of the institutional fact of the capacity to officiate at marriages—as when a celebrant obtains state sanction—becomes the grounding for the creation of another sort of institutional fact, a marriage. The thin logical structure of institutional facts is transformed by iteration, negation, and conditionality into the more familiar complexity of recognizable social institutions. From this logical analysis we learn more, perhaps, than we imagined we needed to know about how to ground Thomas's famous claim that what we define as real is real in its consequences.

For many sociologists, the title of this book will immediately bring to mind the classic of the 1960s *The Social Construction of Reality*, by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. Searle gives no indication that any reference was intended. (Indeed, there is almost no explicit discussion of any other social theory in this book: Readers should be

prepared to make the connections themselves.) Whether intended or not, however, his variant of the classic title hints that he wishes to challenge any unreflectively large claims for the various forms of social constructionism that are influential in many sociological fields, as well as in postmodern scholarship and in philosophical antirealism. Searle develops an ontology for social facts to situate them within a broader ontology, preserving the logical priority of "brute facts," and allowing physics, chemistry, and biology to retain a special place in our understanding of the world. If some versions of social constructionism seem to make the existence of the "real world" doubtful, Searle aims to assuage those doubts.

This agenda emerges most explicitly in arguments intended to establish the ultimate grounding of institutional facts in "brute facts," and in more technical arguments for "external realism" and a correspondence theory of truth. Many sociologists may be uneasy with the assertion about "brute facts"—and find the elaborated argument for external realism dissatisfyingly brief at its most crucial point. For instance, Searle's repeated assertion that socially constructed reality must ultimately be grounded in something "that is not itself an institutional construction" (p. 191) to avoid infinite regress or circularity sits strangely with his argument elsewhere that there is no circularity in the self-referentiality of social concepts like "money," because "we can cash out the description in terms of the set of practices in which the phenomenon is embedded" (p. 53). Why is the solution he invokes at a lower analytic level not worth exploring as a more general solution? Sociologists could want more convincing that the circularity or infinite regress Searle fears is indeed damaging.

There are a variety of intriguing sidetracks to Searle's main argument. For instance, he rejects methodological individualism (pp. 25–26), rejects rational decision-making models (pp. 138–39), tends to label collective acknowledgment "collective agreement," makes an argument that background dispositions sensitize us to constitutive rules (ch. 6), and suggests that "massive" institutional power is a precondition of "liberal values" (p. 94). But the real interest of this book lies not in these issues, nor even in assessments of the validity of the "brute facts" claims, but in the challenge it offers to reflect more rigorously on whether and how we might wish to draw the limits of social constructionism.

Ambiguous Empowerment: The Work Narratives of Women School Superintendents, by **Susan E. Chase**. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. 272 pp. $45.00 cloth: ISBN: 0-87023-949-X. $16.95 paper. ISBN: 0-87023-950-3.

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Susan Chase says that her book is both similar and different from "much contemporary feminist research." It resembles such work in its focus on "the coexistence of power and subjection in women's lives" and the complexity and ambiguity that result; she says that it differs (at least when compared with other sociological studies based on interviews) by emphasizing "what other researchers usually take for granted when they gather women's accounts—the narrative process itself, how women tell their stories." Narration is a form of social action, she asserts, that merits study in itself and can be used to better understand how women make sense of their situations, how they work to balance discordant themes in their work lives. The stories she examines are provided by women school superintendents of diverse ethnic and racial background, organizational experience, and location; she chose superintendents because she wanted to study women working in a field heavily dominated by men. The four she examines in detail are from a larger study she conducted, in association with Coleen Bell, of 37 women working in different settings across the United States.

One idea that stands at the center of Chase's work is "discursive disjunction": "As we conducted the interviews, Coleen and I observed the relative ease of talk about professional work and the relative difficulty of talk about inequality." She built on this observation, paying increasing attention to fluency in one area and self-consciousness in the other—a pattern shared by respondents