

Language, Categories, and Social Reality

Zosimo E. Lee

Abstract

This paper considers how awareness of concepts, categories, and criteria in language can be utilized in understanding the grammar of social institutions. The discussion then looks into how three key notions (agentive-function, collective intentionality, and the distinction between constitutive and regulative rules) not only provide clues as to how social institutions can be understood, but also provide the bases for interventions on social institutions. The development and crystallization of collective intentionality, through community deliberations, is important.

Keywords: language, categories, social reality

Concepts and categories

When a child acquires a language, it is not only the meanings of words that are learned; the child also learns how expressions are used. The same expression can mean different things depending on the context within which the expression is used. An interesting question for linguists, grammarians, and philosophers is what in the context provides the basis for differentiating the meanings of the same expressions. It cannot just be the meanings of the particular components or even the combinations of the words alone but something else that matters. What has happened before, or who is saying what and even how, play into the equation. What are the conditions under which an utterance was made? More importantly, when somebody says something, it is appropriate to ask why she is saying what she is saying. For example, a young woman being visited by a suitor is told by her mother, “*Anak, alas-nueve na.*” This is not a description of time, as we all know. Language is used to do things. A use of language is an act.

When Merlin the Magician said to young Arthur, “The Excalibur has a sharp blade,” he could have been warning Arthur to be careful when he takes the sword out of the rock. At another time, when King Arthur, among his knights of the round table, says, “The Excalibur has a sharp

blade,” he could be warning anyone who dares challenge him that consequences are fatal. Or when they are confronted with wooden barriers during a trek through the forest, he can tell the riding party that “The Excalibur has a sharp blade,” for them to make way because he can cut through the barriers. Here the same expression can be an expression of care and concern, a warning, or a promise. Why can the same expression have different meanings? How are the different meanings of the same expression identified and delineated?

A key notion is the concept of *difference*,¹ including the distinction between what are the same and what are different. Semantic contrasts are one way through which we learn what distinctions are possible. Some word-pairs are polar opposites; some indicate nuances and shades of meaning. Different language-games—activities using language—are made possible because of the distinctions embedded in language. The same expression can mean different things because the expression is being *used* in different ways. We can be exposed to these different uses and logical possibilities. We learn differences and distinctions as we acquire language. What the basis is for the distinctions, though, is a little bit more complex. What becomes the basis for identifying an expression as one of care, of warning, or of promise, for example? These distinctions, though, are the bases for categories.²

The distinctions are found in language rather than imposed from some theoretical system. Perhaps one has to be *exposed to* or acquainted with a lot or even the *whole* of language (as well as to have paid attention to the features of language) to be able to see the parts and notice how the parts hang together. There can be indicators or criteria³ within language, of what the activity is, but then what that category is is still subject to what the conditions or parameters of the category would be. For example, what would be the basis for the distinction between *nagugulumihanan* and *balisa*, or even between *nakapag-aral* and *may-pinag-aralan*? Between *confused* and *concerned* or *worried*, there would be distinct differences. Someone who has gone to school is not necessarily someone who is considered educated. Can someone be educated without having gone to school? Not all who have gone to school are necessarily educated, some of us would think. There would be deeper criteria, and these criteria can be discerned. They can be found. They can be unearthed.

The categories are *found* in the sense that they are already present in our language even if we are not always able to specify or make precise

these criteria and these categories. Or we may not have been aware that the categories were there. But our use of language or even our clearer thoughts employ these categories, and the task then is to notice how our own categories affect our thoughts. What can unearth or reveal what the criteria are? What compose categories? These are complex questions. Do the criteria, for example, define or constitute the category? Answers to these questions are available, though, through deliberations among those similarly perplexed on what the appropriate criteria are for making judgments.

Matthew Lipman writes:

Strong judgments, as we know, rest upon good reasons. What do good reasons rest upon? Upon strong criteria—criteria that are minimally clear and relevant. Irrelevant criteria are not just weak: they are useless. Likewise, reasons cannot be good unless they are relevant to good strong criteria. The criteria for judging works of art are useless for judging military maneuvers: it's all a matter of appropriateness. Therefore in strengthening children's judgments, in addition to the strengthening that comes with practice and experience, we need to insist upon the strengthening that comes with reasonableness. In this respect, we should teach children how to determine the criteria appropriate to the thing to be judged, and how to determine the reasons that can satisfy those criteria. The criteria by means of which a play should be judged are likely to include acting, direction, plot, stagecraft, etc. Each of these criteria must be satisfied by means of a reason relevant to that criterion, and each such satisfaction must be sufficient for the standard relevant to that criterion. (Personal communication to the author [Lipman's letter to Lee, May 21, 2000]).

The criteria alluded to here are those that are used for making good judgments, whereas in the earlier context, the criteria were meant to identify or differentiate one category from another. The important point is that criteria render a *service* or have a *function* in differentiating good and appropriate judgments from those that are not, as well as in identifying those dimensions that are being subjected to scrutiny or evaluation. All these belong to discussions of criteria. Criteria also help identify categories.

An expression of care and concern, a warning, and a promise presuppose different categories. When one understands *what is being done* through the expression, one has understood the language-game, and one would thus know what the appropriate response would be. One can continue the game, to pursue the analogy. Depending on one's apperception⁴ of what is being done in and with language, one can respond as one chooses or decides. (One important question is: How does one *know* what is being done, how does one learn how to characterize what as belonging to a certain category of language-use or language-game?) A speaker knows whether he has been understood when the response is within a range of what would be appropriate to what one was doing through an utterance. When one gets an inappropriate response, then one knows that one has not been understood. For example, a person says, "I love you but not in the way that you would want me to." The other responds, "Yes, but I love you." No real communication has taken place.

There would then seem to be an implicit metaphysics in the grammar⁵ of an activity. A use of language constitutes a category. When one has understood the use of language, or what has been done in and through language, one can see it as a category of thought, behavior, or language-use. The categories can be seen as existing separately from one's intention or even desires. The activity can be differentiated from the purpose of the activity, and even from the intended results of the activity. Actions have ontologies.

