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Defining realism in social ontology

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Introduction

Social ontology studies first-order metaphysical questions about social reality. It studies, for example, the nature and existence of group agents, of social kinds related to race, gender, class and disability, of institutions like money or marriage, of organisations like FIFA or the United Nations, and more generally it inquires into the nature of social facts, properties, and relations. Here are some good questions social ontologists ask about entities in any of these categories: Are the entities irreducible to their constituent parts? Are they grounded in something more fundamental? Are they somehow dependent on human minds - are they constructed, conferred, projected? Are they ultimately eliminable? Does talking about them actually refer to anything? Should we take them into account in providing causal explanations, in seeking normative guidance in the social world, or when we engage in social criticism?

In this paper, we are not concerned with debates on these substantive first-order questions. We are interested in the second-order question as to *what counts as realism* in social ontology. Our aim is to make progress with regard to how realism in social ontology should be defined and what defending it requires.

Rival definitions of 'realism' are more or less independent from substantive answers to different first-order questions. Two authors may agree in their answer to a first-order question - for instance, they may agree that social kinds like gender are

mind-dependent - but disagree on whether this commitment marks their view as realist (or in this case, anti-realist). Conversely, two authors may agree which second-order question targets the mark of realism - for instance, that realism about group agents consists in claiming that they are irreducible to their individual members - but disagree as to what is the correct answer to the respective first-order question whether group agents are reducible or irreducible (cf. the section "Two debates about realism," below).

Our overall aim then is to map and assess rival usages of 'realism' in social ontology. We set in by proposing definitions of a variety of realisms (and, by implication, anti-realisms) in social ontology, and thereby seek to structure present debates. We first introduce four guiding questions which we use to expound a new systematic way of mapping four kinds of realism and four corresponding kinds of anti-realism. (Cf. the section "A basic map of realisms and anti-realisms," below)

We then turn to argue which of the four proposed definitions of realism would be most appropriate in social ontology. We first discuss irreducibility or non-redundancy as a definition of realism, making three points. We point out that the distinction between 'really real' and 'real' may be hard to defend; that fundamentality as a definition of realism would consider all things social to be unreal; and that while causal and normative relevance are the main motivation to argue that things can be mind-dependent but real, independent arguments would be needed for the case that that causally inert or epiphenomenal entities do not exist at all, or do not 'really exist' at all.[1] Thus, we argue that while X's causal efficacy is a good reason to believe that X is real, it need not be a special definition of what it is to be real. Then, in the next section, we take a closer look at variations, degrees and kinds of mind-independence. We shall suggest that some forms of mind-dependence are more clearly anti-realist than others. Subsequently, we shift the focus to the more minimal realism characterised as cognitivist success theory, and argue that it is the best definition of realism for social ontology. (The second best is non-redundancy understood as causal and normative relevance, but it is better conceived as a reason to believe something is real, rather than a definition of what it is to be real). Mere cognitivism seems too minimal. (Cf. the subsections under "contested issues" below). The final section presents the conclusions.

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[1] Causality is often regarded as a mark of being real. If something makes a causal difference in the world, we have reason to think it is real. Arguably, normativity can be regarded as analogous to causality in this respect: if something makes a normative difference, we have reason to think it is real. For example, there is real oppression. The analogy does not do central work in this paper, nor do we argue for it, but we occasionally mention normativity side by side with causality to draw attention to the possible analogy. We thank an anonymous referee for a comment on this.

Two debates about realism

The aim of this section is to highlight the difference between two kinds of disagreements: one kind of disagreement or debate concerns substantive questions in social ontology (say, is race something socially constructed?) and the other kind of disagreement concerns the meta-debate about realism (say, is social constructivism about race a form of anti-realism?). The substantive debates, as we elaborate in the first subsection, target first-order issues concerning the nature and status of social entities. The meta-debate to which we turn in the second subsection and the rest of the paper is about what warrants labelling a view taken within a substantive debate as 'realist.'

Some substantive debates in social ontology

Before turning to rival definitions of realism, it will be helpful to demonstrate that the first-order questions cited in popular definitions of realism are genuine questions at the heart of substantive social ontological debates. In outlining four such debates, we shall use 'race' and 'group beliefs' as examples.

(1) Views that would be analogous to instrumentalism in philosophy of science or non-cognitivism in metaethics, would not take race-talk or group-belief-talk at face value. They would hold that 'even if race is an illusion, racial discourse might serve some important interests.' (Glasgow 2008, 11).[2] Most emancipatory race activists agree that literally there are no biological races, but race-talk is nonetheless called for by the aim of correcting past injustices. In the same vein, Daniel Dennett (1987), Raimo Tuomela (2013) or Deborah Tollefsen (2015) may think it is possible and for normative or explanatory purposes important to relate to groups as if they are believers, while thinking that they are not literally agents or subjects of intentional attitudes. In general, instrumentalism or non-cognitivism would hold that the point of race-talk or group-belief-talk is not to describe reality: it may be useful for certain purposes, but talking in these ways is merely instrumental and does not commit one to thinking there are races, or group beliefs. It may be useful for addressing existing oppression or for holding collectives responsible, but on this kind of view the discourse is not to be taken literally. It is taken to be metaphysically non-committal because the respective language is to be interpreted non-cognitively or instrumentally. In physics, one may regard talk about 'centre of gravity', or 'holes', or 'quantum strings' as instrumentally useful even while thinking such theoretical entities do not exist. And in social science, one can hold that socio-economic structures are similarly only theoretical entities. It is fair to say that

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[2]   Pace Charles Mills (1998, 49), who seems to think there are no non-cognitivists about race.

such instrumentalist or non-cognitivist views are widespread in various branches of philosophy, in philosophy of science including the philosophy of the social sciences as well as in metaethics. And it is a position that can be taken in metaphysics and social ontology, too, albeit one that assigns only a secondary role to metaphysical commitments. Unsurprisingly, many do not take this line but hold that race-talk or group-belief-talk - or the talk of holes or social structures - is to be taken literally, i.e. they advocate non-instrumentalism or cognitivism.

(2) But even if one adopts a non-instrumentalist or cognitivist view, there is room for further debate. Understanding the respective discourses in this way does not answer the questions whether there *are* races or group beliefs. It is possible to hold that race-talk is literal and descriptive but that there are no races, and likewise for group-belief-talk and group beliefs. This amounts to eliminativism concerning races and group beliefs, and to error theory concerning the talk or theorising about them. As Haslanger (2012, 198) notes, error theories about race are common.[3] Similarly, a garden variety individualist would hold that there are no group minds and *a fortiori* no group beliefs.[4] Whereas non-cognitivism need not advocate the abolishing of all talk about race or group belief, eliminativism is likely to come with that advice (see Glasgow 2008, 114). Eliminativists may argue that there have been inappropriately racialised groups, and there may be stringent duties of restorative justice towards them, but that it is a massive mistake to think that there are races. Behind all race-talk (or talk about group beliefs), they may proceed, lies a systematic erroneous presupposition that is to be abolished. Again, this is a reasonable sort of view, and almost everyone is likely to be an eliminativist about something, if not about races or group beliefs, then at least about phlogiston or witches in the discourses in which they are claimed to exist.

(3) Another debate concerns the mind-dependent, language-dependent, constructed, projected, or conferred status of the entities under discussion. Perhaps there are races (or racialised groups), genders (as opposed to sexes), disabilities (as distinguished from physical impairments), as well as group beliefs, plans and policies, but they are social constructions. Variants of social constructionism may well be the dominant positions regarding many issues in social ontology. They oppose objectivisms or non-constructionisms or naturalisms of different

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[3]   See, for instance, Appiah (1996) and Zack (2002), and Glasgow (2008) on Haslanger's account.

[4]   Whereas defenders of group beliefs such as Rovane (1998) or Pettit (2003) would argue in the other direction that as groups are able to form beliefs and act, they have 'minds' in some restricted sense while not having phenomenal, experiential minds.

kinds. Social constructionists stress that qua social constructions races, genders, and disabilities differ from related natural or non-constructed phenomena such as having certain ancestry, or having certain female or male characteristics, or having bodily impairments.[5] With respect to questions about group beliefs, institutions, or organisations, it may be less tempting to claim that they are not social constructs in some sense (and concerning them, social constructionism may seem uncontroversial), but arguably one could hold that, say, 'marriage' refers to certain patterns or functions,[6] or that 'group belief' refers to certain dispositions of the individuals in a population etc. that it is the task of social sciences to find out.[7] Even if no-one regarded institutions or group beliefs as independent of social construction, it would not follow that social constructionism is an uncontroversial position: instrumentalists and non-cognitivists, and eliminativists and error theorists would oppose either the cognitivism or the non-eliminativism it entails. Yet, social constructionism is clearly a wide-spread view, or family of views, concerning many questions in social ontology, and there are many important further substantive questions on which there are family disputes within this approach.

