

Chapter 5

The Logical Form of Totalitarianism

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Abstract Theories of social behavior include some notion of cooperation. In light of large social institutions such as government, a paradox ensues in cases where the institution in question is oppressive and not enjoyed by the collective of individuals inhabiting such an institution: How is it possible to cooperate unwillingly yet intentionally? Are such individuals complicity reinforcing the regimes that oppress them? This chapter addresses despotic regimes in general and totalitarian regimes in particular by examining the notion of cooperation within these regimes. An analysis of cooperation is offered in which individual behavior in collectives is logically preceded by perception of the social group as either a set with which the individual identifies or does not. In each case, social identification operates over an individual's social behavior as a reinforcement of the group with which he identifies, or an erosive element of the institution that he finds alien and oppressive.

1 Introduction

A logical account of society considers features that are necessary for societies to exist. Some logical accounts are marked by a particular essential feature, that of cooperation. This essential feature is one which determines how a society will develop through time thereby creating a kind of vertical or horizontal axis through the temporal space of evolutionary social development. Accounts that form a vertical axis are social structures that begin as a matter of simple cooperative behavior among the members of a group and eventually develop into more complex social behaviors. Given a species' capacity for cooperative behavior, there is a simple algorithm for society building according to this type of vertical analysis: if a species

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or a group has the feature of cooperation, it is possible for it to have some sort of social structure. If the group or a species lacks the feature of cooperation, it is not possible for it to have social structures. A benefit of an account based solely on observable behavior that appears to be cooperative is that it can be applied in principle to both linguistic and non-linguistic social groups to explain how their social structures evolved.¹

In contrast to the vertical account, in which society gradually evolves out of cooperative behavior, is a horizontal account in which the basis of society exists the evolutionary moment certain intellectual capacities appear in a species. Although the complexity of social structures do and can evolve on this account, social behavior itself is already a sophisticated activity as soon as the appropriate mechanisms are present. What sort of social cognitive mechanisms are foundational differs according to different cognitive accounts. For example, on some accounts, it is the cognitive capacity for joint perception that bootstraps social behavior. On other accounts, social behavior begins with the intellectual capacity for deontic concepts.²

On a deontic account of social behavior, in order to be able to cooperate, members of a group must have the concepts of commitment, obligation, and the ability to represent these concepts with future reference, i.e. they must have the capacity for deonticity and representation. The capacities for deonticity and representation themselves may have evolved gradually in a species, but once present, society exists even in the most basic forms of cooperating, such as pair bonding and family bonding. Humans are a linguistic species and this account is more easily applicable to human society than non-human societies because the linguistic evidence of deonticity is readily apparent.³

For brevity's sake, let us call the vertical account the "social practice account", and the horizontal account the "cognitive account". There are many accounts of how human social structures evolved, but in general, all social structures can be characterized in terms of one of the two accounts mentioned above even if they contain elements of both. In this short article, I am going to discuss one account in particular, that of John Searle.

In both *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) and *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (2010), John Searle's account of the institutional structure of human society is a deontic account. In his earlier book on the subject, *The Construction of Social Reality*, Searle claimed three logical features as the necessary constituents for the creation of social institutions. These are (1) collective intentionality, (2) the imposition of status function and

¹This is a simple picture of a social behavioral account. A more elaborate example of such an account is that given by Haugeland (1982); for a behavioral view of social organization that does not require collectivity or cooperation, e.g. Hayek (1944).

²Indeed there are many other types of cognitive accounts, e.g., motor cognition which serves as the foundation of joint attention and cooperative behavior. e.g. Jennerod (2006).

³It is not entirely clear that animals do not have comparable capacities. This is an epistemic question that remains unanswered.

(3) codification. It is by means of the imposition of status function and codification both of which require language, that Searle imports deonticity into his account of social reality, as language requires the notion of commitment in Searle's account.