Language-games are categories themselves, and the task is to find out what the criteria are for distinguishing one category from another. There is a difference, for example, between *denying all charges* from *verifying the truth of the charges*, or between *freedom of expression* and *inciting to rebellion*. It is important to be able to distinguish what the activity is so that one would also know what is involved in the activity. One would then know how to proceed, or what the relevant or appropriate moves might be, given how one has judged what the category of the activity is.

Setting the tone or demarcating what the *rule* of the activity is involves being clear about what is needed for the *activity to be guided* and constituted as belonging to or composing a category. What, for example, distinguishes real *people power* from a farce or parody of *people power* when Filipinos dispute whether the May 1, 2001 uprising in front of the presidential palace could really be called legitimate *people power*?

There are several ways of being guided. The rule is also a family resemblance⁶ concept and there is more than one way in which it can be understood. But while there can be different ways of being guided, for example, there is still a boundary between being guided and not. So the inquiry into what categories define a certain activity so that it can be differentiated from another, or into how one conceptual category can be distinguished from another, provides bases for a level of clarity to, and of understanding of, what is being done. The awareness of what the activity is provides justification and rationale to the activity itself, the difference between *facing the truth* and *being afraid of the truth*, for example. Knowing what one is doing makes one aware that one is doing it. The big challenge is really knowing how to assign what categories to which activities or language-games. In short, how does one know what constitutes a category or a language-game? The answer is, it is the category itself. When instantiated or actualized, the category itself provides the parameters and boundaries for what that category is. The actualization or instantiation itself provides the ground for constituting the category.

How does one know what criteria for demarcations or judgments are relevant and appropriate or decisive and crucial? Are the criteria *constative* or *ampliative*? Are they cited/stated because they have not yet been asserted, or are they merely to be amplified because presumably the criteria are already latent? While indeed the distinction is in language and made possible through language, is the distinction only language-dependent, as against a distinction made possible by logic, or is a distinction at the very least a distinction based on what *same* and *different* mean?

Language already contains inclusions, implications, and exclusions. Understanding the meaning of a linguistic expression sometimes means knowing what the implications, inclusions and exclusions of that expression are. Semantic structures can be represented as logical relations: semantic inclusions are logical entailments, semantic contrasts are logical incompatibilities.⁷ Hence, logical relations can demarcate the boundaries between and among concepts. Sometimes when the boundaries are not clear and explicit, there is need for elaboration and articulation of what the concepts mean, what the concepts can include and exclude, or with what they can be compared or contrasted.

Distinctions, criteria and categories enable us to have an overview of concepts, a conceptual domain or *übersicht*. Presuming the categories of same and different, as well as what might be considered transitory, it is

possible to group words in accordance with how they relate with each other and with their own individual meanings. This allows us to have a wider view of how concepts and categories interact with one another and what the *domain* looks like. It is possible to talk of conceptual clarity as being able to see how concepts relate with one another.

The process of explication and clarification of meanings as well as relations among concepts occurs in communities because the source and reference point for the clarification and explication are the communities themselves insofar as they use and understand the meanings of the concepts and categories (not that everyone is clear about the demarcations already). Through deliberations, meanings and relations among concepts are brought out and articulated. For example, the contrasts and similarities among *kaibigan*, *matalik na kaibigan*, *kalaguyo*, *kilala*, *kaaway*, *hindi malapit*, and *kinasusuklaman* can be mapped out. The process of inquiry and clarification on practices within the community allows for the distinctions, clarifications, and explications to surface.

Discussion among communities, or articulating what may be the meanings of words and concepts, clarifies and delineates what can be the boundaries of the concepts. At least, it enables the community to arrive at a *judgment* regarding what they understand the meaning of the concept to be.⁸ Since language is a living phenomenon, and meanings and the domain of concepts can evolve and change, subjecting concepts to community inquiry also enables the community to have “ownership” over the meanings that their concepts may have. Discussions can also amplify some of the initial intuitions people belonging to the linguistic or social community may have, because what is being elicited are conceptual schemes within persons’ minds. Clarification and elucidation help inform a more perspicuous and precise use as well as understanding of these terms.

The community judgment regarding the meanings and boundaries of concepts and categories also helps build a common understanding and application of criteria as well as an appreciation of categories.⁹ To the extent that the community arrives at clarification and elucidation of these concepts and categories, there may be a greater sense of collective understanding and agreement on the meanings and significations of terms and concepts. The discussions and clarifications also build and strengthen communities, perhaps on a more profound plane. The thinking on and understanding of the community of its own concepts and categories, criteria and norms strengthen collective awareness.

While categories are found and amplified within language, awareness of the self-referentiality of concepts provides a level of self-awareness. This means that concepts can refer to themselves and can be understood by demarcations provided by concepts themselves. But it takes self-awareness too for us to realize that it is our language itself that is the basis of our understanding. We are able to understand how our linguistic activities allow us the possibility of understanding itself. Thoughts expressed in language are understood by thought explicitated in language as well. That humans forming a community can have this awareness, first of all, provides the means for the dis-alienation of language and concepts. There can be a sense of disempowerment over language and the understanding that linguistic expressions and exchanges provide. The antidote is to understand the categories and delineations and arrive at an overview of the conceptual domain so that one can see what the layout of the concepts are and how they relate with one another. Having this sense of mastery over meanings and concepts can be empowering. Community discussions over these delineations can be empowering as well.

The grammar of social institutions

Criteria and the awareness of criteria are crucial for autonomy. Autonomy means, in part, that one can take responsibility for states of affairs, including one's own thinking, and the directions and parameters of that thinking. Autonomy furthermore provides conditions for self-awareness and, consequently, the possibility of interventions on one's own manner of perception and understanding.

