On the varieties of 'counting as'

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In the second chapter of the *Categories* Aristotle is studying two overlapping classifications of things and their mutual relations. There are things, he says, which are said of other things and there are things that are not said of other things. Then, there are things that are in other things as in their subjects as well as those that are not in any things as in their subjects. From this two-fold classification, an 'ontological square' can be derived:

Things that are said of other things and are in other things as in their subjects	Things that are said of other things but are not in other things as in their subjects
Things that are not said of other things, yet are in other things as in their subjects	Things that neither are said of other things nor are said of other things as of their subjects

From this, all kinds of interesting conclusions can be derived, and much of Western metaphysics is based on this classification. But another use of this Aristotelian study is a deepening of our understanding of the pivotal relations of 'being said of something' and 'being in something as in one's subject'.

Now, a pivotal concept of Searle's social philosophy is that of 'counting as'. X counts as Y in context Z, is, he says, the basic matrix of most social institutions which are created by people's mental acts as it were out of nothing, or with a very meagre input. Now the problem is that the semantics of that expression 'count as', and hereby also its ontology, is far from clear. The expression is difficult to translate in other languages—in Italian '*avere valore di*' (Conte school), '*essere, venire considerato*' (myself), in Polish '*być poczytywanym z*a', '*być uważanym za*' and similar—all such expressions are in no way quite adequate and have obscurities and difficulties of their own. In German, for instance, one tempting possibility is to translate the expressions with the extremely important verb '*gelten*': *gilt als*. But '*gilt als*' can also mean 'passes for' which is not what is intended here: Searle certainly *counts as*, but does not *pass for*—and least of all *passes himself off as*—one of present-day's greatest American philosophers. Similarly, 'counting as' is not always the same as 'being considered'; for instance, the defendant counts as innocent until proven guilty, but certainly is not always really considered innocent (otherwise he would not have been defendant)—in the contrary, he is considered *suspect*.

This 'counts as' is a kind of copula, *verbum substantivum,* except that it does not express the substantive mode of being, much rather an accidental one; so it would matter a lot to find out just which accidental mode of being it does express. Interestingly enough, little as there is to be compared with it in contemporary European languages, there is one in the Classical Chinese, the language of Confucius and the other sages: 曰, *yuē,* which most often means just 'says'[1] but sometimes acquires a copula-like meaning, similar to our 'counts as'. This may not be an accident, given that the Classical Chinese philosophy was decidedly centred on things social, to which 'counts as' also belongs.

But things that count as other things in all kinds of contexts need not *be* actual fact (and still less: be necessarily) the things that they count as—at least not in the context in question; instead, they can *just* count as so being.

This gives rise to another fourfold classification:

(1A) Things that count as other things (in various context) and are those other things in those very contexts[2]	(1B) Things that count as other things (in various context) but are not those other things in those very contexts
(2A) Things that do not count as other things (in various context), yet are those other things in those very contexts	(2B) Things that neither count nor are some other things in certain contexts

As for (1A), clearly, there are good many things that belong to this category. For instance, most Polish citizens *are* by hypothesis Polish citizens and at the same time *count as* Polish citizens.

As for (2B), again, there are many things that belong here, too. For instance, quaint elderly ladies *do not (or no longer) count* as witches (at least not to the point at which it would seem advisable to burn them at stake) and, at the same time, they *are not* witches (or so we hope, at least), either.

The two remaining categories are far less obvious, however.

For certain reasons I prefer to start form class (2A), that is to say, from things that are certain other things but do not count as such (at least not in all contexts.)

In the academic world a particularly nasty type of cases belonging here are those in which our academic degrees, titles, and other qualifications, though duly and lawfully acquired, are not acknowledged in a different country or a different academic system. (Once they are acknowledged,

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[1] So writings of Chinese sages are full of phrases starting with '子曰', '*zǐ yuē*', or 'The Master says, the Master has said' (there are no tenses in Chinese).

[2] Here our square diverges from the Aristotelian ontological square. Within the latter, things could be said about one thing and be in another; for instance, fair complexion could be said of Socrates and be in his skin; here, the matter is whether things *are* the very *same* things as those they count as.

they usually are acknowledged as that which they are, for instance, a PhD acquired in Bulgaria or Peru, but a PhD nonetheless, not a PhD acquired in Poland or Italy; this rebuts, or at least blocks, the objection that what is not acknowledged is the title or qualification acquired in the country in which it is not acknowledged. Certainly, a Peruvian PhD is not acknowledged in Italy as an Italian PhD, but then, it *is* not an Italian PhD... .) This is, on first blush, a clear case of simply ignoring facts, or 'turning a blind eye' on things patent; yet, in social reality epistemology is very tightly interwoven with ontology, so that you—as George Orwell once put it[3]—no longer can say which is man and which is pig, or rather, which is and which merely counts as; you are tempted to say that the very acknowledgement of a fact (for instance, that John is a Peruvian PhD holder, and hereby also a PhD holder purely and simply) by a civil servant creates that very fact. To a tough-minded ontological realist like myself more appealing is the alternative which consists in saying that the fact is there independently of whether a civil servant acknowledges it or not, but that it (the fact) does not have diverse social consequences before he (the servant) acknowledges it.

Another class of cases in point are various rights and entitlements: We are entitled to various things, say allowances or reductions, but we may not count as such—that is, as entitled—if we cannot produce—not just evidence, but a special sort of evidence on the spot. For instance, in Gdańsk public transportation vehicles senior citizens need pay no fare, (100 pc fare reduction, as it were), but a ticket control officer wishes to see your ID even if you look very senior. I have been in situations where an officer pretended he could not tell a ten-year-old from a sixteen-year-old (for cases where not senior, but very junior citizens are *qua* such entitled to something or other); he pretended that quite absurd thing because no suitable ID was to hand. The obvious way out is to say that in such a case, one is entitled to something or other not *qua* seniors, juniors or what not, but *qua* such *cum* producible evidence. But this is not at all plausible, so I shall not even discuss it.

Quite often, something being something else but not counting as it is a matter of feeble epistemological powers. We are simply not in the position to recognise something for what it truly is, the awareness that it is that thing has not gained currency—perhaps never will—and so X is Y in context Z without counting as such. But in other cases it is not intellect, but will, which fails to exercise its proper function. Tolstoi, Dickens, yea, even Theodor Fontane, not to mention Henry James counted and still count as great novelists, yet Simone de Beauvoir in her *Journals* remembers how her grandfather, a passionate, not to say fanatical, partisan of all things French, had theatrically refused to acknowledge these writers as great and to genuflect to their greatness. 'You ought to humble yourself before a Tolstoi or a Dickens', she kept telling him; 'I will not!' he would respond.

Then, there is class (1B), things that count, it is true, as something or other in various contexts but are not that which they count as, or at least not without qualifications. The question which has always puzzled me is

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[3]In his 'Animal Farm'.

whether there be any natural limits to things counting as something else without being it. Clearly, a whale cannot, by itself and without further ado, 'count' as a hummingbird, nor can a hummingbird 'count' as a Member of Parliament. Yet, on the other hand, next to everything can count as a chess bishop, for instance, as I myself argued in my first essay on constitutive rules. It shall, therefore, be useful to inspect various groups of cases more closely.

There seem to be several groups of cases here.

There are cases where the X in question is not Y (as which it counts), but in various ways is either similar or in some other fashion 'close' (topology for philosophers) to being a Y. It seems, then, that the X in question can be called a 'Y' by either meddling with the intension of 'Y', or extending its extension a little. For instance, various countries (no names shall be named here) count as democratic even though they are not democratic in the substantial meaning of the term, but for different reasons are such that this predicate can be stretched so as to cover them. One of such reasons is that democratic procedures are, from a purely formal point of view, flawlessly applied there. Or maybe because one wishes to make them democratic by pretending they are democratic already. Another example are 'states' such as the Church State: it is not a real state, but it is considered as such, it counts as such, again, for rather complex, and partly historical, reasons. (The Republic of China—not People's—by contrast, is a real state but it is recognised as such by a decreasing number of states, one of which is, ironically, The Holy See—this belongs to the former group, (1B).) Furthermore, Mexico counts as a South American country even though it most clearly is not, being on all counts a North American one. But for various reasons it is not only feasible but also advisable to stretch the predicate 'South American country' so as to cover Mexico. It also both *counts as* and *is* a Latin American country (Class (1A)). Should Quebec, by contrast, one day become a sovereign State, it would remain to be seen whether it would count as a Latin American country, and if it would, it would still remain debatable if it really *be* one.