(4) Consider finally the set of questions surrounding reducibility, fundamentality, groundedness, or the possible emergent or *sui generis*-nature of social entities. These questions concern the dependence of social or institutional entities not so much on minds or observers or conferrers, but on their constituent parts, or on more fundamental layers of reality such as the natural, the physical, or the material, or (in the cases of groups) the individuals that the group in some sense consists of. Reductionist views hold that there are group beliefs, but that they are reducible to individuals' attitudes, whereas non-reductionists treat them as irreducible. Whether or not group beliefs, or social properties and social entities more broadly, are reducible is a matter of substantive debate between individualists and their opponents in philosophy of social science.[8] And similar debates about irreducibility are ubiquitous in metaphysics, where they are closely related to debates about grounding, fundamentality, and dependence.[9]

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[5]   Constructionists typically advance substantive arguments against views which claim that races, gender, disabilities are equally non-constructed phenomena as ancestries, genitalia or impairments. (For example, Ásta (2018) holds that the social properties like being disabled are conferred, and the conferrers try to track the base properties like having impairments).

[6]   Guala 2016.

[7]   See e.g. Thomasson 2019 for discussion.

[8]   See, e.g. Zahle & Collin (eds.) 2014; Ylikoski (2017).

[9]   See, e.g. Schaffer (2009), Sider (2011), Barnes (2014), Tahko (2015), Mikkola (2017).

The consensus in social ontology (apart from possible radical social constructionists) is that the entirety of social reality, if it exists at all, is non-fundamental: social reality presupposes the existence of social animals, and even they are hardly included in the inventory of fundamental entities, for their existence is dependent (in some way) on something more fundamental.[10] The fundamental entities are not ontologically dependent. Yet, non-fundamental entities may have features that are not fully reducible to the fundamental entities but are for example emergent. Ontological dependence need not entail full reducibility, and social entities may be non-fundamental and yet irreducible.

Regarding each of these issues, there are different substantive metaphysical, first-order debates.[11] The related meta-debate, to which we now turn, concerns which of the positions adopted on those issues count as 'realist' and why. This meta-debate is in dire need of mapping and clarity.

The meta-debate: rival definitions of realism

We can introduce the meta-debate about conceptions of realism with the help of these sets of substantive questions. Independently of which of the theories are true (in some domain), the second-order question is what it takes to be a realist (in that domain). What is the role of cognitivism, non-eliminativism, mind-independence, or irreducibility, in defining realism? We next seek to demonstrate that quite different definitions of realism have been proposed in the literature, but they have not always been clearly distinguished from one another where scholars have often understood their proposal as the only (and sometimes obviously correct) definition of realism.

According to the received view of metaphysical realism only mind-independent things are real.[12] This definition of realism is used in social ontology as well: 'A 'racial realist' … will be somebody who thinks it is objectively the case, - *independent of human belief* - that there are natural human races; in other words, that races are natural kinds' (Mills 1998, 46; italics added). On this definition, socially constructed entities and properties are not real and social constructionism (of any kind) is an anti-realist view. Instead of accepting this verdict, it has been argued forcefully that this definition of realism, standard as it may be in general metaphysics, will not do for social ontology.

At any rate, realism in social ontology faces a special tension. On the one hand, ordinary people in their everyday lives normally take for granted that social structures and entities are in some relevant sense something real. Institutions, practices, behavioural expectations, racialised and gendered oppression are

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[10] We thank an anonymous referee for urging us to note the possibility of radical social constructionism.

[11] This list of substantive questions is naturally far from exhaustive. In particular, it doesn't include systematic examination regarding particular modes in which entities might exist. In setting this aside for now, we attend only to discussions about *whether* an entity (or kind of entities) exist, and not to those about *how* they exist, with the exception of mind-(in)dependence and (ir)reducibility; as these have figured in debates on how to define realism.

[12] See, e.g. Devitt (1984), Thomasson (2003), Barnes (2017), Haukioja (2021), Khlentzos (2021), and Miller (2022). Realism in this sense is traditionally opposed to 'idealism' and 'phenomenalism' (cf. Raatikainen 2014).

something we really do encounter - they are not mere figments of imagination. They often are 'all too real,' as Haslanger puts it (2012, 5). Moreover, they are causally and normatively effective: they cause events and generate oughts. On the other hand, these institutions, expectations and wrongs seem equally obviously to be somewhat dependent on human minds, actions, and practices, which suggests that they aren't real after all or that they are less real than the mind-independent, more fundamental natural facts.[13] However, there are rival definitions available.

Some scholars have argued that there are other criteria than the commitment to mind-independence for a view to count as realist, and these are related to the terms of debates (1) and (2) we outlined in the previous subsection. For example, Haslanger and Sayre-McCord suggest the following:

> 'A realist about a domain D maintains that claims purporting to describe D are truth-apt, that is, the claims are the sort of thing to be either true or false, and at least some of them are true' (Haslanger 2012, 198).

> 'Realism involves embracing just two theses: (1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false (cognitivism), and (2) some are literally true.' (Sayre-McCord 1986, 2).

Thus, one question is whether the relevant claims have truth-value. Another question is whether any of the claims in that discourse are true.[14] In any domain, including the social and institutional world, there are correspondingly two ways of being anti-realist, that is by subscribing to non-cognitivism or instrumentalism, or by adopting an error-theory or eliminativism,[15] whereas realism would entail cognitivism and non-eliminativism.

These two questions can be seen as providing a relatively minimal answer to what realism is, so that we arrive at realism before even asking about mind-independence. This is one sense in which one can be a realist about mind-dependent entities.[16]

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[13]   See Fine (2001) for a suggestion that all realism versus anti-realism debates face something like this tension.

[14]   See Devitt (2010) for an argument (against e.g. Sayre-McCord) that realism should be defined independently of questions of truth and merely focus on the existence and independence – conditions; more or less our criteria 2 and 3.

[15]   Haslanger (2012, 198) notes that plausible anti-realism in the social domain can take especially 'the form of error theories. Error theories about race are common (e.g., Appiah 1996; Zack 2002; Glasgow 2008). On this view, because there are no races, statements involving racial terms, although they purport to be true or false, are all false, since racial terms do not refer.' (Haslanger 2012, 198). See also Mills (1998).

[16]   Sayre-McCord is explicit that 'Realism is not solely the prerogative of objectivists [defenders of a mind-independence view].' (1986, 12). Joyce (2016) holds that Sayre-McCord does not give sufficient reason to exclude mind-independence as a criterion of realism. 'Perhaps all that is needed is a more careful understanding of the type of independence relation in question.' For a distinction between four kinds of mind-independence, see Page (2006). For a recent suggestion that what matters is not mind-dependence but mind-groundedness, see Cohen (2022).

But an even more minimal definition of realism is available, on which even an error theory or eliminativism count as realist, and on which all that is needed for a view to be realist is a commitment to non-instrumentalism or cognitivism.

For Dummett, a sufficient mark of realism is

> '. . . the belief that statements of the disputed class possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us.' (Dummett 1978, 146)

In a similar vein, Putnam does not invoke non-eliminativism as a requirement either, though he does suggest linking up cognitivism and mind-independence:

> 'A realist (with respect to a given theory or discourse) holds that (1) the sentences of that theory are true or false; and (2) that what makes them true or false is something external-that is to say, it is not (in general) our sense data, actual or potential, or the structure of our minds, or our language, etc.' (Putnam 1979, 69-70)[17]

Further along on the spectrum spun up above, many theorists think there is more to the question of realism in social ontology than the three questions of cognitivism, non-eliminativism, and mind-independence.[18] There is a fourth question which distinguishes between some *Xs* that admittedly may exist in some weak or redundant sense (like shadows or holes, or heat, or random aggregates of individuals), and something else, *Ys* and *Zs,* that are 'really real'. The non-redundancy can be cashed out with the help of either of two related distinctions, ontological irreducibility or explanatory relevance. The first is a distinction between *Xs* that are reducible to (they are 'nothing but') something else, *Ys,* on the one hand, and those more fundamental *Ys,* that ground or constitute or help compose the reducible *Xs*; or also things that are otherwise ontologically irreducible (*Zs*) (while perhaps not grounding anything else), on the other.[19] The second is a distinction between things, *Ys,* that are non-redundant in making an explanatory difference, causally or normatively, on the one

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[17]   Cf. also Uskali Mäki (2005, 231), who defends different definitions of realism for different domains, suggests that on some domains at least cognitivism is enough (while in other domains we may need a suc- cess-theory): 'It is sufficient for a realist to give the existence of an entity (and the truth of a theory) a chance, while in some areas we may be in a position to make justified claims about actual existence (and truth).'

[18]   See Baker (2007), Barnes (2014 and 2017), Enoch (2017), Fine (2001), Haslanger (2012), Himmelreich (2019), Hindriks (2006), List and Pettit (2011), Mikkola (2018), Mäki (2008), Pettit (2009), Schaffer (2009 and 2017), Sider (2011), and Taylor (1989).

[19]   See e.g. Baker (2007) for a view that links realism and non-reductionism. Similarly, Pettit 2009 and List & Pettit 2011 ask whether group-level-talk is 'readily reducible' to individual-level talk. If yes, we have 'thin, redundant realism', but if not, 'non-redundant realism'. See Section 4.1 for the distinction between existing in some thin sense or 'really existing' (Fine 2001, Himmelreich 2019).

hand, and things, *Xs,* that are inert, epiphenomenal, or merely idle wheels, on the other hand.[20]

A group agent, for example, is real in this more demanding sense if it cannot be metaphysically reduced to its constituents and so is irreducibly real, or if it (rather than its component parts) is causally efficacious and non-redundant. But there is also room for debate on how best to understand this question of non-redundancy, whether as metaphysical fundamentality or as causal or normative relevance.[21] On the latter reading something is real even if it is not fundamental (and even if it is mind-dependent).

This malaise of definitions of realism has not gone unnoticed. One response to the observation that, say, mind-dependence or fundamentality are more appropriate characteristics of what is real in some domains than in others would be to adopt *local realisms*. For what being real amounts to may differ from one domain of reality to another.[22] In physics and chemistry, entities' being real may well consist in them being mind-independent. In social ontology, however, we may need to refer to a different definition of realism to make sense of the idea that social reality is indeed social *reality*.

As is standardly understood, commitment to realism is always commitment to realism-about-some-domain, where one can be a realist in one domain (say, physics) and an anti-realist in another domain (say, ethics). And within any domain, one can be a realist concerning *Xs* (say, quarks) and an anti-realist concerning *Ys* (say, phlogiston). (see e.g. Miller 2021, Miller 2022, Mäki 2008). Within social ontology, one can coherently be a non-cognitivist concerning, say, hurray-talk of football fans, an eliminativist concerning group minds, a reductionist concerning group agency, and yet a non-reductionist concerning groups per se. What interests us is what makes one

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[20]   As Barnes writes, some 'metaphysical realists go further. They think that among the things that exist, some things are more explanatorily important than others. Maybe it's true that both holes and electrons exist. Nevertheless, electrons are explanatorily more significant than holes. Metaphysicians trying to give a good theory of the world should care about electrons more than they care about holes.' (Barnes 2017, 2418).

[21]   Barnes and Mikkola illustrate this with reference to Haslanger and Sider. Barnes adds that e.g. on Sally Haslanger's view '*social categories* are among the most explanatorily important things that there are.' (Barnes 2017, 2418). 'Theodore Sider, in his *Writing the Book of the World*, gives the perhaps the most detailed defense of metaphysical realism in the contemporary literature—one that attempts explain both what such realism consists in and how such realism can lay the groundwork for distinguishing between 'substantive' and 'non-substantive' ('shallow', 'terminological') disputes' (Barnes 2017, 2425). 'on Sider's construal of ontological realism, Haslanger is not an ontological realist about social kinds. To me, this result suggests that Sider's construal of ontological realism is impoverished, rather than that Haslanger is misdescribing her view.' (Barnes 2017, 2430). Mikkola (2017, 2442) notes that Sider and Haslanger 'disagree on what counts as reality. For mainstream metaphysicians like Sider (and not all metaphysicians agree), only that which is fundamental does; for feminists like Haslanger, whatever has causal efficacy counts as real.' Barnes sides with Haslanger; ''The debate over gender realism isn't a debate about how/whether genders are grounded. It's a debate about what (if anything) they do, and what (if anything) they explain.' (Barnes 2017, 2433) What Barnes's, Haslanger's and Mikkola's views have in common with Sider, however, is the attempt to distinguish between redundant and non-redundant existences. Their debate is on whether this is to be cashed out with reference to fundamentality, or to explanatory relevance.

[22]   Mäki (2008).

a 'realist' or 'anti-realist' in social ontology: is, say, rejection of non-cognitivism, or of eliminativism, sufficient for being a realist?

In the remainder of this paper, we map out and discuss four candidates for such local realisms in social ontology and defend one of them. Yet, each candidate for a monist local realism (one for social ontology, one for mathematics, one for physics, etc.) is at the same time one constituent of a pluralist global realism (several definitions of realism in each of the domains). A global pluralist map of different definitions would be relevant for potential debates in any domain (cf. Sayre-McCord 1986, Haslanger 2012, and Fine 2001). This response has the advantage of not relying on a prior metaphysics of domains, and of treating mind-independence as one, but only one, criterion of realism. We shall adopt this approach in the following.

A basic map of realisms and anti-realisms

We now proceed to mapping out and defining a variety of views that may warrant the label 'realism.' Our proposal is based on four guiding questions, answers to which we take to define realist and anti-realist views. In the next two subsections we formulate the questions in terms of statements or sentences that can be truth-apt or true and are made true by social entities. In an ensuing, shorter subsection we briefly discuss how the questions could be reformulated in terms of entities that exist, are (ir)reducible or mind-(in)dependent, and in virtue of which the relevant sentences are true. No specific account of truth or truth-making is presupposed by the analysis.

Four Questions

Statements such as 'the bank closes at 4 pm,' 'the Kaizer Chiefs scored a goal,' 'the prize committee is a group agent,' 'there is racial discrimination,' and 'Alex is a woman' capture some of the central issues in social ontology. These statements are about institutions, group agents, and the social kinds of race and gender. As indicated above, we can ask a variety of questions about such statements (referred to as 'S' below). The following sequence of questions is apt to capture definitions of realism and anti-realism:

(Q1)   Does S have a truth value?
(Q2)   Is (a statement like) S ever true?
(Q3)   Is S true in virtue of mind-independent facts?

In line with Sayre-McCord (1986) and Haslanger (2012), we take (Q1) to mark the distinction between *cognitivist* and *non-cognitivist* views. Cognitivists' answer to (Q1) is 'yes,' non-cognitivists' answer is 'no.'[23] Whereas this contrast is familiar from

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[23]   There are rival ways to characterise the question distinguishing cognitivism or representationalism from non-cognitivism or expressivism. Not only are there detailed hybrid positions such as fictionalism and qua-si-realism which would call for a more sophisticated map (see Van Roojen 2015), but also the initial question

discussions in metaethics, some debates in philosophy of science feature a rather similar contrast to distinguish realist from instrumentalist views.[24] The latter hold that theoretical concepts (say, 'inflation', 'social structure', or 'male domination') are mere tools for organising our observations, and do not imply ontological commitment.[25] By contrast, realists in this sense claim these terms refer to the reality under investigation.

(Q2) in turn serves to distinguish between *error theories* that maintain that S-type statements are truth-apt but never true, and *success theories* according to which such statements are sometimes true. For success theory, mere cognitivism is not enough, as it holds that at least some of the statements in question are true. Eliminativism about race, for example, construes race-claims in a cognitivist fashion, but states that there are no races (see the discussion above). Realism that contrasts with eliminativism or error-theory takes at least some of the relevant claims to be true (Haslanger 2012, 198, Sayre-McCord 1986, 3).

(Q3) prompts leaving the binary schema. It invokes the contraposition between views that affirm mind-independence (often labelled as objectivism) and those that affirm mind-dependence (idealism, phenomenalism, subjectivism, intersubjectivism, constructionism). Many authors in social ontology reject this definition of realism in claiming that something *can* be both socially constructed and real.[26] On this view

> 'social structures are real - as real as anything - but they are *made*. They aren't 'joints in nature', they're joints in the social world. We created them, and our collective social activity is responsible for their continued existence, but they're no less real as a result.' (Barnes 2017, 2423).

Following Sayre-McCord (1986, 10ff.), we suggest distinguishing *objectivism* in social ontology from two variants of non-objectivism, namely *subjectivism* and

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can be formulated without the notion of 'truth', leaving room for the possibility that for expressivists the sentences do have truth-value, on some suitably minimalist notion of truth (Dreier 2004). Especially in metaethics, the question can be posed in terms of moral language deriving its contents from the world, as representationalists would have it (from the truth-conditions of the statements, or from the moral properties referred to) or from our minds, as expressivists would have it (from the states of mind expressed in such statements). Similar shifts in the definition of non-cognitivism are possible and even foreseeable in social ontology, but here we stick to the current usage, e.g. in Haslanger (2012). Again, the main point is that, as we will see in due course, one of the four main variants of anti-realism in social ontology is non-cognitivist expressivism, and it is to be expected that there are many rival formulations and hybrids possible concerning this question, like with other questions. We thank Teemu Toppinen for comments on this.

[24]   The heyday of instrumentalism was in the first half of the 20th century, cf., however, a more recent proposal in (Rowbottom 2011).

[25]   Contemporary scientific realism emerged largely in opposition to 'instrumentalism', the view that 'it is not possible to eliminate theoretical concepts from science, or define them in terms of observational concepts, but these theoretical concepts do not refer to anything real; they are only practically useful fictions which enable one to systematise observations and predict new observations on the basis of old ones.' (Raatikainen 2014, 5)

[26]   See Barnes (2017), Haslanger (2012), Mills (1998), and Mason (2020).

intersubjectivism. Objectivists hold that the truth of S-type statements is borne out by facts that are objective in the sense that they are altogether independent of attitudes or practices. Intersubjectivists, by contrast, hold that S-type statements are true in virtue of a particular social practice or attitudes shared within a particular community. And subjectivists hold that S-type statements are true in virtue of facts about a particular subject, e.g. the one uttering S. Only objectivism thus characterised claims that S-type statements are true in virtue of mind-independent facts, whereas subjectivists and intersubjectivists embrace mind-dependence.[27]

To do justice to the social ontological debate about reducibility, we suggest including a fourth question:

(Q4)   Is S about some irreducible entity?

This question reflects the longstanding concern with fundamentality debated in metametaphysics. In relation to questions of existence and reality, the issue is whether only fundamental entities exist and are real, where being fundamental can be understood as being irreducible. The general issue here is whether certain statements refer to irreducible entities or whether they ultimately refer only to their constituents or grounds (see e.g. Mäki 2008, Pettit 2009, List & Pettit 2011, Fine 2001, Schaffer 2009). Kit Fine (2001, 27) suggests 'a general presumption in favour of the grounded not being real.' This view holds, to use Fine's example, that if a war between nations is grounded in military activity of their citizens, then the citizens and their activity are real, but the nations and war are merely apparent, unreal or grounded, not part of fundamental reality. Lynne Rudder Baker (2007, 3) seems to agree with Fine and others that the issue of reducibility is relevant to realism, but she disagrees concerning what is reducible: 'The aim of *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life* is to present a theory that focuses on the familiar objects that we encounter every day – flowers, people, houses, and so on – and locates them irreducibly in reality.' (Baker 2007, 3).

In social ontology, a familiar context for asking (Q4) is provided by statements referring to social groups or group agents: Are statements about social groups or group agents reducible to statements about their members or are they about some irreducible entity? With regard to social groups in general the question becomes salient whenever S ascribes a property to a group. With regard to group agents in particular the issue arises whenever a belief, an intention or an action is ascribed to a group. In line with the received terminology, an affirmative answer to (Q4) makes one a *non-reductionist*, a negative answer makes one a *reductionist*. Answering (Q4) either way is independent of how one answers (Q3). We thus need to make room for

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[27]   In Mills' (1998, 46-49) terminology, something mind-dependent but existing and causally efficacious is 'objective' but not 'real'; we follow Sayre-McCord in calling it 'real' but 'not objective'. When mapping rival usages, it is important to note that despite the terminological difference with respect to 'objectivism' and 're-alism', Mills draws the same conceptual distinctions as Sayre-McCord (1986) and Haslanger (2012).

non-reductionist and reductionist variants of objectivism, intersubjectivism, and subjectivism.

Taken together, the main thrust of these questions is metaphysical: Do *Xs* exist, are *Xs* ontologically dependent on minds, and are *Xs* reducible to some *Ys*? Our focus here is on metaphysical realism in social ontology. We have formulated these metaphysical questions semantically in terms of statements S about *Xs* and *Ys* to link them to the prior question of how to analyse the statements. According to this framework, one way to fail to be a metaphysical realist about *Xs* is to think that the statements about *Xs* are not truth-apt.[28]

The distinctions introduced so far yield the following map which we will use to individuate different types of realism and anti-realism in the following subsection (see figure 17.1).
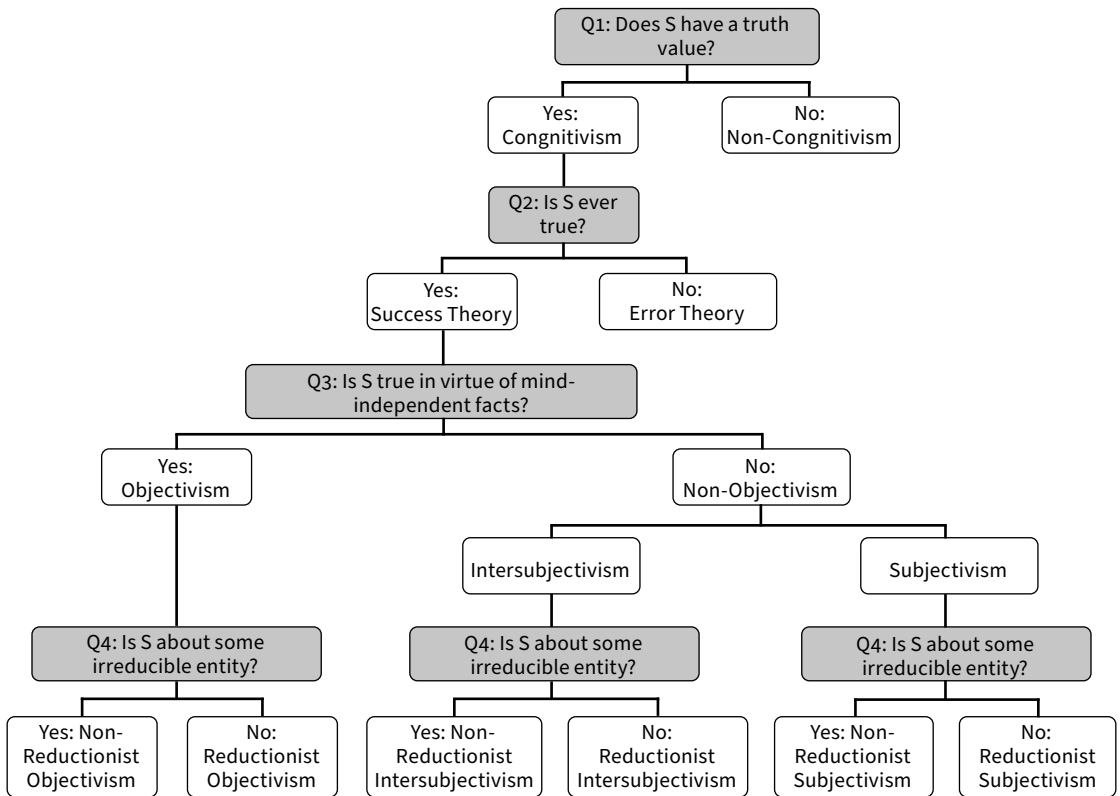
Figure 17.1: Basic map of views in social ontology

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[28]   For a more detailed analysis of the interplay between scientific, metaphysical, and semantic realism cf. Raatikainen (2014).

Four Realisms and Four Anti-Realisms

Let's begin with the realisms. Using the order and numbering of the questions (Q1) through (Q4), we can list and label the following four types of realism by giving their respective answers to those questions as identifying commitments regarding statement S:

> (R1) *most minimal realism*: 'S has truth value.'
> (R2) *minimal realism*: 'S is (sometimes) true.'
> (R3) *objectivist realism*: 'S is true in virtue of mind-independent facts.'
> (R4) *non-reductionist realism*: 'S is about some irreducible entity.'

We do not intend to suggest here that any of these positions can count as a comprehensive view. But differentiating between them facilitates identifying a variety of realist commitments. Especially when read in this order it becomes clear that some of these realisms build on others in the sense that those with higher numbers imply commitments to those with lower numbers; thus minimal realism implies a commitment to most minimal realism, and objectivist realism implies a commitment to both most minimal realism and minimal realism.

Realism can be defined in minimal fashion so that one is a realist in the sense of (R1) if one believes that a statement of the relevant kind can be true (whether or not it is). The attitude Uskali Mäki (2008, 340) calls 'a realist attitude' implies that 'there is a fact of the matter concerning whether or not X exists and whether or not [S] is true. It is an attitude that will give real existence and objective truth a chance, but one that at the same time is prepared for concluding that X does not exist or [S] is not true, after all.' In this sense, one can be a realist about phlogiston and deny that there is any.

The view here labelled as 'minimal realism' (R2) is demarcated by the thought that error-theory, eliminativism or nihilism are forms of anti-realism. As illustrated with regard to Haslanger's and Sayre-McCord's frameworks one must thus meet the two conditions that define a success theory to be a minimal realist.

A more demanding form of realism is objectivist realism (R3), adoption of which requires subscribing to the idea that the statements in question are true in virtue of something mind-independent. This definition is congruent with Mallon's (2016, 138 ff.) characterisation of 'basic realism' as views that fulfil three requirements (literalness, success, and objectivity), i.e. give affirmative answers to our first three questions. The definition is akin to one of the elements Thomasson (2003, 580) identifies as belonging to the 'realist philosophical world-view'. According to this 'ontological view [...] there are kinds of things that exist and have their nature independently of human beliefs, representations, and practices' (ibid.). Sayre-McCord (1986, 11) polemicises against treating (R3) as the only form of realism and deems all three variants (objectivism, intersubjectivism, subjectivism) 'quite clearly' realist.

With regard to (R4) it needs to be highlighted that this, too, picks out a variety of realist views. As mentioned before, many take irreducibility or fundamentality

respectively to be crucial to being real. On this view, one is not a realist about *Xs* if one thinks *Xs* are reducible to something else. Mäki (2008, 335) refers to reductionists as anti-realists and thus treats a commitment to irreducibility as a mark of realism. Similarly, Pettit's (2009) argument for the reality of group agency can be read as targeting the question of reduction, even though it is couched in the debate about whether certain groups can be real agents. Responses to the associated question (Q4) do not, however, build on responses to the other questions, and thus (R4) does not build on other forms of realism in the way, say, (R3) builds on (R2). Correspondingly, our map indicates that one can adopt a reductionist or a non-reductionist account irrespective of one's commitment to either objectivism, intersubjectivism, or subjectivism. Only for the view on which statements about social entities are true in virtue of irreducible objective facts is it the case that all the mentioned realisms build on each other.[29]
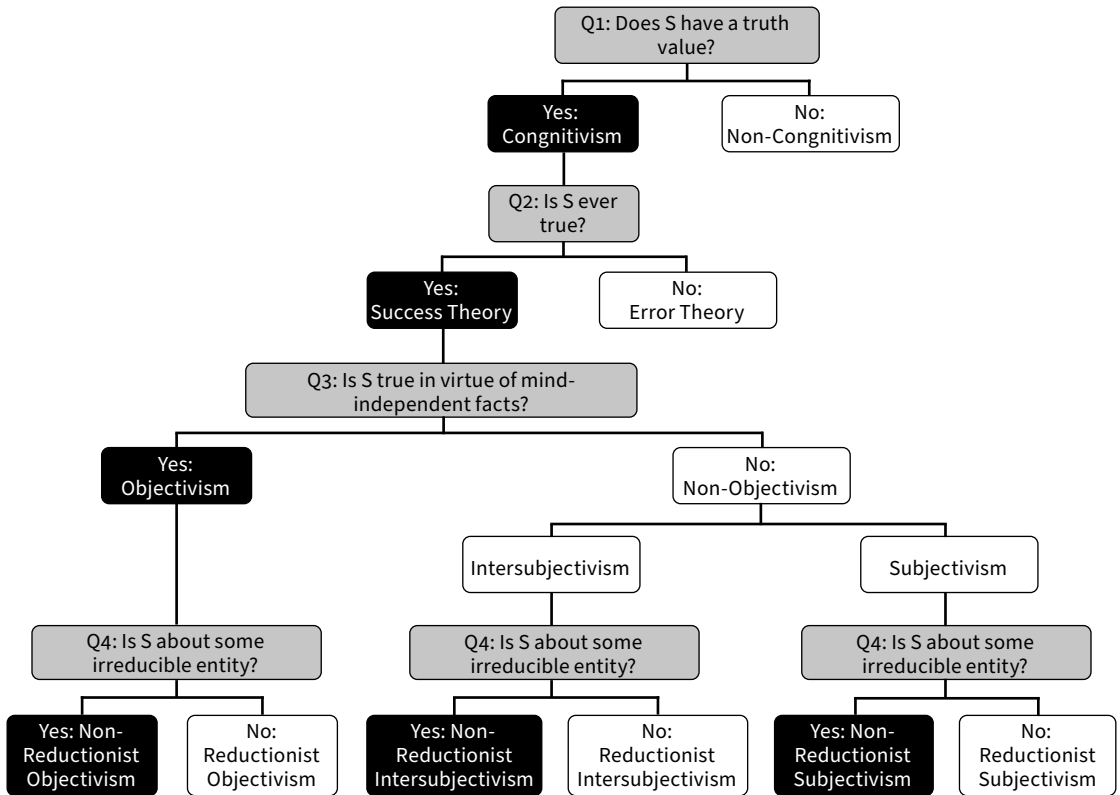

Figure 17.2: Realisms in social ontology

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[29] It is important to note that the views in question here needn't rely on a single feature such as those picked out by (R1)-(R4) in defining realism. There are a number of multi-feature views which are worth discussing; such as those that combine (R2) and (R3) (e.g. Haukioja 2021), (R2) and (R4) (e.g. Pettit 2009), or (R1) and (R4) (e.g. Mäki 2008). We set these more complex views to the side for the time being and focus on the tenability of their components.

Now for the anti-realisms. Juxtaposed to (R1) through (R4) above, they can be labelled and formulated as follows:

(AR1) *non-cognitivism*: 'S does not have truth value.'
(AR2) *error theory*: 'S is never true (always false).'
(AR3) *the mind-dependence view*: 'S is true in virtue of mind-dependent facts.'
(AR4) *reductionism*: 'S is about some reducible entity.'

The contours of (AR1) and (AR2) are relatively clear. Defenders of (AR1) are non-cognitivists about the kind of statement in question. A detailed analysis of non-cognitivist accounts in social ontology - which we are not undertaking here - would have to pay close attention to the question whether at least some variant of what is known as constructionism in social ontology could be given, or is indeed taken to have, the form of 'collectivist expressivism.'[30] Defenders of (AR2), on the other hand, embrace an error theory about the kind of statement in question, i.e. they hold that although truth-apt the statements in question are never actually true as there is nothing that makes them true.

(AR3) is the 'mind-dependence view' according to which statements about social entities are truth-apt, sometimes true, and true in virtue of mind-dependent facts. Given the threefold distinction we have invoked, the options here are subjectivism and intersubjectivism, depending on whether the mind-dependent facts in virtue of which some statements are true are taken to be facts about individuals or facts about collectives or communal practices. Both of these views reject the objectivist response to (Q3) and can thus be called 'non-objectivist.' If (Q3) is understood as targeting the question of realism in terms of mind-independence, then such non-objectivist views are *ipso facto* anti-realist. Below we will suggest rejecting the criterion of mind-independence as a marker of realism. There are, we will argue, good reasons to label at least some non-objectivist views 'realist.'

Given how (Q4), the question concerning reducibility, departs from the cascading provided by (Q1)-(Q3), it is possible to combine (AR4) with any view regarding the truth-aptness of S-type statements and regarding in virtue of what they are true. If a commitment to irreducibility is taken to be the mark of realism, then a view that subscribes to (R3) and (AR4) - call it 'reductionist objectivism' or, more precisely, 'reductionist objectivist realism' - would count as a form of anti-realism. It is, however, debatable whether responses to (Q4) mark off realist and anti-realist views in a satisfactory manner, not least because the issue of reducibility is of considerable complexity. We shall return to this below, in the subsection on reducibility.

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[30] Interestingly, we can ask a question analogous to (Q3) regarding the non-cognitivist branch as well. S-type statements could express individuals' attitudes (subjectivism) or collective attitudes (intersubjectivism). The latter, 'collective expressivism' is an underexplored possibility in social ontology, but perhaps something like Sellarsian (1968) views about collective intentionality tied to Gibbardian (1990) views about norm-expressivism could be used as a starting point for developing such a position.
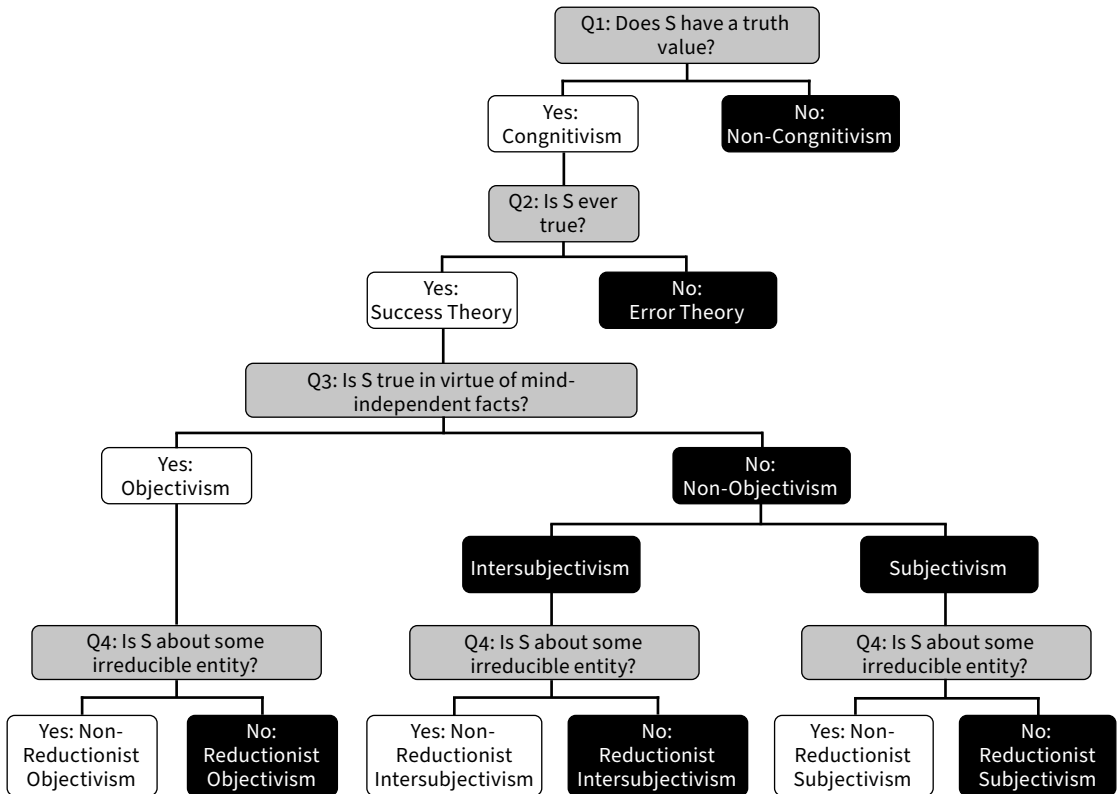
Figure 17.3: Anti-realisms in social ontology

Sentences or entities?

We have plotted the maps of realisms and anti-realisms with the help of sentences (*Ss*) being truth-apt or true or reducible. One might object to this approach that instead of using sentences about social entities a systematisation of kinds realisms should be about entities (*Xs*) and their reducibility. Does this difference in formulation matter? Not really, we argue in this subsection.

Starting with sentences being truth-apt brings to fore well-known questions about the nature of truth. We do not presuppose or expound any specific substantive theory of truth, and we hold that what we say here is neutral with respect to different understandings of truth. As it might turn out that for example the difference between cognitivism and non-cognitivism should be defined differently depending on whether one holds a deflationary, a minimalist, a perspectivalist or a correspondence theory of truth, in this section we try to shed light on how, roughly, the four guiding questions could be rendered in 'entity-talk' rather than in 'sentence-talk.'

The first question can start, instead of sentences and their truth-aptness, with the entities that figure in theories and discourses about a domain. Do the entities in question exist? For example, do the theoretical (unobservable) entities that figure

in scientific theories exist? Are there entities to which the theoretical terms refer? 'Scientific realism' is the traditional view that yes, there are such entities, whereas 'instrumentalism' holds that the theoretical concepts are merely useful instruments and should not be taken to refer to entities.[31] For example, even if there is no such thing as a 'centre of gravity,' it is a useful concept. Many authors (such as Sayre-McCord 1986) treat the debates between scientific realists and instrumentalists on the one hand, and between cognitivists and non-cognitivists on the other hand, as centred around the same question. While questions remain about the exact relationship of sophisticated non-cognitivism and sophisticated instrumentalism, they share the idea that some seemingly referring aspects of discourse can be interpreted as having some other function. The first way of being anti-realist then is to argue that contrary to appearances, our discourse is non-committal with regard to the existence of such and such entities. This way of formulating the question does not refer to the truth of sentences. Yet it does not take a stand on the question whether or not *Xs* exist, but remains non-committal.

The second question can be understood as distinguishing between eliminativism about *Xs* and non-eliminativist realism about *Xs*. Eliminativists hold that there are no *Xs*, i.e. that *Xs* don't exist, whereas the non-eliminativists would include *Xs* in the inventory of what exists. This formulation wears its metaphysical character on its sleeve, as it were. (By contrast, error-theory and success-theory were formulated as divided over the issue of whether certain sentences are ever true).

The third question can then be recast as about whether the relevant *Xs* are mind-independent. Again, this question is straightforwardly about entities and its formulation avoids reference to 'truth.'[32] Our (Q3) above is about the mind-independence of what makes sentences true. If it turns out that for independent reasons the formulation in terms of entities is better than the formulation in terms of sentences, the translation should be pretty straightforward.

The fourth question concerns reducibility. In debates about reducibility, entity-reduction is often distinguished from theory-reduction. For our concerns, it is the reducibility of some *Xs* to some *Ys* that is central. We discuss this in more detail below.

Contested issues

Providing the basic map of realisms and anti-realisms in social ontology is the main aim of this contribution. Maps in general may be found wanting in two important respects: their resolution may not be sufficient for your purposes, and they don't tell you where you are on the terrain they depict. A map of the sort we have plotted in the previous section might warrant reactions of this kind in that, firstly, it may not be

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[31]   See e.g. Raatikainen (2014).

[32]   For an overview on how different theories of truth relate to theories of realism and anti-realism, see section 4 in Glanzberg (2021); and section 6 in Miller (2021).

sophisticated enough to locate a specific view about social phenomena. For instance, the map as given doesn't distinguish between and define variants of non-cognitivism in social ontology which may be of interest to accounts according to which collective intentionality is best analysed within an expressivist framework. Secondly, although the map helps locate different views using the four questions to determine the respective coordinates, it doesn't offer guidelines as to which definition of realism is best suited for social ontology.

With respect to the first point, which we accept as valid, we can here only defer to future work towards a more sophisticated map of realisms and anti-realisms. Working this out would go beyond the scope of the present contribution. With respect to the second point, we want to use this section to at least briefly discuss some contested issues that will help specify which definition of realism might plausibly be adopted for social ontology.

In doing so, we take up the issues targeted in our guiding question in reverse order, turning to the question of fundamentality and reducibility first and the question of mind-independence second. We argue that insistence of these criteria as marks of realism in social ontology is unconvincing and sketch an argument for success theory as a useful definition of realism.

Fundamentality and irreducibility

The issue of the reducibility of collective or supraindividual entities to individuals, has dominated the social ontological discussion in the philosophy of the social sciences, especially in interplay with debates about ontological and methodological individualism.[33] Unsurprisingly perhaps, those who defend the irreducibility of the supraindividual entities, have come to be called 'realists' about those entities. However, should the definition of realism in social ontology be tied to a requirement of fundamentality and irreducibility?

Within general metaphysics, the relevance of reducibility to being 'real' has been influential in debates about fundamentality and grounding. The fundamentality-approach can be understood as supporting the idea that only the fundamental entities are real. A broader view holds that there are two kinds of real entities: in addition to the fundamental ones, those that are non-fundamental and irreducible.

One general challenge for any such view is to make sense of the distinction between eliminativism and reductionism. For how are we to distinguish between eliminativism and reductionism about *Xs*, if *Xs* indeed are not fundamental and irreducible? Current scientific understandings advise us to be eliminativists concerning phlogiston and witches, for instance, and to be error-theorists concerning astrological claims on the whole. If it turns out that football teams, corporations and states can be reduced to individuals (or to some further fundamental entities

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[33]   See Epstein (2009), Ylikoski (2017), Van Riel and Van Gulick (2019).

all the way down to the micro-physical),[34] should we then regard the Kaizer Chiefs, Supercell, or Estonia with the same kind of suspicion advised vis-á-vis phlogiston, witches, or astrological energies? Fine (2001), for instance, discusses attempts to make conceptual room for the distinction between downright eliminativism and non-fundamentality. In Himmelreich's words (2019, 6) this amounts to the attempt to distinguish 'what exists from what really exists.'

The definition of realism (R4), according to which, by implication, only fundamental, ungrounded, irreducible, or *sui generis* entities are real, is indeed accepted by many as one feature of realism (e.g. Baker, Fine, Pettit, Mäki, Schaffer, Sider, *op.cit.*).[35] The credentials of this view will partly depend on whether there is a non-ad-hoc account of the relevant sense in which tables, football teams, states, which are held to not 'really exist,' nonetheless 'exist' in some relevant sense. It is not entirely clear that a good, disciplined account along these lines has been provided. If one wishes to bite the bullet and be an eliminativist about these entities, one actually defends anti-realism of the (AR2) kind, which amounts to there being no fourth sense of anti-realism (AR4) after all.

The alternative is to hold that even reducible, non-fundamental, grounded entities are real. On this view, groups would be real entities despite being reducible to individuals. The reducible, non-fundamental, grounded entities nonetheless exist, and no distinction between 'really existing' and 'existing' is needed on this view.

In addition to such general considerations, the relevance of non-reductionism (R4) in social ontology can be questioned. Various authors - among them Haslanger (2012), Barnes (2014 and 2017), and Mikkola (2017) - have suggested that social (and feminist) ontology must go beyond the fundamental. If fundamentality is required for reality, then nothing in the social or institutional domain is real.

To save the intuition that the study of non-fundamental aspects of the social world can nonetheless be about something 'real', the definition (R4) requires that the entities are shown to be irreducible. A central motivation for classifying some non-fundamental things as irreducibly real is that they can make a causal difference, or a normative difference.

Causality is very commonly understood to be a mark of the real.[36] If something causes something, then it presumably exists and is real. This is a powerful reason

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[34]   There is an important class of arguments that suggest that the reduction fails. They aim to show that groups are not reducible to individuals, for example because they have causal powers that individuals lack, and that they are thus indispensable in best explanations. Or it may be that they have irreducible deontic or normative features, and thereby are indispensable in best deliberation, or in living everyday lives (Taylor 1989, 58; Enoch 2007, 22; Thomasson 2019). The most permissive and less permissive views would disagree on whether it matters that the social entities simply have empirical features that are irreducible to the features of individuals (say, a team may have 11 members, but none of the members has 11 members). These arguments try to show that some social entities are irreducible in the relevant sense, or sui generis, or emergent, even though some aspects of the social entities are partially grounded in facts about individuals.

[35]   For the view that this question is orthogonal to realism, see Miller 2021, section 4.

[36]   See e.g. Barnes (2014), Haslanger (2012), and Psillos (2011) for critical discussion. For argumentative use of causal efficacy as a criterion of reality, see e.g. the debate between Hindriks (2017) and Tuomela (2017), both of whom accept that the reality of group agents hangs on their causal efficacy.

to regard something as real (even in cases of mind-dependence; see the next subsection). While less often noted, having normative roles or normative significance can be equally important as having causal roles or significance: for something to make something wrong, or good, it also is a strong indicator of its being real. And as causal relations are typically contrasted with constitutive relations, it is also possible to hold 'playing a constitutive role' or 'having constitutive relevance' as an indicator of being real. For our purposes, theorists stressing the causal role only or also admitting normative and constitutive roles are on a par, they are just varieties of 'non-redundancy' as a mark of irreducibility - the main contrast is with 'epiphenomenal' properties or entities that do not play such roles.

We appreciate the emphasis on such 'non-redundancy,' and the problem with (R4) is not with the irreducible entities that it classifies as real. The problem is with entities that are reducible: is the view really that reducibility amounts to non-reality? Would that not make reducibility amount to elimination?

It is possible to argue that something is real even though it is 'epiphenomenal,' i.e. lacks causal relevance. Indeed, presumably only real, existing things can be epiphenomenal. On the other hand, one could apply Occam's razor in a broadly pragmatist spirit, so that in thinking about whether to regard something as really existing or not, one ends up holding the view that something deserves a place in the one's inventory of the world's furniture *only* if it is needed in causal explanations, or normative explanations, or constitutive explanations. The former view might hold that the existence of some causally, normatively or constitutively inert *Xs* is not dependent on whether we should add those *Xs* to our inventory - the emphasis on our explanatory needs would be to put the cart before the horse, as it were. Perceived causal, (or constitutive, or normative) significance may be a reason to believe in the reality of something rather than a suggested analysis of what it means to be real: perhaps causally inert entities exist and are real as well.

This subsection has made three points: first, it is implausible to define reality in terms of fundamentality alone as that would lead to forced anti-realism about everything social and institutional. Second, any definition linking irreducibility and reality must come with an account of how to distinguish reduction and elimination, and a related account of the distinction between 'existing' and 'really existing'. Third, while it is a good idea to focus on entities that have causal, normative or constitutive significance, it is less clear whether we should deem the epiphenomenal, reducible aspects of reality as 'not real'. It seems to be more faithful to the spirit of realism to acknowledge that some aspects of reality are not playing those roles, and that the question of reducibility is in the end orthogonal to the question of realism.[37] Overall, there is strong reason to reject versions of (R4) that appeal to fundamentality, and reason to feel some unease with versions of (R4) that appeal to irreducibility. Yet, the indubitable importance of causal (and relatedly, normative and constitutive) roles as marks of real gives a reason to acknowledge that (R4) has something going for it.

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[37]   Cf. Miller 2021.

Mind-independence

Mind-independence may be a good enough criterion of realism in domains such as physical reality. To think that physical objects consist of, for example, nothing but sense data would be expressive of a form of idealism, and clearly opposed to the spirit of realism. But much, perhaps all, of social reality is mind-dependent in one way or another. Thus, either there is no room for realism in social ontology or mind-independence does not provide a useful criterion to identify realism in this domain (see e.g. Khalidi 2016). As expounded above, we treat mind-independence as only one of four criteria of realism on the map of realisms meant to apply to any domain.

Social constructions are clearly mind-dependent.[38] If there weren't any agents engaged in intricate forms of interaction and forming specific individual or shared attitudes, there wouldn't be social entities such as banks, football clubs, democratic elections, parking areas or labour unions. With the help of the basic map, we can see that such entities can nonetheless be considered real in the sense of (R1), (R2), and (R4). Anyone who holds that claims about social constructions have truth value, are sometimes true, and are about irreducible entities, is both a realist ((R1), (R2), and (R4)) and a social constructionist (and thus non-objectivist). According to the basic map, to be a social constructionist is only incompatible with being an objectivist realist (R3). But in all other senses, social constructionists can be realists. This is worth emphasising, as many social constructionists self-identify as realists (e.g. Haslanger 2012) whereas others (such as Ásta) are sometimes classified as anti-realist (see Ásta 2015, Barnes 2017, Mason 2020 for discussion).

That said, it still seems that some kinds of mind-dependence conform more with the realist spirit than do other kinds of mind-dependence. The intuition that mind-dependence amounts to anti-realism can perhaps partially be saved on a more sophisticated map. Social constructionism need not be equally seriously opposed to the spirit of realism as, say, textbook sense-data idealism about physical objects is (cf. Ásta 2015). A more sophisticated map would show that the nature of mind-independence is to be studied more carefully in view of this. We here outline two ways in which the basic map might be refined (see Page 2006 for a third way[39]).

(1) First, if you think of the social realm as directly dependent on the experiences and thoughts of *current* observers, your stance is analogous to idealism about material objects. But even if social reality is causally or constitutively dependent on past actions, it may be independent of current observers. Further, if some aspects of social reality are dependent on *intersubjective or collective* acceptance, these aspects may nonetheless be relatively independent of any individual. This marks a

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[38]   Our discussion in this section is similar in spirit to Thomasson's (2003, 584f.) treatment of varieties of mind-dependence. We will discuss further varieties of mind-dependence in a separate paper.

[39]   Page 2006 distinguishes between ontological, causal and structural independence from 'individuative' independence.

crucial difference between subjectivist and intersubjectivist accounts.[40] What is thus needed is a more precise account of both the relata and the nature of the dependence relation in play. In other words, further work is needed for inventories and analyses (a) of what social reality is dependent on - be it beliefs, intentionality, science, declarations, collective acceptance, official decisions by institutions, informal communal recognition etc. -, (b) of the nature of the respective dependence - be it causal, constitutive, normative, ontological, etc. -, and especially (c) of arguments about what kind of dependence is the crucial kind of mind-dependence for the question of realism.[41] One could be, to adapt a term, a 'quasi-objectivist' and say that whereas social kinds, social injustices, oppressive practices, and everyday institutional facts are not strictly speaking objective, they are very close to being objective in that they do not display the kinds of mind-dependence at odds with the spirit of realism. They do not go away, whatever an individual thinks.

(2) Second, social reality contains heterogeneous elements, and some elements may be multiply mind-dependent, whereas others are relatively mind-independent (even though mind-dependent in some general sense). In this vein, Khalidi (2015) distinguishes between, on the one hand, social kinds of which a token can be a member of the kind only if the token is collectively regarded as such - for example, one can only be the president of the U.S in this way -, and on the other hand, kinds within which the general type is mind-dependent, but once the kind exists, tokens can become members without any thoughts targeted at the tokens - for example, there could be a dollar bill that was produced in the usual way but then lost so that no-one has ever had any awareness of it. The former social kinds are mind-dependent in two ways (as types and tokens), the latter only in one way. Similarly, although all action is mind-dependent, patterns of interaction may emerge without anyone intending or even noticing this. Emergent patterns of interaction (not necessarily noticed by anyone) are more mind-independent than conferred statuses, which exist only when conferred, and thus are more thoroughly mind-dependent. Consequently, whereas patterns of interaction and conferrals of statuses both depend on human action and mental attitudes in some general sense, conferrals of statuses are

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[40]   This distinction warrants more attention that we can give it in this paper. Our focus is on which strength of the claim concerning mind-dependence non-objectivist views would be advised to adopt. Although our explanations and most accounts mentioned in this section take a broadly intersubjectivist line - i.e. in terms of social practices or collective beliefs -, this alone may not dissuade those attracted to subjectivism. However, a proper defence of intersubjectivism and engagement with subjectivism will need to be provided on another occasion.

[41]   See e.g. Vinueza 2001.

thus dependent in a further way. The recipe for examining degrees of mind-dependence would then be to study which (if any) phenomena are mind-dependent in multiple ways and which are such only in some very general sense.

We cannot pursue this here, but our suggestion is that a more sophisticated map of realisms would capture positions as 'more objectivist' and 'less objectivist' by analysing the kinds of dependence at issue. One could then suggest a definition of 'quasi-objectivism' for a certain family of positions closest, or at any rate relatively close to objectivism.

The more sophisticated distinctions may be needed in accounting for the sense in which some social constructionist accounts are more realist (more objectivist) and some more anti-realist (less objectivist), even though they all subscribe to a mind-dependence view, i.e. (AR3) on our basic map.

For Success theory, against mere cognitivism

By contrast, minimal realism (R2) is a fully recommendable definition of realism in social ontology. This is the sense of realism in which one can be a realist about the less-than-fundamental, and the not-fully-mind-independent. And as commented above, this may be especially appealing when an entity deemed real has causal powers or normative roles.

The corresponding form of anti-realism is what Kit Fine (2001) calls the eliminativist or sceptical form of anti-realism. This view of anti-realism holds that if numbers are not real (in the sense of R2), then there are no prime numbers between 3 and 6. And as there *are* prime numbers between 3 and 6, we have good reason to be realists *in this sense*. There are also good reasons to be eliminativists about various entities from witches to phlogiston (namely, the ones that do not exist).

But why not adopt an even more minimal definition of realism in social ontology? Why doesn't, in other words, an affirmative answer to our (Q1) suffice in demarcating realist from anti-realist views? Here we hold that cognitivism alone is a too modest view, as it is compatible with error theory. Here, the key argument is simply that existence seems just too central for something to be real - the mere availability of views on which realism about *Xs* entails that *Xs* exist places a heavy burden of proof on views on which realism is compatible with non-existence. Such a massive majority of usages of 'real' in all contexts from everyday life and philosophy to social research connote being real and existing, that R1 cannot but feel inadequate. To avoid this inadequacy, realism in a domain *D* better entail a success theory about the central claims or sentences of domain D. The basic view we labelled 'most minimal realism' (R1) is, in short, too minimal to be an acceptable account of realism, when other options on which existence is a defining part of realism are available. Yet, here too there is conceptual space for more sophisticated views.

Defenders of *quasi-realism* typically argue that their theory can be success-theories while capturing the strengths of a non-cognitivist, expressivist analysis of the relevant discourse.[42] It is worth pointing out that in social ontology expressivism hasn't been popular at all (despite Wilfrid Sellars (1956 and 1968) being both an expressivist and an important early defender of we-intentions), and for example Mills (1998, 49) puts it aside as an irrelevant option. One reason for that may be that expressivism has an immediate appeal in metaethics that it lacks in social ontology: a salient feature of ethical or normative talk and thought is its practicality and connection to motivations. By contrast, the immediate salient feature in metaphysics of the social and institutional reality is its dependence on human constructions and conceptions. Social constructionism has a lot going for it, as a theory in social ontology. In metaethics, social constructionism has been an equally marginal position as expressivism is in social ontology; and expressivism typically does not go very well with social constructionism.[43] They both differ from robust objectivist mind-independence views (R3), but expressivism parts company already in Q1, whereas social constructionism only in Q3. If one is to defend social constructionism, one should opt for R1 and R2; expressivism doesn't (by definition, it rejects R1). Therefore, while a quasi-realist can argue that apparently realist phenomena can be reinterpreted on an expressivist basis, it may lack the initial motivation: why not be, say, a realist social constructionist instead?

Conclusion

We have suggested that there are at least four ways of defining realism in social ontology, labelled (R1) through (R4). Against non-cognitivism, (R1) holds that statements such as 'the bank closes at 4 pm' or 'the Kaizer Chiefs scored a goal,' abbreviated as statements about *Xs*, have truth-value. Against error theory, (R2) holds that some of the statements are true, and so that there are *Xs* in virtue of which those statements are true. Against non-objectivist (subjectivist or intersubjectivist) views granting the mind-dependence of social constructions, (R3) holds that for *Xs* to be real they have to be objective, mind-independent. And against reductionism (of reducible, non-fundamental, grounded entities to something more fundamental), (R4) holds that for *X* to be real, it has to be irreducible, ungrounded, fundamental, *sui generis*. This basic map helps to see how social constructionists can be realists in the sense of (R1), (R2), and (R4). A more sophisticated map would zoom in on the third of these demarcating issues and distinguish between kinds and multiple degrees of mind-dependence. In analogy to these forms of realism, there are four types of anti-realism (AR1)-(AR4).

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[42]   Cf. Blackburn (1993), van Roojen (2015).

[43]   Cf. Essays in Lenman and Shemmer, eds. (2012), for arguments for and against the compatibility of constructivism and non-cognitivism.

The basic map is primarily guided by the clarificatory aim of making sense of debates about 'realism' in social ontology. Above, we assessed reasons for and against the four suggested definitions of realism. We argued that (R1) seems necessary, but insufficient: it is counter-intuitive to take error-theorists (eliminativists) to be realists. (R3), in its basic version, seems ill-suited for social ontology. Social reality just isn't fully mind-independent, but that does not seem to justify throwing social entities in the dustbin with phlogiston or witches. And (R4) has problems of its own: to distinguish between eliminativism and reductionism it may need to appeal to the distinction between 'really existing' fundamental entities and 'existing, but less real' non-fundamental entities. It may well be that it is best to merely talk about reducibility, fundamentality or grounding without the assumption that the status as *real* hangs on those investigations. Further, fundamentality as a definition of real is ill-suited for social ontology. A more fruitful understanding of 'non-redundancy' is that of causal or normative relevance: certainly at least non-redundant entities are real (even if mind-dependent, or even if non-fundamental). However, this may be a reason to believe in their reality rather than a suggested analysis of what it means that they are real: perhaps causally inert entities exist, or are real, as well.

For these reasons, realism as success-theory (R2) looks to be the most viable definition of realism in social ontology. The second best is then non-reductionism (R4) on the 'less permissive' reading we have detailed, which permits causally and normatively significant properties and entities to count as real, but not others. In some contexts, adopting this view on the 'irreducibility'-reading is fine, but substantively the same points can be made without the problematic distinction of 'existing' and 'really existing'.

Given the central appeal of mind-independence, a more sophisticated plotting of views in between subjectivist and objectivist realism is called for, and more detailed accounts of what is dependent on what, and what kind of dependence is at stake are called for, before it can be an acceptable definition of realism for social ontology. We have taken first steps in this direction, more may need to follow.

One might still wonder whether social ontologists need the sort of metametaphysical clarifications towards which we worked in this paper. That is, why not drop the moniker 'realism' and simply examine the debates of cognitivism vs. expressivism, error theory vs. success theory, mind-dependence vs. mind-independence, reducibility vs. non-reducibility, or causal or normative relevance and redundancy?

There are several reasons to examine which usages of 'realism' are most fitting in some contexts, such as the social and institutional world. The term 'real' - with all its more or less confusing usages - is so deeply embedded in different discourses that it is less futile to argue for reasoned usages than to hope that the term would simply disappear. These discourses include those of lay people in their everyday life, social scientists which take themselves to be studying something real and those philosophers interested in locating social entities in broader metaphysical understandings of the universe. In practical and political contexts, it is rather

obviously important to be able to say that, for example, some forms of oppression are real. As realism-talk is likely not going to go away in any of these guises, it is better to promote disciplined usages than simply give up.[44]

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