

The Social Construction of Reality Berger and Luckman

Primary socialization thus accomplishes what (in hindsight, of course) may be seen as the most important confidence trick that society plays on the individual— to make appear as necessity what is in fact a bundle of contingencies, and thus to make meaningful the accident of his birth.

In primary socialization, then, the individual's first world is constructed. Its peculiar quality of firmness is to be accounted for, at least in part, by the inevitability of the individual's relationship to his very first significant others. The world of childhood, in its luminous reality, is thus conducive to confidence not only in the persons of the significant others but in their definitions of the situation. The world of childhood is massively and indubitably real. ¹¹ Probably this could not be otherwise at this stage in the development of consciousness. Only later can the individual afford the luxury of at least a modicum of doubt. And probably this necessity of a protorealism in the apprehension of the world pertains phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically. ¹² In any case, the world of childhood is so constituted as to instill in the individual a nomic structure in which he may have confidence that "everything is all right"— to repeat what is possibly the most frequent sentence mothers say to their crying offspring. The later discovery that some things are far from "all right" may be more or less shocking, depending on biographical circumstances, but in either case the world of childhood is likely to retain its peculiar reality in retrospect. It remains the "home world," however far one may travel from it in later life into regions where one does not feel at home at all.

A watches B perform. He attributes motives to B's actions and, seeing the actions recur, typifies the motives as recurrent. As B goes on performing, A is soon able to say to himself, "Aha, there he goes again." At the same time, A may assume that B is doing the same thing with regard to him. From the beginning, both A and B assume this reciprocity of typification. In the course of their interaction these typifications will be expressed in specific patterns of conduct. That is, A and B will begin to play roles vis-à-vis each other. This will occur even if each continues to perform actions different from those of the other. The possibility of taking the role of the other will appear with regard to the same actions performed by both. That is, A will inwardly appropriate B's reiterated roles and make them the models for his own role-playing. For example, B's role in the activity of preparing food is not only typified as such by A, but enters as a constitutive element into A's own food-preparation role. Thus a collection of reciprocally typified actions will emerge, habitualized for each in roles, some of which will be performed separately and some in common. ²² While this reciprocal typification is not yet institutionalization (since, there only being two individuals, there is no possibility of a typology of actors), it is clear that institutionalization is already present in nucleo.

At this stage one may ask what gains accrue to the two individuals from this development. The most important gain is that each will be able to predict the other's actions. Concomitantly, the interaction of both becomes predictable. The "There he goes again" becomes a "There we go again." This relieves both individuals of a considerable amount of tension. They save time and effort, not only in whatever external tasks they might be engaged in separately or jointly, but in terms of their respective psychological economies. Their life together is now defined by a widening sphere of taken-for-granted routines.

Let us push our paradigm one step further and imagine that A and B have children. At this point the situation changes qualitatively. The appearance of a third party changes the character of the ongoing social interaction between A and B, and it will change even further as additional individuals continue to be added. 23 The institutional world, which existed in *statu nascendi* in the original situation of A and B, is now passed on to others.

... A and B, the original creators of the social world, can always reconstruct the circumstances under which their world and any part of it was established. That is, they can arrive at the meaning of an institution by exercising their powers of recollection. A's and B's children are in an altogether different situation. Their knowledge of the institutional history is by way of "hearsay." The original meaning of the institutions is inaccessible to them in terms of memory. It, therefore, becomes necessary to interpret this meaning to them in various legitimating formulas.

The development of specific mechanisms of social controls also becomes necessary with the historicization and objectivation of institutions.

The new generation posits a problem of compliance, and its socialization into the institutional order requires the establishment of sanctions. The institutions must and do claim authority over the individual, independently of the subjective meanings he may attach to any particular situation. The priority of the institutional definitions of situations must be consistently maintained over individual temptations at redefinition. The children must be "taught to behave" and, once taught, must be "kept in line."

Berger, Peter L.; Luckmann, Thomas (2011-04-26). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Open Road Media. Kindle Edition.