Searle's original logical formula of social construction was simple and elegant: An x as some object, could have a status function imposed on it and become something new, a y , in virtue of this imposition and collective agreement all of which is codifiable in principle given an appropriate context, a c . Along with this imposition of function on the x term, the new y term receives deonticity. Thus the formula:

$$x \text{ counts as } y \text{ in context } c$$

was intended to account for all of institutional reality along with the deontic powers thereof.

An early question about this formula was, How do the institutional statuses, the y 's, import collective expectations and individual responsibilities into this equation? How does the formula

$$x \text{ counts as } y \text{ in context } c$$

turn into the fact that the collective accepts that

$$x \text{ counts as } y \text{ in context } c$$

and that the y now has new rights and responsibilities?

As an answer to this question, Searle extended the original formula by adding the logical operator of Collective Acceptance. In this way, he explained in his later book, *Making the Social World*, the formula $x \text{ counts as } y \text{ in context } c$, is implicitly or explicitly a declaration, and as a declaration, the speech act states that an x is now a y by means of a double level of illocutionary force: it both states a new state of affairs exists and creates a new state of affairs by making this very statement. Further, because the speaker of this speech act has a double level of commitment, both to the truth of the state of affairs stated and to the sincerity of the underlying desire that this state of affairs be the case, the state of affairs is collectively accepted because the speaker indeed is the collective itself. This is implicit in all declarations regardless of whether they are uttered by single individuals or not. For example, in the case of marriage, the priest marries a couple as a spokesman for the Church. He has no personal power to make such a pronouncement outside of this collectively sanctioned role. In the case of meeting adjournments or anonymous public announcements, the speaker is authorized by the collective to perform the declaration in question. The point in question is that declarations require authorized speakers, and authorized speakers can only act in virtue of collective acceptance.

In other words, they serve as mouthpieces or spokesmen for the collective.⁴ In this way, we can say that in the case of the creation of an institutional fact, the collective thus authorizes itself (in the form of an authorized speaker) to create the very state of affairs that the declaration dictates. The formula

$$x \text{ counts as } y \text{ in } c$$

thereby acquires a Collective Acceptance (CA) operator with wide scope when it is used to collectively impose a status function and create an institutional fact:

$$\text{CA [cceptance]} (x \text{ counts as } y \text{ in } c)$$

With this formulation, deonticity is imported into the role of y by means of the collective declaration.

This extended formula raised a new set of objections. For example, concerns were initially expressed over the Collective Acceptance operator reflecting a kind of happy embrace of institutions some people might find objectionable. The institution of slavery is a good example of this objection. Searle was able to avoid this objection by explaining that the operator of Acceptance was not intended as collective approval, but rather something more akin to collective recognition. But another more serious objection to the extended formula was that it could only capture part of the institutional story. It captures institutional facts such as becoming a wife, a president, a licensed driver, a citizen, etc., statuses which have powers *in virtue of* authorization. But the question then arose as to how Searle's extended formula could capture status functions that are unconsciously born by social perception shaped by a given linguistic community—how does Searle's formula capture that part of institutional status which is *social expectation*? (Cf. Anderson 2007; Hudin 2007) For example, how could this formula capture the expectation of how a wife or a mother is to behave, behaviors which are imported by the status functions of wife and mother but not codified? The social expectations of status functions are as powerful as the authorized powers that are codified and imposed by a collective, yet they are difficult to pin down because they are both contextual and timely, always a function of time and place.

A perfect example of the malleability of social expectations is the status function and social expectations of what a mother is. Given the context of the United States and the time, the 1950s, a mother was naturally expected to be married, to be a

⁴Because of this impersonal role of being the mouthpiece for the collective, the sincerity conditions are not flouted if the speaker himself personally does not believe nor desire the state of affairs the declaration brings about. For example, it is entirely plausible for a military commander upon following higher orders to announce that the time of attack will be at sunset, yet not desire that the time of attack take place, nor even believe that it will take place at that time.

housewife—itself a status function which implied good housekeeping and cooking.⁵ An American mother of the 1950s was not expected to work outside the home.

Now 50 years later, the picture of what a mother is in the United States is quite radically different. As of this date, there is no expectation that an American mother be married. In fact she can have as many children as she wants with no husband whatsoever.⁶ The term “housewife” is considered derogatory, replaced by another term for women who do not work outside the home, that of “stay-at-home-mom”. “Stay-at-home-mom” is a status function which is not only self-created by those who bear the term, it is a status function that is self-imposed. It refers to a woman who considers taking care of her children as not a function of being a mother but as a career, one which she has chosen to do as one would choose any career, be it a banker or a teacher, etc.⁷

The understanding of what a modern mother is has so changed that my mother or my grandmother would not recognize it. As demonstrated by this one example, social expectations exist and are a function of time and place; these expectations are limitless yet describable, non-linguistic, and non-codified.

In 2007, I suggested emendation to Searle’s formula by means of something called *The Deontic Split*. The Deontic Split is characterized by assuming that there are two parts to the imposition of status functions, and indeed, two parts to the acquisition of social power be it positive or negative. The split of deonticity is between social expectation, a non-linguistic perception of social roles, and social authorization, a linguistic codification of status function. I suggested that the deontic split could be easily accommodated by Searle’s formula with one small change in his extended formula to allow for non-reflective social expectation. This change is that of allowing the collective acceptance operator (CA) to be a collective recognition operator (CR).

The small change to Searle’s formula to incorporate the deontic split would appear in its logical form as:

$$\text{CR [ecognition] (O [bligation] (x counts as y in c))}$$

The power of social expectation is a function of the Collective Recognition operator, which has wide scope over the entire proposition. As I thought at the time, the power of authorization would be a function of the O operator which has a narrower scope and the CR operator which operates over the entire proposition, though, as I will argue later in this chapter, this account is not satisfactory.

⁵I used this example in another paper, *Can Status Functions Be Discovered?*

⁶E.g. Nadia Suleyman is an unmarried mother of 14 children in the U.S., eight of whom are octoplets and a product of artificial insemination. The case of Nadia Suleyman has brought her national attention in the United States, but is not the kind of scandal it would have been in the 1950s.

⁷Stay-at-home-moms form their own societies. Self-imposition of the status is collectively recognized once the person who bears it accepts and embraces the status. The deonticity thereby received would be rights such as joining the clubs, exchange of day care, etc.

In his latest book, *Making the Social World*, Searle did not adopt my logical formula but he did adopt the operator, (CR), replacing the (CA) with the (CR) operator. But with this new formula, I now believe that there are new challenges for Searle. Specifically, there are two questions which it raises. These are (1) How can collective perception, a passive cognitive event, create and maintain unpopular regimes? and (2) How is the power of the unpopular regime maintained by mere collective perception? In this chapter, I will suggest a logical formula which can account for both the creation of objectionable institutions, along with the perpetuation of despotic power.

2 How Collectives Support and Maintain Oppressive Regimes

Scholars from various disciplines have given us a picture as to why despots have gained power throughout history. The phenomenon of despotism is not a mystery. But what is mysterious is the continued maintenance of the oppressive regimes over which despots reign. A simple question which is often asked about oppressive regimes is, How could they let it happen? “They” are the collectives whose cooperative activities make social structures possible.

In this chapter, I am going to focus on one type of oppressive regime in particular, that of totalitarianism. Totalitarian regimes are a particular kind of oppressive regime in that every aspect of individual behavior is governed by the ruling state party, or the ruler of the state. This total control over individual behavior provides an interesting case for either a behavioral or a cognitive logical account for the very reason that both accounts require cooperation, and cooperation implies some form of complicity in the sense that people are motivated by their desires whatever they might be. Without further examination, this feature of cooperation leaves the logical analysis with a strange result: totalitarian regimes are both sanctioned, and accepted and maintained by the collective. To put it bluntly, they are what the people wanted.

