
THE REALITY AND ITS INSTANCES: REVIEW ON BERGER'S AND LUCKMANN'S THEORY OF THE *SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY*

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Abstract: One of the key issues in Sociology of Knowledge it is the discussion of social understanding of reality and its confluence impact with the reality in itself. Indeed, discussion as above, is giving us the opportunity to reshape our understanding about the reality, and consequently to conceive it in different context. In order to find the *real* modalities of the reality, its definition in social contexts can help further in building an episteme about reality as commonly used in our daily aspect. In fact, Berger's and Luckmann's theory on "Social Construction of Reality", is sharing the polarities between individual and social concept of reality in one hand, yet in another explaining distinctions that depicts subjective and objective reality. Moreover they too makes us aware of knowledge 'produced' by the people, and instantly embedded through institutional level. Obviously, Berger's and Luckmann's "The Social Construction of Reality" attempts to reminiscence on objective or subjective social concept on reality. As the discussion on social knowledge goes further, Berger and Luckmann describes the embodiment of the social knowledge in the phases of habitualization, institutionalization and legitimation. The threefold phase as described above depicts the legitimation of the knowledge itself and its intensifying character from social reality to the objective real. In this context, the paper relies on Berger's and Luckmann theory on Social Construction of Reality to clarify some of the theories of social knowledge and its legitimation as discussed also from other authors as well. Moreover, social construction of reality - or constructivism-, in history of ideas, is considered a very new social theory. In fact, by its subject, since it deals with theory of knowledge, it encompasses not only the individualistic and scientific point of view of the knowledge, but rather the knowledge conceived through interpersonal and social-interactions. Furthermore, constructivist theory goes back to the social theories of Husserl, Schultz, Heidegger, and especially to recent philosophers like Foucault and Habermas. Most of the 'constructivist' ideas brought by abovementioned philosophers in this regard are related to a theory which intends to undermine the individualistic epistemological system and to lead to 'consensus idea of reality'. The reality, herewith, it is not what subjectively contemplated into, but rather objectively 'shared' through intercommunication and in intersocial relations. Intercommunicative understanding of reality, thus, becomes a standard in which the societies build their understanding of different social behavior and practices. In its final analysis the paper will end up with the argument that the concept of reality it's differently stated in different practices in society having in mind the theories of objective and subjective reality as will be exposed in details in further chapters of the paper.

Keywords: Social Constructionism, Social Construction of Reality, Objective Reality, Subjective Reality.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE REALITY IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

The discussion on reality and its contexts it is differently stated among different philosophers. The discussion goes back to ancient Greece when Plato in his seventh book of the Republic gives details example how the knowledge of reality is built upon subjective self-constructed knowledge and of socially legitimation of it. As in the allegory of the Cave in Plato's Republic the three phases - from the imprisonment, departure and return to the cave - are symbolizing the turning route from subjective constructed reality to the objectively conceived reality. As Plato's symbolism is rich with the allegory of the cave, for our purposes we draw only the attention into the last phase when the illuminated person of the cave is sharing the reality with his fellow prisoners inside the cave. For our understanding, this momentum depicts the essential feature when subjectively constructed reality it becomes the social constructed knowledge. At the end of time, knowledge as experienced in subject becomes *knowable* to other subjects as well, thus the reality it is intensified in social constructed reality.

The above example is one of the many; however, contemporary discussion of the social constructed reality is quite different. Starting from Kant's and Hegel's idea of subjectively validation of the reality up to the modern contemporary discussions on Habermas' intercommunicative validation of the social knowledge, philosophical thesis on knowledge and reality were always been intertwined. Generally the main idea that encompasses the both philosophical stances (of subjectively constructed reality or intersocial validation of it) is put together in the view of discovering the origin of the real and the reality itself and for itself. Two above categories are main concern in philosophy. Reality for itself always has been socially constructed, while reality in itself subjectively validated. In order to leave this aberration we choose to discuss on Berger's and Luckmann's theory of social construction of reality where the ideas that arose in theirs book alternated the discussion in very constructive way.

