

CPR FORUM RESPONSE

Multiple Routes to Conceptual Consistency

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Yes, we need some degree of conceptual consistency to communicate and make sense of our findings. Terms and concepts used in a theory must be well defined, leaving little confusion. Mathematics excels in this area. A definition in mathematics can use only those other terms that are already defined. Yet, in this rigorous exercise, mathematicians eventually reach a stage, where certain terms cannot be further defined. Individuals understand 'primitive terms' privately, as something out there. Still, terms and concepts in mathematics are shared with little confusion.

Conceptual clarity in mathematics owes to the method of definition, one that builds from the basics. In CPR studies, conceptualisation of common property was obtained in the same way, by building from primitive terms like excludability and subtractability. Primitive terms and notions are limited; one may not find a suitable one for a concept, in several disciplines. Those used in the definition of common property were essentially terms borrowed from Law. While congratulating Poteete for drawing attention to a vital issue of analysis, I also record my point of difference. Refinement of concepts within a discipline may assist development of concepts and consensus within another discipline. Participation of scholars from many different disciplines is an asset for attaining conceptual clarity, not a source of confusion.

Construction of definitions from the basic concepts is a must. But is this the only way to arrive at consensus? Different terms follow different trajectories in the process of attaining clarity. I will explain it by analysing the likely course for a few terms that Poteete cites, terms that feature prominently in current debates, and yet are used to refer to very different things. Conceptualisation of community has a very long history, dating back to late nineteenth century, e.g. Toennies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). By now we have a rich body of definitions in sociology, trying to catch up with increasing complexities of real communities. CPR studies will benefit in this area from conceptual works using sociological understanding.

Participation is a different kind of concept. It is a primitive term that exists there, and range from 'short public meetings to describe official policies' to 'repeated meetings with local residents to discern local concerns and develop strategies for addressing them through local initiative'. For pragmatic purpose nominal participation may be excluded from the technical meaning of the term.

This would require a convention. Forests for example, are defined as those with some minimum crown cover etc. following conventions adopted by agencies like International Geosphere Biosphere Project or FAO. Conceptualising plurality as a unity is an altogether different kind of challenge. Cantor named it a 'set'. Mathematicians found that there are two ways of specifying a set. One is listing of all elements and the other is by its characteristic property: as $\{1, 2, 3, 4 \dots 9\}$ or as $\{x: x \text{ is all single digit positive integers}\}$. The second approach cannot be used in such cases where there is no readily identifiable characteristic property, e.g. for a set $\{1, 27, 31, 104, 9\}$. The people or the knowledge referred to as indigenous can be enlisted with some precision. But there is no readily identifiable characteristic property of this set, i.e. a property which is satisfied by each deserving community or knowledge and by none else. Complete listing is the only way to avoid confusion until we find an alternative term that fits the history and description of just these objects, people and knowledge but none else.

Meanings of terms change over time. Linguists identify various ways of occurrence of such changes. Globalization is a changing concept. Apart from its dictionary meaning it has also a popular connotation - Scholte noted as many as five in the common usage of the term. The connotation of globalization may, in due course, become its meaning (denotation). The process of evolution is spontaneous and conscious efforts may not make much difference.

One size does not fit all. We have to be open to varieties of approaches. Besides, some changes are spontaneous. Wherever possible, initiatives must be taken to attain conceptual clarity. Add to it the watchdog duty. New entities that would dilute concepts gaining no analytical strength by sharing CPR platform, may seek access. Analytical work preventing such entry would favour conceptualisation. Few of us had noticed the inconsistency in 'information commons' before Prof. Poteete made it clear.

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