To understand the grammar of social institutions, first of all, one has to adopt the attitude or perspective that there is nothing mysterious or magical here. Social institutions are not alienated. Laws or processes beyond human understanding and control do not govern them. One can understand what is being done in and by social institutions. From the experience of being able to understand the grammar or logic of language-games and of social transactions, one's awareness can progress to the understanding of social phenomena. Awareness of autonomy and awareness of one's own thinking and what influences one's way of thinking matter.

Having an *übersicht*, or overview, and an understanding of the whole raises one's awareness. These are all in response to the question, "How do we understand, if possible, the whole of society, how it works, and how we

can function and intervene within it?” An answer is possible because it is within one’s consciousness, first and foremost, that social institutions function. The standpoint is not to *get out of society* but rather to reflect on what is within one’s self. One can affirm or choose the principles that will govern one’s own thinking and behavior instead of being an unthinking pawn.¹⁰

Humans assign functions to entities in their universe. The word *screwdriver*, for example, identifies an entity which occupies a certain function and purpose within human communities. Agents ascribe functions to various dimensions of the physical and social environment. The function of naming is to identify objects, persons and processes. It is also to *assign* a function to these entities within a conceptual universe. One could even argue that the conception of nature is plastic or malleable enough to accommodate how humans would define what nature is without ultimately claiming that humans are responsible for the manifestations of the physical world.¹¹

When humans developed language, it became possible to name entities and for humans to have consciousness of entities both within and beyond direct experiences.

That agents assign functions to entities also includes the notion that social relations are construed, defined, understood and labeled according to concepts and categories that have roots in human designs, purposes and intentions. At the same time, fundamental logical categories are immanent in these operations. Inclusions, exclusions and implications exist among concepts applying to social relations. Conceptual clarification can help unearth the layers of understanding and knowledge that may have been encrusted (similar to Michel Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge).¹² But, ultimately, self and community awareness should dis-alienate concepts and categories, and allow for a level of clarity and empowerment (because clarity is strength). The hidden presuppositions of concepts can be uncovered to subject them to reevaluation and reexamination with the possibility of their modification and even conscious evolution.

Human institutions should not have an alienated *grammar* (meaning that we should not have a sense that these institutions cannot be understood, much less influenced). Rather, the grammar of social institutions can be brought under human and social control and awareness so that these social institutions can be directed towards the fulfillment of human purposes and goals. Social beings should not acquiesce to the logic

of social institutions either understood or controlled only by a few, or even allowed to run haywire. There can also be freedom from the hegemonic and ideological agenda of those who can influence the logic of social institutions and employ that influence for domination.

Since reflection on human institutions is based on what is practiced, on what is *found* rather than on what is invented, these discussions on practices are self-referential: they refer to what humans do and are directed at what humans do. The claims in these discussions on practices have their justification and ground on what is done itself (or on characterizations and explications of what is done) rather than on what an invented conceptual scheme per se can indicate.¹³ This is not simple, though. There are different grammars involved. There are, among others, the grammar of status, the grammar of conventional power, and the grammar of institutional power, as well as the grammar of counter-institutional legitimacy.¹⁴

Inasmuch as awareness and clarity of criteria and the parameters of categories are enhanced in community deliberation, communities definitely have a crucial role. But, it could be asked, are the judgments made possible because of a pre-existent community? (The deliberations iterate the community which will be appropriate for the generation of criteria and categories.) Or is a community created or established when there are common judgments made?

Such community discussions strengthen a political culture so that a nation, as a result, can control its resources and build institutions in conformity with a common conception of justice within its own boundaries. Constitutive and regulative rules would be built on conceptions that are, in turn, based on notions or categories found rather than imposed or invented. These rules would not only be easier to understand but will also be grounded in the thoughts and reflections as well as behavior of the citizens. This does not deny the need precisely to forge institutions that can strengthen the political culture and enable the whole nation to determine, within and without, what will ensure just institutions.

The ground for the community's decisions is based on what they can realize to be criteria and categories embedded in their own conceptual scheme. This provides a ground because when persons are asked the bases for what they recognize to be valid, they can point to the differences that they identify as significant within the delineations that they make as well as the criteria that set out social categories. Clarity of concepts helps in the

development of that political culture in terms of identifying its manifestations and roots and in forging intersubjective perceptions of social reality, both in terms of what it can be as well as the reasons and justifications for the institutions that exist.

Understanding the rationale and justification of social institutions helps in being accountable and responsible for these institutions. This idea has two parts:

- a. There are anthropological, philosophical and psychological bases of categories and conceptions in the apprehension of social reality;
- b. The rationale and justification of social institutions build on these bases and project the question onto the domestic and global basic structure of what principles should govern the basic structure of society.¹⁵

Concepts and categories based on distinctions and differences found in language are more stable to the extent that they resonate with what people already do or know (even if sometimes they are not fully cognizant or aware of these) rather than with what they still have to be convinced about. But what they are being made aware of is that which has to be brought to the surface because an understanding of basic categories and the recognition of criteria are still inchoate, provided we accept basic categories and the recognition of differences.

The basis for the distinctions might sometimes be behavioral rather than conceptual, but that behavior is based on distinctions that can still be pointed out because those who are engaged in that behavior may not be aware of nor recognize the basis for the distinction.¹⁶ How the type of behavior is to be distinguished from another is based on criteria applied to behavior.

The *role* that categories play is not only on the level of thought but ultimately in the sphere of consequences in attitudes and behavior. If the significance of the categories is played out, the distinctions are manifested more in actions and attitudes rather than in concepts alone. Hence, there might then have to be a grammar of behavior which indicates what categories are applied in making distinctions among behavior. Part of this grammar would be not only identification and awareness of the categories to

distinguish behavior, but also what the categories *as a whole* indicate about how behavior can be understood. Knowing what the conceptual or even political¹⁷ grammar is, how concepts and categories operate, and what delineations, differences, contrasts, and similarities they engender, can be immensely empowering.

Social reality is constructed and the primary tool for construction and deconstruction is language. The terms that we employ allow us to see, as well as conceal, aspects of social reality. All human institutions are subjective in the sense that the meaning and significance of these institutions are available only to humans. This implies a global attitude that human institutions can also be designed or that one's understanding of the logic of social institutions can be directed towards human purposes and goals.

The ontology of social and institutional facts

John Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* (1997) offers one discussion of the ontology of social and institutional facts. The main problem is presented as follows: how can facts in the world—such as the fact that I am a Filipino citizen, or that this piece of paper is a one hundred-peso bill—be objective facts if they are, in some sense, facts only by human agreement (427)?¹⁸

Searle (1997) believes that “the ontology of institutional reality can be explained using exactly three concepts: a) constitutive and regulative rules, b) the assignment of function, and c) collective intentionality of the form, ‘X counts as Y in context C’” (427).

The key to understanding institutional reality is to see it as a class of functions imposed on entities where the function cannot be performed solely in virtue of the physical constitutions 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 constitutional of institutional reality (427).

Let us go deeper into the three notions utilized by Searle.

Constitutive and regulative rules

The distinction between constitutive and regulative rules plays an important role in Immanuel Kant's philosophy and he was the first to discuss the issue. The conception of constitutive and regulative rules has a crucial role in understanding social reality as well.

A constitutive rule is the sort of rule that makes a game or kind of action possible at all, such as the rule of tennis or the rules Hoyle gives for card games. Constitutive rules make sense only in sets rather than singly, they are commonly presented in indicative rather than imperative sentences, and they make certain moves or action possible. It is not possible, for example, either to serve or to return a serve, let alone to win a point or a set, apart from the constitutive rules that define tennis. Regulative rules, on the other hand, make perfect sense singly, they are commonly presented in imperative rather than indicative sentences, and they *presuppose* that the move or action they mean to regulate are already possible. The rules of chess are constitutive rules, whereas chess strategies consist of regulative rules (Garver & Lee, 1994, 129).

An activity and an institution are made possible by constitutive rules. Without the constitutive rules, an institution cannot function, be recognized, and identified as such. Once the institution or activity is set up, regulative rules indicate what may or may not be done within that institution or activity. The constitutive rules set up the game even before the first move is made.

Searle (1995) presents a fundamental problem in the following manner:

I have said that the structure of human institutions is a structure of constitutive rules. I have also said that people who are participating in the institutions are typically not conscious of these rules, often they even have false beliefs about the nature of the institutions, and even the people who created the institutions may be unaware of its structure. But this combination of claims poses a serious question for us. Under these conditions, what causal role can such rules possibly play in the actual behavior of those who are participating in the institutions? If the people who are participating in the institution are not conscious of the rules and do not appear to be trying to follow them, either consciously or unconsciously, and if indeed the very people who created or participated in the evolution of the institution may themselves have been totally ignorant of the system of rules, then what causal role could the rules play (127-128)?

These are deep questions and it would seem as if it would almost be impossible to answer these questions. If constitutive rules structure social institutions (and if even the ones who created or invented the social institutions may not necessarily be consciously aware of the constitutive rules of these social institutions), what is the function and causal role that the constitutive rules indeed have?

An answer from Wittgenstein (1958, section 224) would be that since the process of being guided can take several forms (he mentions five, at least) (section 172), it may be that one's behavior is guided without one's being aware of it, but this need not mean that one's behavior is not being guided. One's behavior could even be guided by a rule that one may have stipulated in the beginning, but that one has either forgotten or one is not conscious of the stipulated rule. Hence, it is possible for behavior to be *caused* by constitutive rules but not necessarily *explained* by those rules. *Causation* is not synonymous with *explanation* even if sometimes we think that when we have understood the *causation*, that provides the explanation. The clue may lie in being able to articulate in what ways one's behavior is being guided by constitutive rules.

Once an institution is constituted, regulative rules enable us to operate or function within these institutions. Could a society be set up even without a move within that society? And as we interact with members of that society, does one then learn what the rules for behavior are?

The distinction between constitutive and regulative rules allows us to understand and appreciate so much of human institutions.¹⁹ Property, gender and status are some examples of phenomena or conditions that are constituted. The deep question is: What enables us to constitute institutions, and why do we constitute these institutions to be what they are? In a profound sense, social institutions are contingent; they need not be what they are. Since they are what they are, it is perhaps meaningful to ask why humans have constituted institutions in the way that we have, and whether we could have done otherwise. If these social institutions are in a profound sense dependent on our constitution of them, can they be designed in a different manner?

John Searle (1995) builds on this notion of constitutive rules to explore the creation of institutional facts. The basic formula takes the form: X counts as Y in context C.²⁰

He says:

. . . collective intentionality assigns a new status to some phenomenon, where that status has an accompanying function that cannot be performed solely in virtue of the intrinsic physical features of the phenomenon in question. This assignment creates a new fact, an institutional fact, a new fact created by human agreement (46).

Searle (1995) views the formula as a “powerful tool for understanding the form of the creation of the new institutional fact, because the form of the collective intentionality is to impose that status and its function” (46).

“X counts as Y in context C” applies to persons, processes, events and objects. “Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo counts as President in the Republic of the Philippines.” “The bills of paper count as Philippine pesos (money) within the national territory (fiduciary region).” “This gavel counts as a symbol of authority of the Chief Justice in a court or trial.” The Y status can be imposed on several ontological categories. And then, these entities

can interact in systematic relationships with one another. For example, national governments allow universities to charge tuition fees, and state universities petition national executives or the legislature for greater subsidies.

Agentive-functions

Searle notes that it must be recognized that humans have the capacity to create social facts. Social facts are those which are true only because of human agreement. That someone is the president of a republic, that pieces of paper function as currencies, or that a red traffic signal means *stop* are social facts. Social facts are created when functions are assigned to objects and other phenomena. Functions are never intrinsic. Functions are assigned according to the interests of agents (Searle, 1995, 19). The assignment may not always be momentous. The bases for assignments are perhaps already embedded in the concepts or categories of language.