According to the social constructivist theory of Berger and Luckmann, the concept of reality and knowledge need to be referred in philosophical terms and its pejorative meaning - or 'man of the street conception' as the book is generally refers²⁰¹. Thus 'reality' it is defined 'as a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition... and 'knowledge' as the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics²⁰². Social reality thereby, it is maintaining another epistemic concept of the reality, excluding the other respective rational or scientific theories about it. Being aware of the reality, according to Berger and is thereby having considered all deposited 'human 'knowledge' with is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations. Shifting the understanding of the reality from individual to social context enhances the re-identification of the social reality and its processes to the level that objectively manage the social issues and social knowledge as well.

Before Berger's and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, philosophical dimension of the Sociology of Knowledge dealt with epistemological and methodological aspects. Berger and Luckmann in this regard, concentrated their studies more on empirical and social aspect. Moreover they argue that the problem of 'ideas', including the special problem of ideology, constitutes only part of the larger problem of the sociology of knowledge, and not a central part at that. Therefore, empirical aspect of sociology of knowledge is its central part. This leads to examine the social ambience in empirical terms and studies. Social constructivism is method to underline the social consensus of knowledge, its habitualization and institutionalization. It is therefore important to stress the empirical aspect of human thought. Otherwise, as Berger and Luckmann, puts in, the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with everything that passes for 'knowledge' in society²⁰³.

2. SOCIAL REALITY: SOCIAL INTERACTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

From the first chapter of the book *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann are using the deductive method to bring the subject of social construction of the reality into its essence. Subject of Social Reality and similar, as we have seen in above-written paragraphs - it is having some slight difficulties in explanation if it were not the method used by Berger and Luckmann. Generally speaking, by social interaction and relations peoples share the 'what they knows' about social world, even the knowledge of this interaction herewith are set of maxims, values, beliefs, myths, and so on. Moreover, social interaction plays a major role in finding the differences or commonalities of the stances of the peoples. Starting from the point of face-to-face communication - other communication modalities are not excluded also - peoples are sharing not only theirs space and time, but theirs subjectivity, emotions, thoughts and so forth. Into this part of contact social subjects are becoming aware of two or more realities: his/her's reality and our 'inner reality'. These 'two realities' create a typification in which genesis are to be found in 'noun setting positions' of interaction.

As we derive from the beginning of Berger's and Luckmann's study, by conceiving ones 'reality' the social subjects are setting 'traditional noun position' to the person who is in front of our face, so to say, face-to-face situation. Under the position of such social interaction, subjects are assuming that typification is produced automatically. Moreover, from the given example study: 'the reality of everyday life contains typificatory schemes in terms of which others are apprehended and 'dealt with' in face-to-face encounters. Thus I (social subject – AM) apprehend the other as 'a man' 'a European', 'a buyer', 'a jovial type', and so on'²⁰⁴. The typification syndrome will exist until no 'strange' interaction is imposed. Typifications are becoming habitual and traditional beliefs, except of the typification changes are realized, and never disappear. Again, 'The social reality of everyday life is apprehended in a continuum of typifications, which are progressively anonymous as they are removed from the 'here and now' of the face-to-face situation'²⁰⁵.

In this direction, language as such, plays a very crucial role. Language not conceived only in phonological, but rather in offering 'set of thoughts', by which semantics or semiotic aspect can be reflected so. Then, in our everyday life social subjects are communicating with and by means of the language. The means are used to transcend the social subjects, otherwise, in social worlds of our understanding. Transcending our means, thoughts and ideas, it might mean transcending our subjectivities into common objective world - or Objectivity. The turning point from subjective reality to objective one is obvious in Berger and Luckmann's study.

²⁰¹ Berger and Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books, London, (1966)

²⁰² Ibid, pg. 13

²⁰³ Ibid, pg. 26

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pg. 45

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pg. 56

3. SOCIETY AS OBJECTIVE REALITY: `Symbolic Universes` AND `Universe Maintenance`

Society as objective reality is one of the subject in Berger`s and Luckmann`s theory of Social Construction of Reality. The authors maintain that society by its inter-subjectivity relation are creating a habits that each ideas, concepts or positions are traditionally settled as `social concepts`, or `social overview`. Accordingly, social concepts and social overview according to the authors, leads to habitualization, institutionalization, and then, the `symbolic universes` - as they refer to. Symbolic Universes, according to Berger and Luckmann are representing social experienced knowledge, and by its nature, are enabling to re-confirm the level of institutionalization of the set of social approved ideas, i.e. `the function of legitimation is to make objectively available and subjectively plausible the 'first-order' objectivizations that have been institutionalized`²⁰⁶. The `second order`, herewith, is about symbolic universes, thus legitimization of institutionalization process.