In great many other cases, however, X counts as Y in context Z even if it is not Y by itself, yet—as distinct from the former case—not because it does not have all definitory properties of Y, but because the term Y is semantically vague, i. e., we do not know what these 'definitory properties' (if any) are supposed to be in all cases. For instance, the racial predicate 'white' is inherently vague. It has, no doubt, 'focal cases' of application, as much as those of non-application, but it has all to many border- and transitory cases where we are not certain how to apply it and if there is at all any 'truth of the matter' to go by, in the first place. For this reason it is useful, if one is at all interested in the application of various racial predicates, to lay down by *fiat* (Barry Smith) that certain human beings should count as white and certain others should not. Curiously, in the Republic of South Africa, in the times when it still was officially racist, not only all Syrians counted as white (independently of how fair or swarthy they were, but then, Syrians are seldom very swarthy), but so did also the Japanese, which, however, does not fall under the present consideration.

In all cases belonging either to class (1B) or (2A) there is a role to be played by the *will*. (Mentioned by Francesca in this Symposium.) One must decide whether to include X in the extension of the term 'Y' and start counting X as a Y, (say, Mexico as a South-American country) or, in the second sub-class of cases, one must decide where to draw the line dividing Whites from Non-Whites and so on. But this is not to say that one is bound to proceed wilfully; in the contrary, quite often similar decisions are taken on the basis of various subtle considerations, involving weighing pragmatic and other reasons, such as for instance, in the South African case mentioned above, the socio-occupational belonging of both Syrians and the Japanese. Should Quebec one day become an independent nation, we shall wait and see if it strikes us as 'rather like' or 'rather unlike' most Latin American countries to extend to it, or to not extend, that predicate which it deserved if language were the sole criterion. But particularly tricky are cases where the fact that something *is not* a something else enters into those consideration that lead up to counting it as that which it *is not.* An alinea of the German constitution states that:

> Former German citizens who between January 30, 1933 and May 8 1945, were deprived of their citizenship for political, racial or religious reasons, and their descendants, shall be re- granted German citizenship on application. They are considered as not having been deprived of their German citizenship if they have established their domicile in Germany after May 8, 1945 and have not expressed a contrary intention (Art. 116, alinea 2.)

Ex-German citizens may, if they so wish, have their citizenship restored, and from then on they count as those who have never been deprived of their German citizenship, that is, they count as something they are *not.* It is easy to surmise—given all we know about German history in the relevant period—that they count so *not despite of*, but, much rather, exactly *because of* the fact that they are *not* that which they count as, i. e. those who have never been deprived of their German citizenship.

A somewhat similar, and at the same a very dissimilar case is known from Poland, where a Statute requires that certain foreigners shall be treated as Polish citizens if there exist 'justified presumption' that they have in the past been Polish citizens. If the Statute is strictly adhered to, which it often is, the non-Polish citizens in question count as Polish citizens. In this case, X-es, that is, human beings and non-Polish nationals at that, count as something which they are not but which they once (possibly) were. Why do they? Well, among other things, because the Polish Republic wishes to avenge, as it were, its supposed former citizens' faithlessness and not just *despite* they no longer are, but *exactly because* they no longer are its citizens subjects them to fiscal and bureaucratic harassment by exacting various fees, fines, and what not from them.

Such are the vicissitudes of what is and what counts as.

Then, there is yet another sub-class of things that count as other things yet are not those other things (our class (1B)) in certain contexts. It is the class of X-es that count as Y and are not Y not because they in some way fail to

have the right (definitory) properties, or because these properties are only vaguely defined, but simply because there are no Y's at all (nothing is a Y) *save those that the rule in question itself creates*. The attack on a chess-king from which the king cannot (by any legal move) escape 'counts as' check-mate, and is *not* check-mate (prior to its being laid down that it should so count) simply because there is no check-mate at all: nothing is check-mate. The formula 'the attack on a chess-king from which the king cannot withdraw is check-mate' creates check-mate, which henceforth exists, and in a very well-defined fashion. The thing called 'check-mate', once defined in the way described, is such that nothing---due to the clarity of the rule---will 'count as' it without *being it* at the same time.

Here the text sort of peters out, rather anticlimactically, there shall be more stuff here not exceeding the time limits, though.