Institutional facts are created when a status is imposed and with it a function on some entity (person, object, process or event) that does not already have that status-function. “In general, the creation of a status-function is a matter of conferring some new *power*” (Searle, 1995, 95).

Sometimes this power is *symbolic* power. A military uniform with three stars on the hood of a cap and the epaulet signifies rank and authority. Being seated at the head of a table, in certain contexts, means having primary position. To the extent that these symbols signify something beyond themselves, they can be assigned functions as well.

To summarize:

1. Since all functions are observer relative, (Searle speaks) of all functions as *assigned* or, equivalently, as *imposed*.
2. Within the category of assigned functions some are *agentive* because they are matters of the use to which agents put entities.
3. Within the category of assigned functions some are *nonagentive* because they are naturally occurring causal processes to which we have assigned a purpose, e.g., the function of the heart is to pump blood.
4. Within the category of agentive functions is a special category of those entities whose agentive function is to

symbolize, represent, stand for, or, in general, to mean something or other (Searle, 1995, 23).

Collective intentionality

Collective intentionality is the capacity to engage in cooperative behavior, to share intentional states such as beliefs, desires, purposes and goals. The formulation is, "I am doing something only as part of *our* doing something." There is a difference, for example, between a violinist playing a sonata by herself, and her playing in an orchestra as part of the performance of a symphony. In the latter, she does her part in a collective act.

Even most forms of human conflict would require collective intentionality. Warring parties must think and understand that they are fighting. I refuse to greet someone because I mean to snub her, and she knows that I am snubbing her. Israeli forces practice precision retaliation because they want the Palestinians to realize that no provocative action is going to be tolerated, and that only the perpetrators are going to be hit, as much as possible. Social facts cannot be understood without an understanding of collective intentionality. What is it that we are doing together as a collectivity?

"The crucial element in collective intentionality is a sense of doing (wanting, believing, etc.) something together, and the individual intentionality that each person has is derived *from* the collective intentionality they share" (Searle, 1995, 24-25). Again, "I block the path of the guard because I am performing a zone defense together with my teammates in a basketball game."

The notion of collective intentionality is sometimes resisted because of methodological individualism. Methodological individualism, Karl Popper's concept, says that all intentionality exists in the heads of individual human beings, and that intentionality can make reference only to the individual in whose head it exists. But collective intentionality takes the form "we intend," "we are doing so-and-so" and not just "I intend" or "I am doing so-and-so." While the locus for intending is the individual mind, that individual intends the same thing as several others, or understands each one's actions and intentions as part and parcel of a collective activity. Our individual activities form a collective whole. The intentionality that exists in each individual head has the form "we intend" and not "I intend

that we do so-and-so.” I intend to do my share in our doing a cooperative or common project. Unless I did my part, the collective effort, as a whole, would not be seen and understood as such, much less come to pass.

A social fact would be any fact invoking collective intentionality. Two people going for a walk together is a social fact. (Each one understands that, together, their walking is a ‘walk together’).

Collective intentionality has the form, “We intend, as a group, to do something (e.g., raise a family, have children, increase our tax collection), and I do my part for us to fulfill the collective goal.” We are doing what we are doing together (“we are dancing the *cha-cha*”), and both of us have parts or roles to play in that collective endeavor.

Collective intentionality gives rise to the collective. Social institutions are created through collective intentionality. “Once you have collective intentionality, then, if it is *in fact* shared by other people, the result is more than just yourself and other people, collectively you now form a social group” (Searle, 1997, 450). And collective intentionality creates institutional facts.

The logical structure of institutional reality is:

We collectively accept, acknowledge, recognize, go along with, etc., that “S has power (S does A).” S can be a person, an object, a symbol, an institution, etc. Or more simply, we accept that “S has power (S does A).”

A new leader is placed or a new system of government is constructed, and it is able to operate because there is collective acceptance that “S does A.” Should acceptance be withdrawn, or that S becomes incapacitated even when formal authority remains, then S (still) does not do A. The phrase “does A” can also have a variety of meanings.²¹

Raimo Tuomela comments that “(t)he members of a collective, so to speak, collectively construct a social institution ‘semiotically’ by conceptually or semiotically giving something a new ‘status’ and a ‘function’ to accompany it” (Searle, 1997, 434).

Searle himself does not really give much attention, though, to collectives, how they are created, or what they actually or possibly could do. Not enough attention is given to the collective as a whole and to what

the collectives *ought* to be able to do and to what *only* they are able to do. This is to be decried, given the crucial role of collective intentionality.

Collective intentionality remains to be built. It has to be organized and propagated. People have to be provided opportunities to think and behave as members of collectivities, as citizens of a state, for example. In this regard, visionary leadership may be crucial for collectivities, including national communities, to be organized and strengthened because leadership provides a collective identity and purpose.

At this point, the role of the community in judgments and in the articulation, clarification, and application of criteria would be valuable in generating collective intentionality. The author participated once in a community reflection in Negros Occidental, where the question was: “Why are all of you afraid of speaking against a Big Person (*mga tao nga dako*, meaning, landlords, politicians, government officials) and end up compromising and kowtowing, doing what the powerful ask you to do, and, in the process, betraying your own sense of dignity?” In other words, what is the root of the fear? In the process of reflection and tracing back their responses and their reasons for such responses, the fear was traced ultimately to a fear of hunger and a fear of death. But because they had been able to let these fears out, there was now a collective resolve that they need not allow themselves to be intimidated because they could thus support each other and check each other whenever they were responding out of fear.

By our discussing these criteria, concepts and categories, we build a common understanding of whether we do share a collective sense of purpose or whether our actions fulfill our collective goals. How can community discussions and deliberations create or reinforce collective intentionality? The processes of building and developing community (how collective intentionality is forged) are valuable.

Redesigning human institutions

Given the view that it is possible to find the logic or grammar of social institutions, knowing or understanding that grammar may make it possible to intervene to help the evolution of social institutions towards the kind of grammar that fulfills certain desiderata, for example, the flourishing of human capabilities. The interventions are applied to the logic or grammar of social institutions.

More than anything else, understanding the grammar of social institutions provides a level of awareness and perspicuity that can empower citizens. At the very least, this awareness dispels a sense of being overwhelmed by social institutions. The basis for the confidence is a firm grasp of what the constitutive rules are for social institutions. One will have been able to discern, within one's own use of language, what the underlying grammar or logic may be. Social institutions can be so understood on the basis of operations that are very much within human awareness. In fact, such understanding is rooted in our very own language. And the possibility exists for explicating and extracting our thinking on what our criteria are for doing with language the activities that we are able to do. The move from awareness of constitutive rule of phenomena and activity to that of social institutions may involve complexity, but the *basic grammar* of constitutive rules is the same.

To conclude this paper, what are some of the implications of the discussion thus far?

First of all, language creates social reality. Human artifacts, created or invented as individuals and communities fulfill and seek to satisfy basic human needs, are identified as such by humans through and because of language. Language enables individuals and communities to convey thoughts and feelings as well as dreams, their imaginings and their visions of the future, and judgments of the past. Humans can name physical objects and they can also talk about what are not perceptually visible but nonetheless remain meaningful, if not more so. Or language allows humans to name entities, whether these are perceptually accessible or not. Language and ideas enable individuals to create realities beyond what are immediately visible. Language creates social facts as well as institutional facts. Through linguistic expressions, humans create obligations, make promises, bind themselves to contracts, make plans, define events in the future and fulfill their ambitions.

Humans create social institutions through various acts and agreements. Apart from natural associations like families, clans, villages, and communities which are based on blood and geographical links, humans can also create social institutions across space and time with individuals they may not know and even with those who are not yet born. Social institutions are made with others who are not all known. For as long as others accept, respect, and recognize these social institutions, the force of belonging to the institutions itself becomes the basis of their association.

To the extent that others likewise bind themselves to the constraints and the powers enabled as well as required by these institutions, the institutions have power and force.

Humans come to decisions either individually or together with others. But even when they make decisions on their own, their capacity to decide is a function of how they learned to do so through their socialization, how they were brought up and what the social influences were that were brought to bear on them. An important element might be the instances, examples or paradigms that they were exposed to. Supererogatory acts, for example, of saints and heroes are noteworthy, although all exemplary actions need not be so dramatic or so unimpeachable.

Paradigms or examples regarding how to make decisions, or even what can be considered in coming up with the best decisions, will affect the competence, skills, and processes that individuals and groups will employ in arriving at decisions. Continued practice and excellence in these thinking skills can permeate a given society and culture. Exposure to different ways of thinking and being able to evaluate reasons and justifications given for various positions taken (in a debate, controversy, issue, or discussion) can increase the range and flexibility as well as the strength and validity of the decision-making process. Reflecting, discussing and deciding in groups which are (a) open to various positions, which can (b) articulate, clarify, and apply criteria for robust and open processes as well as (c) provide good and appropriate reasons, and which can (d) engage in the critical scrutiny of reasons provided, create reflective communities which can be paradigms as well of collective thinking (which influence individual thinking as well). Human development in society can also entail these skills and competence in making decisions individually and collectively.

Created human institutions include property, marriage, contracts, titles, powers, privileges, obligations and rights, as well as structures like government, territory, boundaries, etc. While some may be more *natural* than others (in the sense that they are immediately seen as important and even necessary for survival, like the family and the clan), the natural associations cannot provide the conditions for what would be responsive to the needs and aspirations of larger and more stable societies. Sometimes these natural institutions can be hindrances. A political institution like the state is the largest conglomeration of families, geographical communities, tribes, cultural communities, professional organizations, the social groups living in, or inhabiting, and deriving sustenance from a given territory.

The people within this geographical area and resource base agree to live with one another and bind themselves to a collective agreement, embodied in a Constitution, which lays down the principles of their association with each other, the aspirations, the vision of what they would like to achieve as a collectivity, their internal regulations, and of how they will conduct their affairs with one another, including how they will resolve their differences and conflicts. This is how constitutive and regulative rules have impact on the daily lives of ordinary persons.

Social institutions are *justified* to the extent that they help bring about, or contribute to, the attainment of the collective goals and aspirations, which can, of course, include allowing individuals the freedom and the right to live their lives according to how they see fit, given certain valid limits. When citizens feel left out and the collectivity is not justified, there can be disobedience, radical (not loyal) opposition or even revolt. The collective purposes and goals have to be continuously asserted, articulated or interpreted. Otherwise, the social institutions are alienated in the sense that people forget, do not know or do not recall or understand why these social institutions exist. The social institutions also tend to have purposes that run counter to what citizens feel are just. There must, therefore, be the possibility for continuous reexamination of the reasons for the existence of this or that social and political institution.

Social principles as collective goals and aspirations are always to be reiterated, understood, and re-clarified. Society, by its nature, through the social and political institutions, affirms the collective nature of their association. Any social policy or political action is acceptable and legitimate to the extent that these policies and actions respond to or actualize the principles agreed upon, or even realized and discovered, by the collectivity. In its history, a collectivity can come to realize some of its deeply-held beliefs that come only to the fore because of the challenges or difficulties that it faces, confronts or resolves. Or that they must adhere to these principles in order to overcome and surpass, or be transformed by present difficulties. But then these principles have to be articulated by some members of the collectivity to then gain currency, acceptance and endorsement from the rest. Being able to name and give expression to the emerging beliefs, principles, realizations and ideals can come from any sector of society.