According to the authors, all human activity is subject to habitualization. This is a phase of social habitual intersocial understanding of reality. The legitimization in other hand in the `second order`, since integrating the meanings that already attached to institutional processes. In fact as authors notes: `Legitimation explains the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings`²⁰⁷. Moreover, the legitimization identifies not only the values of the things, but either its `knowledge` of the same. In this case, legitimization is to be understood as ethical imposition to everyday life of human beings. In this symmetry, legitimization process will pass through normative stances that will define the `right` and the `wrong` into the society. Again, legitimization imposes the reality of the things, by what and how should be conceived. Thus, as authors says: `legitimation has a cognitive as well as a normative element`.

Further, according to Berger and Luckmann, legitimization it is applied through levels, so that, from `pre-theoretical knowledge` to institutional order of traditional meanings. The `pre-theoretical knowledge` is the first level, which is defined as `foundation of self-evident knowledge`. The second level is theoretical, as referred to the human psychosocial development, proverbs, moral maxims and wise sayings are common on this level. Finally, the third level is related to very theoretical model of living, thus, contains explicit theories by which an institutional sector is legitimated in terms of a differentiated body of knowledge. When it comes to the symbolic universes, according to Berger and Luckmann, they constitute the fourth level of legitimation. In fact symbolic universes represents constituted meaning and `encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality`²⁰⁸. Again, symbolic universes, represent the very theoretical experience, or, `the symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of all socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings`²⁰⁹.

Except of above, metaphysical traditions and other value systems are part of the symbolic universe. The symbolic universe also orders history. It locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future. By what more definitions were listed from the Berger and Luckmann study, we might conclude that `symbolic universes` are having great impact on human thought and history, since the hierarchy of values and value meaning are depended on such `consensually accepted` ideas. Thus, it has an impact on human history as well, even though history is in `change` or in `motion`²¹⁰. As the human history is concerned, symbolic universes differs and they are fluidal. By the latter, we have in mind the changes that can or should be interfered in `set of beliefs and convictions`. These changes are in same time imposed while history is in generational or ideological substitution. In fact, new generation can/might have new `set of beliefs`, and the latter can overpass the `symbolic universes`, and to shift its axis to new `universe system`. So that, the first is succeed by the latter, and this process of re-institutionalization of knowledge, in Berger`s and Luckmann`s terms, is called `universe-maintenance`.

As an historical example, Berger and Luckmann, takes the `universe-maintenance` as applied to primitive societies, when mythological systems are `shifted` through theological thought, or with nowadays complex set of science which has secularized universe-maintenance. In addition the authors are predicting the following human consequences: `Modern science is an extreme step in this development, and in the secularization and sophistication of universe-maintenance. Science not only completes the removal of the sacred from the world of everyday life, but removes universe-maintaining knowledge as such from that world`²¹¹.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pg. 110

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pg. 111

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pg. 113

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pg. 114

²¹⁰ Kap, E.X., *Што е историја?*. Слово, Скопје, 2001, pg. 154

²¹¹ Berger and Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books, London, (1966), pg. 130

4. SOCIETY AS SUBJECTIVE REALITY: SOCIALIZATION PROCESS AND ITS MAINTENANCE

Understanding the society and its reality, according to Berger and Luckmann it means to conceive it in total. Except of objective reality, the society it is related also in human's subjectivity – or often subjectively managed. Accordingly, every member of society externalizes his/her own being into the social world and internalizes it as an objective reality. The latter is sensitizing the fact that three dialectical *momentums* are in ongoing process - externalization, objectivization and internalization²¹². The process above, as in Berger's and Luckmann's study, it is noticed as primary phase of socialization. In this stage, social subjects are impressed by an idea of objectified subjective relations, by the fact of internalization. In fact, according to Berger and Luckmann, every relations with an objects creates the immediate apprehension of same event, by expressing its meaning and creating the knowledge about otherness and others subjective reality. The latter presents the manifestation of another's subjective processes which thereby becomes subjectively meaningful.

The meaningfulness as stressed above lets us to understand that the subject in this phase has objectified the relation in society. Even some time the `knowledge` gained in internalization process can be objectively available, the main point is that the subjects has already created a *meaning* about otherity and otherness, whether or not is there congruence between two subjects. In addition, full congruence between the two subjective meanings, and reciprocal knowledge of the congruence, presupposes signification²¹³. The state of agreement between two subjects is reproducing the social contacts in real ontological terms. As our authors explained, the first phase dealt with an apprehension and cognitive process of socialization, while in the second understanding and objectifying the social subjective reality. Moreover, according to the Berger's and Luckmann's study, in this primary socialization process, the `social-contact` is not merely cognitive but also the emotional one. The latter makes us aware of `entity` relations between the subjects, or more precisely, like Berger and Luckmann says: 'It entails dialectics between identification by others and self-identification, between objectively assigned and subjectively appropriated identity'²¹⁴.

As we already understood, the primary socialization involved translating the roles and attitudes of specific others to roles and attitudes in general, thus, to the `generalized other`. When the `generalized other` it is crystallized in one's consciousness, a symmetrical relationship is established between objective and subjective reality. In this `translating` process, language is - of course - main tools which determines the socialization. While in primary socialization `base-world` knowledge is necessary - and in same time imposing it into subjective reality - then, in second socialization, according to Berger and Luckmann, it continues with `internalization of institutional or institution-based 'sub-worlds'²¹⁵. The latter phase is consequent to the first phase, which then, it is imposed with already `created` reality into the second socialization. This is important when we have in mind the `educational` process of ones being. The set of knowledge gained through first socialization is merely transported into second, but with the difference is that, in the second phase of socialization, internalization is related to the institutional `sub-worlds` or to the already legitimized `set of knowledge`. Moreover, the second socialization - in relation with the first one - establishes maintained consistency, or, as our authors have emphasized, secondary socialization presupposes conceptual procedures to integrate different bodies of knowledge.

Having minded that socialization is dialectical process, which presupposes that subjective reality it is in constant change, then, the societies in this dialectical process are creating `procedures` for maintenance and transformation of subjective reality in order to insure the symmetry between objective and subjective reality. The latter will insure conceptual congruence between objective and subjective reality, even though socialization can be overcome to re-socialization process. In fact, since society is subjected to modification of subjective reality, then this kind of alternation requires re-socialization, which according to Berger and Luckmann, `must radically reassign reality accents and resembles primary socialization by replicating the strongly affective identification with role models`²¹⁶.

5. CONCLUSION

The theory of Berger and Luckmann of Social Construction of Reality, is considered a very new approach to sociology of knowledge and sociology in general. Berger and Luckmann, have developed methodological approach to `different perspective on a number of specific areas of sociological interest`; raising thus further questions in social sciences in general. Theirs definitions on social reality, individual role in society, dialectical process of embodiment of objective and subjective reality or the concept of objectivization, institutionalization and legitimation are presented in very

²¹² Ibid., 149

²¹³ Ibid., pg.150

²¹⁴ Ibid., pg. 152

²¹⁵ Ibid., pg 158

²¹⁶ Ibid., pg 176

extensive manner. According their main objectives, their study considers the linkage between Durkheim's school and the recent sociological issues. In fact, by its conclusions *The Social Construction of Reality* underlines that sociology of knowledge presupposes the sociology of language, and that the sociology of knowledge without the sociology of religion is impossible. Religion here and language as such are considered main elements of human history and human 'set of beliefs' of 'set of knowledge'. The latter refers us also to new epistemological approach in Berger's and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge.

As it comes to their understanding of human nature of social system in general, they developed hereby new approach by redefining the 'interrelations between institutional processes and the legitimating symbolic universes' thus 'alarming' the academic opinion that social phenomena is not to be analyzed by purely structural sociology because it confronts the law of universe, even though is 'assigning to its constructs merely heuristic status'²¹⁷.

In this symmetry, theirs sociology of knowledge is not intended to defend the empirical approach, which in contemporary world is often – as in Berger's and Luckmann's word - obscured in terms of 'secularization', of a 'scientific age', of 'mass society', or, conversely, of the 'autonomous individual', of the 'discovery of the unconscious', and so forth. Rather, sociology of knowledge is to intensify the reality of social studies and to make aware of the fact that sociology considers the phenomenon of human being as very specific and its 'totality of personality'²¹⁸.

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²¹⁷ Ibid., pg. 208

²¹⁸ Бергаев, Н., *За човековото робство и слобода*. Култура, Скопје, 1995, pg. 26