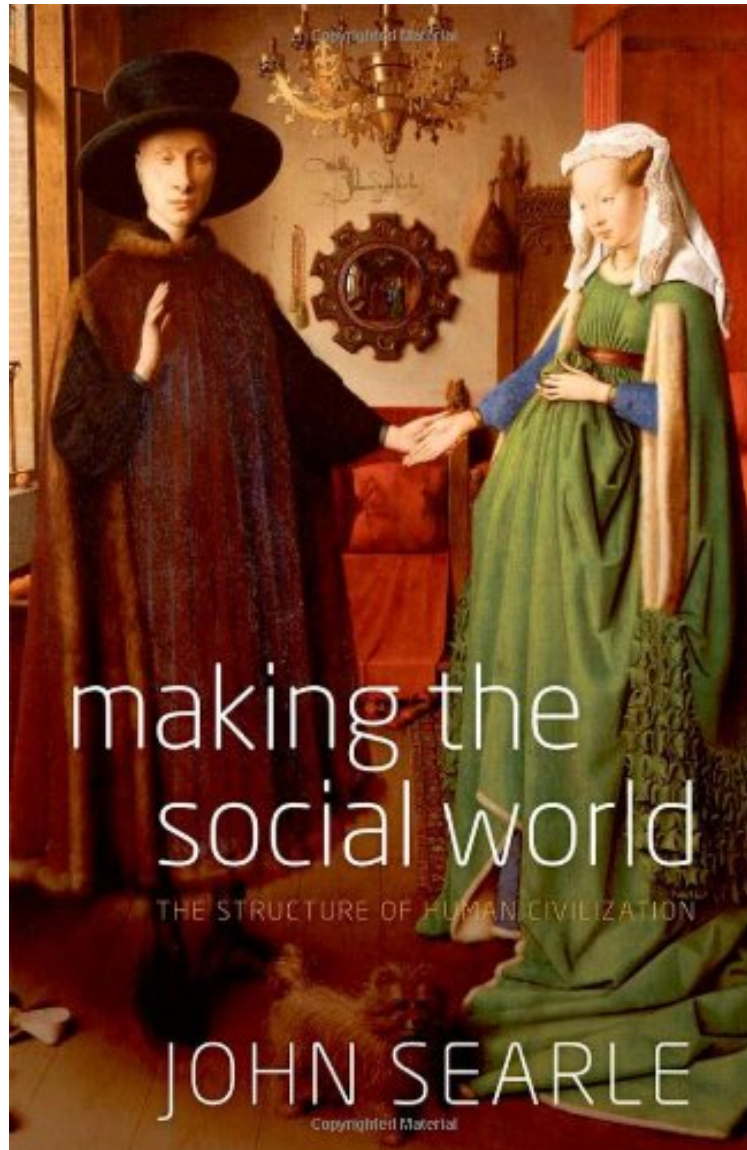


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# Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization

*John R. Searle*

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**John R. Searle : Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good update to "The Construction of Social Reality". Searle a clear thinker and powerful writer By Matthew Rapaport This book written in 2010 amounts to a reprise of Searle's earlier

"The Construction of Social Reality" (1997) which I have also reviewed. In the introduction to this book Searle says there were a few issues not sufficiently clarified and his aim is to clarify them. The two books are about the same length, but Searle manages to say much more in this one about language, free will, and the sensibility of "human rights" outside formal institutional contexts. How does he manage this feat? In the earlier book he very carefully constructs his primary insight into the structure of social institutions and carefully demonstrates its application to a wide range of social phenomena like cocktail parties, sports, money, and government. In this book, he is able to state that fundamental argument more succinctly (he's had a lot of time to work with it after all), embedding it more firmly into a clarified examination of the nature of human language as it relates to the development of social phenomena. As a result, there is nothing in the first book that isn't also in this second one, but for some readers the main argument, the structure of all social contexts, might be stated a little too quickly here. I had no problem with it, but then I had already read the earlier book. But despite the extensions and clarifications here, Searle still leaves a few things not clarified. He distinguishes between negative and positive rights. "Free speech" is a negative right because it requires nothing else of others besides letting me speak my mind. By contrast, a right to clean water (a UN declaration says this is a right) is a positive right because it puts an obligation on everyone else in the world to contribute to providing such a right. Searle rightly points out that positive rights are thus more problematic than negative rights, but he does not note that the UN declaration of such positive rights puts the onus of obligation on governments rather than mere individuals. He also uses a strange example, the right (in the context of the social institution of marriage) of a spouse to be consulted by their spouse before the latter commits to some life changing course of action. This is not a negative right as he seems to cast it, but a positive right, the corresponding obligation being on the spouse contemplating the act. Finally, Searle tries to make sense of the notions of "natural" and "absolute" rights, those that exist by virtue of our being human beings outside any social context. I do not think he clarifies these ideas fully. An unarmed man encountering a hungry lion on the savanna will be eaten by the lion ninety nine times out of a hundred and that puts paid to any such thing as "natural rights" outside social contexts. Despite getting a little loose with the notion of "human rights" at the end of the book, this is a superb portrait of the ontological structure of social reality. In a last section, Searle points out that most social scientists do not think that a grasp of social ontology really helps them with their work but they are mostly wrong about this. Most social science (for example) begins by assuming language and then asks how social reality is constructed with it. By contrast Searle notes that once you have a language, you already have a significant social context.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating read  
By Kevin Beal  
I've recently become a big fan of John's work, and this book is perhaps even my favorite so far. It's nice to get some clarifications and some new terms to describe the concepts you are probably already getting familiar with if you've read his other work. The way John ties intentionality in with language and with institutional reality connected a ton of dots for me, even though I'm already pretty familiar with the ontological subjectivity talked about in the book. It's kind of amazing how much you can go over the same topic and get so much new information out of it. My only hesitation is with the last chapters where the explanation of how government fits into social reality is given. He rightly points out how it's a monopoly on violence, and pointed out other logical problems with it, but did not make what seemed to me the obvious conclusion: the state is an ancient and evil institution which does not serve people in the same sense that institutional reality general does / is supposed to.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By Atli Hardarson  
Analytical philosophy at its best. Lucid and profound.

The renowned philosopher John Searle investigates the nature of social reality. How do institutions such as money, marriage, and government arise from the mere power of words? And how do mind, language, reason, and freedom come into being from the mindless, meaningless particles that make up the physical universe?

"stimulating and vigorous" --Colin McGinn, New York of Books "The present [book] may be recommended to newcomers to [Searle's] philosophy as a lively introductory overview of many of his current research themes and of some of his past research achievements." --Notre Dame Philosophical s  
"Making the Social World has no doubt been greatly anticipated by Searle's many colleagues and critics, as his project has generated considerable interest. Searle's project should make a significant contribution to the philosophy of the social sciences." --Metapsychology  
About the Author  
John Searle is Slusser Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley.