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CASTLING.
A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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> «*These animals, which are vulgarly called suits of clothes, or dressed, do according to certain compositions receive different appellations. If one of them be trimmed up with a gold chain, and a red gown, and a white rod, and a great horse, it is called a Lord-Mayor; if certain ermines and furs be placed in a certain position, we style them a Judge, and so an apt conjunction of lawn and black satin we entitled a Bishop*».

> (Jonathan Swift)

0. *Five levels of description of an institutional act.*

0.1 Many philosophers find intuitively plausible the belief that there are rule-constituted *activities*.[1] A paradigmatic case of a rule-constituted activity is that of the *game of chess*.

Yet, the idea that *victory* in a rule-constituted game is not itself a rule-constituted fact may be less obvious.[2]

I shall explain such a thesis about victory in the following way: it is true that in games there can be constitutive rules *on* victory, but it is false that there can be constitutive rules *of* victory.

Let us consider the game of chess. The following rule of chess:

The game is *won* by the player who has checkmated his opponent's king,

is a constitutive rule *on* victory. It determines the *extension* of the term 'victory' in the game of chess (since it poses a sufficient condition of victory), but it

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[1] The idea that there are rules which create new possibilities of action is due to the Polish legal philosopher Czesław Znamierowski (1924). (Cf. Gregorowicz 1960, 17 and Lorini 2000, 69-81.)
After Znamierowski, and independently of him, the intuition that there are activities that are constituted by rules also appears in John Rawls (1955), John R. Searle (1964), Alf Ross (1968) and Amedeo G. Conte (1981).
[2] The fact that a player has won at chess is structurally different from the fact that a player has checkmated his opponent. While the constitutive rules do constitute the concept of checkmate, they do not constitute the concept of victory.

does not determines the *intension* of the term 'victory'. It says nothing about what victory (in fact) is.

0.2. From the question whether *victory in a rule-constituted game* is itself constituted by the constitutive rules of that game, we should distinguish the question whether the *ludicity* (or *game-character*) *of a rule-constituted activity* is itself constituted by the constitutive rules of that activity.

In order to answer this second question, I shall consider a very simple phenomenon: a castling in the game of chess. As we know, castling is an institutional act: it is an act which is constituted by the constitutive rules of chess (Cf. Searle 1964 and 1969).

Now, with regard to such an institutional act, I ask myself: how many levels of description of castling are there?[3]

I would suggest that we can distinguish between *five* levels of description of castling:

(i) a *pre-semiotic* level,
(ii) a *syntactic* level,
(iii) a *semantic* level,
(iv) a *pragmatic* level,[4]
(v) an *idiographic* level.

According to this idea, a castling can be the object of five (categorially different) types of description. Let us examine each of these five levels of description in turn.

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[3] A similar question has been addressed by John R. Searle (1969). Searle distinguishes between two different kinds of description of an institutional fact: a description *in brute terms* and a description *in institutional terms*. The description in brute terms of an institutional fact does not refer to the constitutive rules of the fact. For example, we can describe a chess *move* as a certain *movement* of a piece of wood with a certain shape and a certain weight. The description in institutional terms relies on the constitutive rules of the fact. According to Searle, only at this level of description we can describe a certain fact in an American football game as a touchdown.
[4] I am here using the language of Charles William Morris (1938).

1. *First level of description of an institutional act: pre-semiotic level.*

In the first place, a castling can be described *in terms of thing-language* (cf. Morris 1938 and Carnap 1936), i. e. *in pre-semiotic terms*.

For example, we could describe a castling as the movement (performed by an agent) of two pieces of wood on a wooden black and white squared surface.[5]

A description of castling in terms of thing-language is a true description, but ignores the specific nature of castling: it ignores what castling (in fact) is.

To achieve a more suitable description of castling, we have to pursue a description in syntactic terms.[6]

2. *Second level of description of an institutional act: syntactic level.*

In the second place, a castling can be described *in merely syntactic terms*.

In merely syntactic terms, a castling can be described as a token of an act-type which is constituted by the constitutive rules of chess (namely, of the act-type: castling).

Unlike the description in pre-semiotic terms, the description in syntactic terms relies on the constitutive rules of chess.

The description in syntactic terms is more suitable than the description in pre-semiotic terms: it represents the meaning of castling, but it does not represent the meaning of a move of chess.

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[5] Another case of description of an institutional act in terms of thing-language is the description of the act of making a withdrawal from a bank. This example is given by Maurice Mandelbaum (1955, 307-308). Mandelbaum imagines attempting to explain to an inhabitant of the Trobriand Islands the societal fact of the withdrawal of money from a bank in terms of assertions referring exclusively to the thoughts and actions of individuals. By means of this thought-experiment, Mandelbaum reveals how the description of a societal fact like withdrawing money from a bank by means of *statements concerning the actions of individuals* is not a hermenutically adequante description. According to Mandelbaum (1955, 309), *statements* concerning societal facts are not reducible to a conjunction of statements concerning the actions of individuals.

[6] Alf Ross (1953, 210) distinguishes between the mere *movement* of a piece in the space [*rumlig omplacering*] and the chess *move* [*skaktræk*]. According to Ross, the rules of chess are what enable us to interpret a movement as a move.

3. *Third level of description of an institutional act: semantic level.*

In the third place, a castling can be described *in semantic terms*.

A castling can be described (not as a token of a rule-constituted act-type of castling, but) as a moment of the activity constituted by the constitutive rules of chess (the rule-constituted activity of chess).

Like the description in syntactic terms, the description in semantic terms relies on the constitutive rules of chess. However, the description in semantic terms is more suitable than the description in syntactic terms: it says that castling belongs to the activity which is constituted by the constitutive rules of chess (the rule-constituted activity of chess).

The description in semantic terms, however, does not capture the pragmatic status of that activity (to which castling belongs) that is constituted by rules.

4. *Fourth level of description of an institutional act: pragmatic level.*

4.1. *In the fourth place*, a castling can be described *in pragmatic terms*.

A castling can be described (neither as a token of a rule-constituted act-type of castling, nor as a moment of the rule-constituted activity of chess, but) as a moment of the performance of a *game* (as opposed, for instance, to a rite, a duel or a Christian mass).

4.2. The description in pragmatic terms describes castling as a *ludic* behaviour. Like the descriptions in syntactic terms and in semantic terms, it relies on rules. Yet we cannot argue from (the knowledge of) the constitutive rules that castling is a ludic act.

The ludicity of the rule-constituted activity of chess is not determined by the costitutive rules of such an activity.[7]

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[7] The first philosopher to notice that the constitutive rules of a rule-constituted activity do not determine the ludicity (or game character) of the activity that they themselves constitute, was Hubert Schwyzer. With regard to chess, Schwyzer (1969, 464) writes: "That chess is a game is in no way a *rule* of the game."

Unlike the descriptions in syntactic terms and in semantic terms, the description in pragmatic terms not only relies on the rules of chess, but also presupposes the knowledge of what a game is and the knowledge that chess is a game (and not a rite, a duel or a mass).[8]

4.3. We have considered four different levels of description of a castling (the pre-semiotic level, the syntactic level, the semantic level, the pragmatic level). At the pre-semiotic level, castling is described in terms of thing-language as the movement of two pieces in space. At the syntactic level, castling is described as a token of a type which is constituted by the rules of chess: namely, castling. At the semantic level, castling is described as a move of the rule-constituted activity of chess. At the pragmatic level, castling is described as a piece of ludic behavior (or game behavior). However, a description of castling in its individuality is still needed.

5. *Fifth level of description of an institutional act: idiographic level.*

In the fifth place, a castling can be described in *idiographic terms*, i.e. as "the individual, the *ídion*, in its individuality" (Conte 1986, 52).

In order to grasp the idiographic description, let us imagine that two people are observing a game of chess between Karpov and Kasparov. Karpov castles and one of the two observers asks: What has Karpov done? The other answers: A castling. The first observer replies: Yes, but what has he done? The second answers: He has begun an offensive.

In order to show that we cannot deduce the pragmatic status of the rule-constituted activity of chess simply from its constitutive rules, Schwyzer elaborates an ingenious thought-experiment: he imagines a country (Ruritania) in which the activity constituted by the constitutive rules of chess is not a game, but a religious ritual.

A similar case is described by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1983, 46). Lévi-Strauss describes the case of the Gahuku-Gama people from New Guinea "who have learnt football, but who play over successive days as many games as is necessary exactly to balance the number of games won and the number of games lost by each side". They consider "a *game* as a *rite*".

[8] If you do not know what games are, you cannot understand what the game of chess is, even if you know the rules of chess very well. A similar kind of impossibility is described in a short story by Jorge Luis Borges: *La busca de Averroes*. In this short story, Borges tells us about an impossible research project, that of Averroës. Averroës tried to translate the *Poetics* of Aristotle. But since he was closed within the borders of Islamic culture, and he did not know theatre, he could not understand the meaning of the terms 'tragedy' and 'comedy'.

This second answer, which describes the castling performed by Karpov as an offensive move (as opposed, for instance, to a defensive move), is an idiographic description.

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