In *Making the Social World* (2010), Searle attempts to answer this very dilemma. In order to do this, Searle departs in several respects from his earlier position in *Collective Intentions and Action* (1990) and *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) to the logical features of institutional reality. There are at least two noteworthy departures, one with respect to the primacy of collective intentionality and another, with respect to the essential feature constitutive of institutional reality, that of codification. In first *Collective Intentions and Action* and then *The Construction of Social Reality*, Searle claimed that collective intentionality cannot be reduced to individual intentionality and mutual belief. His example of the Harvard Business School graduates illustrates two paradigms of collectivity, one in which there is a collective goal that is irreducible to individual intentions and mutual belief, and another in which the goal of the members of the group is identical in content, but is not collective. In the first case, the graduates agree on the collective goal of enriching

the state of the economy by means of their individual wealth; in the second case, the graduates agree on becoming individually rich, the incidental feature of which is a general rise in the economy. In the group effort that is made as a pact, defection of any member spoils the collective goal regardless of whether the general economy rises or not, i.e., the original intention of the collective state is not satisfied. In the second case in which there is no pact, defection of a member ruins nothing at all as there is no collective goal but rather a general effect which may or may not be affected by individual defection, i.e., the original content of each individual intention is satisfied. The important point is that the psychological content of the members of the group is different in both cases depending on whether the goal can only be achieved by the collective or by individuals.

In *Making the Social World*, Searle considers the problem of unpopular regimes in relation to the constitutive and essential feature of cooperation in the structure of institutions. In order to allow for the maintenance of oppression regimes and also explain unwilling individual participation in those regimes, Searle states that contrary to what our theories originally claimed, cooperation is *not* essential to the structure of institutions. Rather, what institutions require at the very minimum is *collective recognition* and this type of collective intentionality—collective recognition—can indeed be reduced to I-intentionality and mutual belief. Thus, he maintains, in this way it is not hard to see how an individual can participate in a regime which he finds disagreeable. The situation is no different from the institution of money. An individual may loathe money, but nonetheless recognizes the institution of money, believes others recognize its value also, and uses it in virtue of this recognition (see Searle 2010, pp. 56–58).

To extend this example then to totalitarianism, an individual might find himself under the control of a totalitarian state. He may not like the regime but he recognizes it exists in virtue of the fact that others recognize it exists, and he shares mutual belief about its existence with others in the community. Because of this fact, he acts within the institution because it is his institutional reality. The proof that this must be the case is that the individual is powerless to change what he does not like. Even if a single individual decides neither to accept nor recognize the institution of money nor the political regime under which he lives, this rejection does not affect the reality of these institutions at all if the collective still recognizes their validity. Institutional reality thus is grounded initially in collective perception, and then secondarily in the acts that maintain its existence. Again, there is a proof of the sequencing of these acts: Once lack of participation in the institutional reality reaches critical mass, the institution no longer is recognizable nor recognized as functional.

As appealing as this explanation is, there is a chicken-egg problem for a logical analysis. This problem is tightly connected with Searle's second essential institutional feature, that of the imposition of status functions as power-endowing. In Searle's original formula, power is conferred on a *y* in virtue of collective acceptance which lent itself to be interpreted as implemented in either non-reflective or reflective behavior. In Searle's new formula, power is conferred on a *y* in virtue of collective perception-recognition, a passive state of the collective which at best can be interpreted as recognizing a *y* has a status function, and not interfering in this

state of affairs. The real question then is, What is the nature of collective-recognition conferral of power? Perceiving that some proposition holds is not sufficient to make it the case. At its weakest interpretation, collective recognition is a negative state of affairs in which the collective does not interfere in the power of the y , i.e., simply put, the conferral of collective recognition must be a negative conferral in that an individual or a group of individuals are allowed to act without interference. And negative conferral of power does occur in cases of coups and revolutions where power is usurped. But not all totalitarian regimes are cases of coups and revolutions. Some totalitarian regimes are authorized, voted in, and legitimated by the collective. In a word, they are positive cases of conferral in which the collective takes active steps towards conferring power on some y .

But even in the cases of coups and revolutions, once the totalitarian regime has been established, it is the collective that maintains the power of the despot or the state by means of their daily acts within the institutions of these states. This is not merely a case of passive perception-recognition, but also a matter of acceptance. *Acceptance is participation in an institution*, no matter how oppressive the institution might be. And, as it has been argued in this chapter, acceptance is behavioral. Acceptance defined as participation, even unwilling participation in an unpopular government or institutional state of affairs, is still a matter of cooperation. This fact forces us to the conclusion that every single individual capable of active participation within totalitarian state, young or old, is in equal regard responsible for the oppressive state he might find himself in. This result is not only intolerable, but false.

Thus, at this point, we are left with two dilemmas: (1) How to incorporate the chicken-egg problem into a logical analysis; i.e., how to reflect the fact that both collective recognition and collective acceptance (as participation) simultaneously construct and maintain totalitarian regimes, and (2) How to account for the possibility that acceptance (as participation) does not necessarily entail complicity (in the sense of willing cooperation) in the construction and maintenance of totalitarian states.

In order to resolve these dilemmas, we first need to return to the primitive notion of social analysis, that of cooperation. Human institutions are constructed and maintained by human cooperation. This includes the construction of marriages, parties, conferences, as well as wars and governments. All of these phenomena require human cooperative actions, what Searle originally called *Collective Acceptance*. But collective acceptance is not at all at odds with the notion that individuals can accept and loathe at the same time the institutions which they maintain since by our definition of collective acceptance as mere behavior, cooperation does not entail complicity. How then can this fact be built into the notion of cooperation as acceptance?

In the same way that power can be divided into both an active and passive conferral (the Deontic Split), acceptance can also have two forms depending on the attitude of the participants in the collective. One form I will call "happy" and the other, "unhappy." Happy acceptance arises from a strong form of collective recognition, one in which the perceiver identifies with the regime or the despot in

some manner, and bonds with this state or person who represents the state, i.e., the despot. This form of identification does not need to be a deliberative process nor rise to the level of thought. In fact, it quite likely can be the case that an individual cannot pinpoint the exact cause of attraction to another, be it an individual or a set of individuals. Rather, this state is a perceptual capacity that allows individuals to perceive in an other an attractive familiarity. To put the experience perhaps more abstractly, it is the ability to see oneself in others, or to see others as a larger form of oneself. Social identification is a necessary step towards forming social relations and it occurs at all levels, from one-on-one pair bonding or friendships, to the more abstract level of joining a set of individuals.

Social bonding is the emotional component of social identification. It is logically separate from social identification in that one can understand oneself to be part of a larger set unified by some property, be it familial or representational (underscored by a principle), yet feel no emotional bond with the group whatsoever. But in situations which interest us, individuals who socially identify with a cause, more perspicuously, a set of individuals who represent a cause, feel a bond to act with the set in question. It is social bonding that is the emotional component of collective identity and motivates the individual to act in the interest of the group. It is this crucial element in human psychology that is required for all collectives to be able to act, to have effect and be a unified force. This crucial element of emotional bonding in oppressive societies is purchased through frequent use of propaganda, including music, art, parades, symbols such as flags. In the case of totalitarian regimes, the parades, flags, symbols, music, art, etc. are means to moving the collective's conferral of power on the despot in particular, the state at large.

So what exactly is the experience of social bonding? Social bonding with individual(s) is an experience in which power is given to the set, be it a set of two or two million. The kind of power given over to another is not of the type, "power over" in which the individual is subjugated to another, but rather, the kind of power that enables the set to become enabled to act as a single unit. For example, in the case of pair bonding, individuals bond with each other, thereby creating a new thing, a "we" which acts together. This new enablement allows pairs to have children, or to make a home, to create an estate, etc. In the case of larger groups, an individual's bonding with a group empowers the group to act more forcefully towards whatever aim the group might have. Thus, the phenomenology of social bonding is one in which the individual gives power to the group and in doing so feels empowered by expanding his or her own sense of what one can do and be. This is true not only of individual relationships but of political, social, religious groups also.

In political regimes of any kind, happy acceptance arises when an individual identifies and bonds with the political group and thus commits him-herself to the collective. In this commitment, the individual gives power to the group and thereby experiences an expanded sense of his-her own power through group membership. Happy acceptance thus motivates individuals to actively strengthen the collective by engaging in activities of legitimation through such acts as voting, engaging in various civic duties such as becoming a party member, becoming the chairman of a cooperative, volunteering for citizen night patrols, etc. The individual who happily

accepts the collective in question feels larger than himself or herself, empowered by the collective power of the group. In some groups, the power is returned in fact, as in the cases of benign institutions as marriages, universities and so on. In the case of totalitarian regimes, the power derived from the state by the individual is only phenomenological as individuals under totalitarian regimes are institutionally powerless.

Unhappy acceptance, on the other hand, is a case in which there is perception-recognition that y has a given status function, but social identification and therefore social bonding is lacking. Unhappy acceptance, at its best, thus leads to begrudging participation in the state, at its worst, erosive activities against the state. Ultimately, without any active effort on the parts of the collective members, unhappy acceptance is a dangerous state of affairs for a totalitarian state because members have little motivation to expend energy on its institutions. And, naturally, members who do not have social identification with the state at large will form identifications with other groups, even with each other, a cause for totalitarian states to have increased police policies, including terrorizing its citizenry.⁸

In light of this twofold distinction, and the fact that collective recognition operates in tandem with collective acceptance, how would we reflect this in logical form?

First of all, unlike in non-institutional reality, in institutional reality perception is logically prior to action. There are two arguments to support this claim. First, deferential behavior alone towards some agent does not add up to conferring power on that agent. For example, alpha males in wolf packs command a certain kind of deferential behavior from their pack in virtue of brute power, but the deferential behavior does not confer the kind of power that is required for institutional status functions. In order for institutional deontic powers to be conferred, the collective must have the capacity to grasp the deontic properties of the y in the absence of y and this requires representational abilities which are perceptual. As an example of this, in a tribe of humans with minimal linguistic abilities that include symbolization and tense, an alpha male or female can also have the status function of “chief” if the collective is capable of perceiving his or her deontic powers even in his or her absence. Thus, the capacity for recognizing social hierarchy with deonticity is logically prior to behaving towards social hierarchy with deonticity.

Second: As argued above, it is in virtue of social identification, a perceptual property, that collective acceptance is made possible. Without the capacity to see some property in others as one’s own, one cannot be social at all.

Thus, as in the logical form saw earlier, the CR operator operates before the CA operator. We are now in a position to reformulate our formula in the following way, allowing the CA operator wide scope over the entire proposition.

⁸C. Milosz (1990 [1951]) expands the notion of what I call “unhappy” and unwilling cooperation in a totalitarian regime by dividing up such participation into various types. As he points out, the participants in such regimes are for the most part not willing cooperators, but engaging in the upkeep of the institution for a variety of reasons.

CA [cceptance] (CR [ecognition] (x counts as y in c))

And as before, this captures the tacit power of social expectation as a function of the Collective Recognition operator which has primacy over the legitimizing power of collective acceptance which has wide scope over the entire proposition. The power of authorization is a function of the CA operator. The power of social expectation is a function of the CR operator.

To make a complete logical description, we need to add the tags of happy and unhappy to the CA[cceptance] operator. In order to do this, we will note them with + for “happy” and – for “unhappy”, and put them as subscripts to the Collective Acceptance operators:

CA [cceptance]_(±) (CR [ecognition] (x counts as y in c))

A final question remains as to whether an unpopular regime can exist with a critical mass of members who join the collective but unhappily. The answer is not straightforward. The continued existence of oppressive regimes depends on how successful they are at convincing individuals of their own powerlessness outside the collective in question. If an unpopular regime is successful enough at frightening its members so that they only feel empowered by being part of the collective, then the regime can exist for a certain amount of time based solely on ensuring individuals’ fear of loss of personal power by leaving the collective. The security of such regimes is always at stake though, and the fragility is apparent in the size of its internal policing and propaganda directed at enemies of the collective. At this point in the analysis, it is safe to make the claim that the oldest and most secure collectives are those that are the most successful at ensuring the experience of personal power through the collective and expanding the actual power of the individual because of membership in the collective.

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