As individuals can place themselves under duties and obligations to conform to or obey commands and rules of their choosing, social

institutions can also place themselves under certain duties and obligations. Individuals can obey the laws they place themselves under, not because of the possible sanctions but because they recognize that these laws are necessary and ought to be obeyed. The strength of social agreements need not be based on sanctions but rather on the citizens' convictions regarding the value and necessity of these social arrangements. These individual obligations and duties are motivated by the desire to become a certain kind of person, develop a certain character or live up to a certain conception of happiness, fulfillment or human flourishing. It is not contradictory for an individual to have a happy, meaningful and fulfilled existence and live a dutiful existence as well. One may even be a precondition for the other.

In the same manner, it may even be because members of the society as well as social institutions place themselves under duties and obligations that society as a whole, including social and political institutions, is able to achieve a level of fulfillment and excellence. It is when individuals and social institutions are perverted or corrupted, as when public or elected officials are not able to transcend personal or individual interests, that social or political institutions are weakened or damaged, and society as a whole suffers. A damaged institution is one where the members of that institution do not live up to their duties and obligations that the institution requires. A vigilant, alert and assertive constituency and citizenry is required either to press for the fulfillment of the requisite duties and obligations, or the citizenry can withdraw their support from, and the legitimacy of, these erring officials. They may even seek to form a new collectivity. Since the institution is socially constructed, how it functions and how successful it becomes is very much a human affair and not mandated by God or made-in-heaven. For the institution to succeed, it requires human effort and a level of excellence according to criteria which the institution by its very nature can also set up. The criteria stand up as bases for evaluation and judgment.

Among the megacriteria for social institutions, two sets of social principles are important. One set has to do with social solidarity, care and concern for the well-being of the members of the community; another would be principles of justice. Social solidarity recognizes that whatever talents, abilities, deficiencies and initial burdens persons may have are not divinely-ordained but contingent.²² One does not deserve being born rich and beautiful or poor and handicapped. Society is the vehicle through which disparities and disadvantages as well as advantages and benefits provided at birth are evened out or compensated through social devices of

care and concern or the avoidance of indifference and of refusal to be concerned. Benefits, powers, privileges, compensations, honors, positions and rewards as well as punishments, privations, disadvantages and burdens have to be merited, justified and recognized as contributing to over-all welfare.

Justice is premised on the need to avoid injury or harm when these are unnecessary, unprovoked and unjustified.²³ Only perhaps when there is going to be greater harm and injury as adjudged by the appropriate officials or even by the citizenry as a whole can instances of harm and injury be justified. Justice is needed to offset whatever acts of injustice are going to be committed or have been committed. When, for example, there is domination of others for the sake of one's own vainglory, that domination is an instance of using others for one's own selfish ends. Even when the oppressed or dominated party "agrees" to that injury, this domination or oppression can never be justified because it violates the conception of human beings as free and self-governing. Injustice occurs when individuals or even groups think only or primarily of their self-advantage. To do justice is to offset this injustice.

In summary, social institutions are human creations and are meant to achieve, satisfy or fulfill collective goals and aspirations. These institutions have to be governed by moral principles. The collective strength of a society depends on the extent to which these institutions are governed by social principles articulated and adhered to by the citizenry. There have to be (1) a continuous assertion of these collective principles which are the bases for the design of social and political institutions and (2) a constant reexamination of these social and political institutions to see whether they serve these collective goals.

Notes

¹*Difference* would have to include the *possibility* of making distinctions. Distinction may include, though not always, contrasts. A view common to Ludwig Wittgenstein and Ferdinand de Saussure is that basic linguistic contrasts, "including those having to do with word-meanings and uses of language, are actually simple and are simply 'given'" (Garver & Lee, 1994, 127). But then how does one learn what differences are, and what differences are significant or not?

²The issue of what a *category* is is a difficult problem. Aristotle and Kant, among others, developed original and complex views on categories. Sometimes, categories are

predications—they say of a thing what it is and what it is not (Aristotle). Kant believed that all fundamental categories were already in our minds but that it takes philosophy to be able to recognize what are more fundamental than others. Wittgenstein conceived of categories more as *doings*. For example, in *Philosophical Investigations*, section 23, “But how many kinds of sentences are there? Say, assertion, question, and command?—There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call ‘symbols,’ ‘words,’ ‘sentences.’ And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language—new language-games, as we may say—come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten.... Here, the term *language-game* is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* translated by G.E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

³*Criteria* are again difficult to define. Criteria can be considered as bases for comparison. They can also be looked upon as decisive reasons. Criteria can be definitions, but they can also indicate differences and differentiations. One can talk about *metacriteria* as criteria applied to choosing or judging criteria, for example, reliability, strength, and relevance as well as coherence and consistency. And there can also be *megacriteria* like truth, right, wrong, just, good, beautiful—regulative ideas having vast scope. These discussions are gleaned from Matthew Lipman (1991).

⁴‘Apperception’ in this instance means one’s awareness of how one has understood what was being done, or understanding of the category the language-game constitutes. It is reflective discernment of how one looks at what is going on. There are three ‘levels’ here—(1) what is going on, (2) how one looks at what is going on, then (3) reflection on how one looks at what is going on.

⁵“... Wittgenstein used the term ‘grammar’ to denote both the constitutive rules of language and the philosophical investigation or tabulation of these rules. Throughout his career he continued to use the term ‘logic’ or ‘logic of language’ in the same two capacities, on the understanding that logical questions are really grammatical, that is, concern rules for the use of words. Wittgenstein also speaks of ‘the grammar’ of particular words, expressions, phrases, propositions/sentences, and even of the grammar of states and processes. . . . ‘Grammatical rules’ are standards for the correct use of an expression which ‘determine’ its meaning: to give the meaning of a word is to specify its grammar” (Glock, 1996, 150).

⁶“Don’t say: “There *must* be something *common*, or they would not be called ‘games’”—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look!” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 66.

⁷In Garver and Lee (157-158), “Suppose we are talking about a beach ball that has a single solid color and use the following letters to abbreviate sentences that might be used to report its color:

B	It is blue.
Y	It is yellow.
G	It is green.
R	It is red.
P	It is puce.
C	It is carmine.
S	It is scarlet.
V	It is vermilion.

Entailments hold between the shades of red and red itself:

V ⊗ R S ⊗ R C ⊗ R P ⊗ R

Incompatibilities hold among the primary colors:

R ⊗ not-B B ⊗ not-R R ⊗ not-G B ⊗ not-Y.”

⁸The same process can help elucidate norms. “We treat our normative judgments as objective, and when we look at ourselves as part of nature, we can see how that might be. Normative judgments tend toward consensus—shakily but not by accident. With some other judgments consensus is automatic: we easily agree on the layout of surrounding rocks and trees, and those judgments are our prime examples of objectivity. We nudge each other to agree on norms too. We do this in a cluster of ways and, agreement achieved, we treat norms like rocks and trees, more or less” (Gibbard, 1990, 249).

⁹Bernadette Abrera (“Bangka.” Dissertation Defense, March 12, 2002) mentions the source of the word ‘*kaibuturan*’ as ‘*ibutor*,’ the pith of the trunk of a tree, so that when one says ‘*kaibuturan ng puso*’ one is talking of the core or pith of one’s being. From the familiarity or acquaintance with objects or phenomena in nature to the use of expressions to refer to human actions or behavior seems to indicate a genius with language. Such creativity though is also done in accordance with what is considered possible and communicable.

¹⁰This recalls the debate between Kant’s *moralität* and Hegel’s *sittlichkeit*. Kant’s notion was meant to be a standard which is not tied down to the mores, customs and traditions of a particular society. Hegel felt that one could not “get out” of one’s own historicity. But if one relied only on the socialization of members of society for the criteria of standards of morality, how would they be able to critically evaluate those social standards? There must be then be a capacity for critical self-reflection, how I have been brought up, how my thinking has been shaped, what are the dominant influences on my conception of my good and my society’s good. There has to be posited an alternative, hopefully rational, objective and even universal criteria. But these are accessible first and foremost through my own reasoning and deliberation.

¹¹This does not necessarily mean a sense of mastery or domination over nature, but that the naming of entities in nature provides a handle as to how to relate with that physical world, even identifying entities within that ‘natural world.’

¹²In Foucault’s genealogical studies, archival records can show the evolution of concepts and categories applied at various stages in the history of a society. By looking at

the evolution of the concepts and categories, presumably it is also possible to see the evolution of the thinking (assumptions and presuppositions) that lay behind the social “decisions,” and what the categories meant and signified. For example, the Sanskrit word *dubkha* translates poorly as “suffering.” Ruben Habito (2001, 17) says that the word refers more to a situation when something is not properly aligned or properly centered, when it is dislocated. It is not functioning according to how it is meant to. Contrast this with how Filipinos now understand the word ‘dukha’ (which one supposes came from the Sanskrit). It is meant to identify someone who is destitute, poor.

¹³An invented conceptual scheme would have terminologies and jargons that do not have roots in or anchored on actual practices. One first has to learn the vocabulary of the invented scheme, before being able to apply them, as against learning natural languages where vocabulary meanings are incremental and evolutionary.

¹⁴‘Grammar’ here can be understood as conscious or unconscious argumentation, or a way of perceiving, thinking and behaving that follows certain premises and assumptions, and a certain logic.

¹⁵The notion of a ‘basic structure’ echoes from the work of John Rawls. The assumption is that beneath all social institutions, in fact, in the conception of society as whole, there is a basic structure, a fundamental relation among elements that forms the basis for everything else. Rawls talks of the basic structure as actually the constitutive principle of a society, what makes it what it is. Another formulation would be the “basis for social cooperation.” Searle gives his own view of what composes the basic structure.

¹⁶Some mothers, in Sorsogon province for example, may give more fish or vegetable dishes to their sons than their daughters without necessarily being aware of their reasons for doing so (either through habit, preference, tradition, etc.) but implicitly this indicates a certain behavioral distinction.

¹⁷‘Political’ because ultimately it demonstrates understanding of how behavior is influenced and how others are impinged upon in their thinking and behavior. Power takes many forms but the political dimension ultimately has social implications.

¹⁸I paraphrased Searle’s words in “Précis of *The Construction of Social Reality*.”

¹⁹Against the notion, for instance, that a rule is a rule only if it can be broken, the distinction of constitutive and regulative rules would indicate that you can break the regulative rules but to ‘break’ or not follow the constitutive rules is **not** to engage in the activity.

²⁰Where X, Y and C are variable, but C has to be nonmaterial and is a state of affairs. The beautiful thing about formulas is that they describe in finite words what can be illimitable phenomena or instances.

²¹It can mean effectiveness (succeeding in doing it), functionality (having the means or wherewithal to do it), being actually able to do A, even including doing A through others, including inspiring or motivating them. Or even making them afraid or fearful of doing something or not doing it.

²²This idea is originally Immanuel Kant’s, but John Rawls gave it a contemporary interpretation.

²³Again, this is an old notion. Onora O'Neill (1996) provides an in-depth discussion in *Towards Justice and Virtue*.

References

- Habito, R. (2001). *Healing breath*. Dallas, TX: Maria Kannon Zen Center.
- Garver, N., & Lee, S. (1994). *Derrida and Wittgenstein*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- _____. (1994). *This complicated form of life*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Gibbard, A. (1990). *Wise choices, apt feelings*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Glock, H. (1996). *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lipman, M. (1991). *Thinking in education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Neill, O. (1996). *Towards justice and virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. (1997, June). Précis of *The construction of social reality*. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Review*, 57(2), 178-179.
- Searle, J. (1995). *The construction of social reality*. New York: The Free Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical investigations* (2nd ed.) (G.E.M. Anscombe, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Date Received: November 20, 2001

Dr. Zosimo E. Lee is a Professor at the Department of Philosophy, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman.