

## DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC “Ethics of Institutional Beliefs”

Reflection over the ways of existence of social institutions is not common. A folk belief held by ordinary people seems to be that social institutions, in particular legal institutions, exist similarly to natural kinds, which are the main components of the furnishings of the world. Law is ultimately a paradigm of the institution which the Average Joe needs to struggle with, but, in the same time, has a little influence on.

Social institutions are social artefacts, which means they exist primarily because people bring them to life by acting and judging in a collective way. In the realistic theories of institutions it is assumed that social (legal) institutions are mind-independent only in a weak sense. Although they exist independently of the beliefs of individuals, their existence depends on the collective beliefs concerning their content, structure and way of functioning. The very fact that the existence of institutions depends on a specific type of conventional, collective human decision distinguishes them from natural kinds (eg. tigers, H<sub>2</sub>O etc.). That means that the beliefs collectively shared fulfil under certain conditions a performative role: without them, social institutions would not begin to exist in the first place.

The existence of commonly shared beliefs of a certain type (so-called mutual knowledge, common beliefs, shared beliefs, reflexive beliefs) has been recognized by social ontologists (such as J. Searle, R. Tuomela, and M. Gilbert) as one of the necessary conditions for the existence of social institutions. However, rarely (if never) they have asked the questions about epistemic (cognitive) and ethical criteria that such beliefs ought to fulfil. It should be noted that so-called evidentialism assumes that holding unjustified beliefs is a cognitive and moral error (eg. it leads to excessive credulity of others). Hence, it is justified to ask about the cognitive status and justification of beliefs which are focused on the constitution of social institutions and which are not true at the moment when they are held. This problem develops differently in case of beliefs that are focused only on description of existing institutions.

As a part of the project, various ontological concepts determining the conditions of existence of social (legal) institutions will be explored, including detailed analysis of the conditions that should be met in order to establish social institutions. Furthermore, the ethical and epistemological thresholds (level of conviction, credence) necessary for the emergence of the performative effects will be defined for individual and collective beliefs. The hypothesis says that these thresholds may vary depending on the type of theory and institution, but it still requires a more thorough check. Research project will also determine the importance of the claims and justifications presented by various (normative) political theories for the ethical and epistemic status of beliefs.

The project will result in a comprehensive theory of ethics of institutional beliefs. Such a theory has not been developed yet, despite the fact that certain threads related to the ethical-epistemic status of beliefs are scattered in the rich literature within theory of social institutions, legal theory, and political philosophy.