

Social Objects, Response-Dependence, and Realism

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ABSTRACT: There is a widespread sentiment that social objects such as nation-states, political borders, and pieces of money are just figments of our collective imagination, and not really ‘out there’ in the world. Call this the antirealist intuition. Eliminativist, reductive materialist, and immaterialist views of social objects can all make sense of the antirealist intuition, in one way or another. But these views face serious difficulties. A promising alternative view of social objects is non-reductive materialism. Yet it is unclear whether, and how, the non-reductive materialist can make sense of the antirealist intuition. I develop a version of non-reductive materialism that is able to meet this explanatory demand. The central idea is that social objects are materially constituted objects that are response-dependent in a certain sense. I go on to offer an independent argument in favor of this response-dependent view of social objects. I then suggest that a proponent of this view can appeal to the response-dependent nature of social objects to explain – or explain away – the antirealist intuition.

1. The antirealist intuition

In an essay about the political and social situation in England during the Second World War, the writer George Orwell asks, “Are there really such things as nations?” (1941, p. 1) The Norwegian anthropologist and explorer Thor Heyerdahl questions the reality of borders: “Borders? I have never seen one. But I have heard they exist in the minds of some people.” (Stein 2015, p. 33) And *The New Yorker* ran a cartoon with the caption, “Sure, money may be imaginary – but at least it’s got everybody imagining it.”¹ These quotations convey a widespread sentiment, to the effect that social objects such as nation-states, political borders, and pieces of

¹ The cartoonist is William Hamilton, and the cartoon was printed in the July 22, 2013 issue.

money are just figments of our collective imagination, and not really ‘out there’ in the world.²

Let us call this sentiment the *antirealist intuition*.

Some positions on the metaphysics of social objects can easily account for the antirealist intuition. In particular, the *eliminativist* who says that social objects do not exist can maintain that this intuition is getting at the fact that there are no social objects. And the *reductive materialist* who says that every token social object is identical to a token ordinary material object can maintain that the intuition is getting at the fact that there are no social objects ‘over and above’ the ordinary material objects that we already recognize.³ However, both eliminativism and reductive materialism face serious difficulties. Eliminativism conflicts with apparent truths. For instance, it is a historical fact that the United States was founded in 1776 and not dissolved thereafter. Given that to found something is to bring it into existence, it follows that nation-states exist. Similarly, it is a geopolitical fact that there is a border between Vermont and New Hampshire. It follows from this that there are borders.⁴ Reductive materialism, on the other hand, is plagued by the problem from Leibniz’s law. Consider, for example, the dollar bill in my wallet. The reductive materialist says that this dollar bill is identical to the coincident piece of paper.⁵ Yet the dollar bill apparently does not share all properties with the piece of paper. For instance, the piece of paper could have existed even if the U.S. had lost the Revolutionary War

² I take social objects to be spatially located particular things that cannot be brought into existence without a society. Ordinary material artifacts such as tables and chairs are not social objects in the relevant sense, since they can be brought into existence by lone individuals.

³ Eliminativism and reductive materialism about social objects are both suggested by Searle (1995, p. 57).

⁴ See Fine (2001, p. 2) and Schaffer (2009, pp. 357-9) for similar arguments applied to other domains. See Thomasson (forthcoming, p. 2) for a related argument in favor of the existence of social groups. See Korman (2015, Ch. 4) for a related argument in favor of the existence of ordinary material objects.

⁵ This example is drawn from Searle (1995, p. 57).

and never set up any financial institutions, whereas the dollar bill could not have existed under these circumstances. So by Leibniz's law of the indiscernibility of identicals, which says that *a* and *b* are identical only if they share all properties, the dollar bill is not identical to the piece of paper.⁶

Other positions on the metaphysics of social objects are able to explain away the antirealist intuition. In particular, the *immaterialist* who says that social objects are immaterial or abstract can maintain that the intuition is based on a mistaken association between concreteness and reality.⁷ But immaterialism also faces a serious challenge, namely accounting for the spatial properties of social objects. For example, the United States is located in the Western Hemisphere; the border between Vermont and New Hampshire is to the east of New York; and a certain dollar bill is now in my wallet. But if these social objects are immaterial or abstract, it is hard to see how they could have such spatial properties.⁸

If eliminativism, reductive materialism, and immaterialism about social objects are rejected, a natural alternative position is *non-reductive materialism*. Non-reductive materialism is committed to EXISTENCE, NON-IDENTITY, and MATERIALITY. EXISTENCE says that social objects exist (contra eliminativism). NON-IDENTITY says that token social objects are not identical to token ordinary material objects (contra reductive materialism). And MATERIALITY says that

⁶ Other authors have advanced similar Leibniz's law arguments against various views of social groups, establishments, and geopolitical entities. See, e.g., Uzquiano (2004), Ritchie (2013, §2-4), and Korman (forthcoming, §2.1).

⁷ Korman (forthcoming) endorses immaterialism for social objects such as stores, restaurants, and states. Thomasson (2003) endorses immaterialism for non-spatial social entities such as laws and governments; it is unclear whether she would endorse immaterialism for spatially located social objects such as states.

⁸ Though see Korman (forthcoming) for a version of immaterialism that attempts to account for such spatial properties.

social objects are material entities (contra immaterialism).⁹ Non-reductive materialism avoids the problems raised for the preceding views, and is thus a promising alternative.

But how do we make sense of the antirealist intuition, as non-reductive materialists? This is far from clear. We cannot make sense of it by pointing to the fact that social objects are non-fundamental. For ordinary material objects such as trees, rocks, tables, and chairs are also non-fundamental. Yet the antirealist intuition does not encompass these objects – there is no widespread sentiment that trees, rocks, tables, and chairs are just figments of our imagination, and not really ‘out there’ in the world. Nor can we fully and adequately make sense of the intuition by pointing to the fact that social objects are less fundamental than ordinary material objects. For the intuition has something to do with the mind-dependent character of social objects, whereas relative fundamentality need not have anything to do with mind-dependence – the facts of physics are more fundamental than the facts of chemistry, but neither set of facts is mind-dependent. Finally, we cannot make sense of the intuition by merely pointing to the mind-dependence of social objects. For ordinary material artifacts such as tables and chairs are also mind-dependent, insofar as their existence is partly grounded in the intentions of their creators.¹⁰ Yet the antirealist intuition does not encompass such artifacts.

My aim in the rest of this paper is to show how the non-reductive materialist can make sense of the antirealist intuition. I do this by developing a version of non-reductive materialism that has the resources to meet this explanatory demand. The central idea is that social objects such as nation-states, political borders, and dollar bills are materially constituted objects that are

⁹ Non-reductive materialist views of social objects have gained popularity in recent years. See, e.g., Hindriks (2013), Ritchie (2013, forthcoming), and Epstein (2015).

¹⁰ This is the prevailing view in the literature on material artifacts. See, e.g., Hilpinen (1992, 1993), Baker (2004), Thomasson (2007), Korman (2015, §8.4), and Evnine (2016).

response-dependent in a certain sense. I go on to offer an independent argument in favor of this response-dependent view of social objects. I then suggest that a proponent of this view can appeal to the response-dependent nature of social objects to explain – or explain away – the antirealist intuition.

2. The response-dependent view

There are two basic ideas behind my proposed version of non-reductive materialism. The first is that social objects are *materially constituted*, much like ordinary material objects such as rocks, rivers, tables, and chairs. The second is that social objects, unlike these ordinary material objects, are *response-dependent* in roughly the sense that they exist partly in virtue of our attitudes towards them.^{11 12} In this section I develop this response-dependent view of social objects more rigorously using the toolkit of analytic metaphysics, as well as ideas from the social ontology literature.

2.1 Preliminary statement

As a first pass, let us say that on the response-dependent view, any social object z satisfies the following conditions by its very nature:

MATERIAL CONSTITUTION	At any time that z exists: $(\exists x)(x \text{ constitutes } z \ \& \ x \text{ is material})$;
RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE	(Necessity) For any y that constitutes z : $[y \text{ constitutes } z]$ holds in virtue of $[y \text{ is taken to constitute } z]$;

¹¹ The notion of response-dependence here is different from the orthodox notions in the literature, not least because these orthodox notions apply to classes of judgments (Wright 1992) or concepts (Johnston 1993, Pettit 1991), not objects.

¹² See Hayek (1943), Searle (1995, 2010), Thomasson (2003), Hindriks (2006), and Khalidi (2015) for related ideas concerning social/institutional facts and kinds.

(Sufficiency) For any y that is taken to constitute z : [y constitutes z] holds in virtue of [y is taken to constitute z].¹³

A few remarks are in order. The constitution relation in MATERIAL CONSTITUTION is the relation exhibited by, e.g., a statue and the clay from which it is made. I take constitution to be an asymmetric and irreflexive dependence relation that holds between an object x and either another object or some stuff that constitutes x .¹⁴ Thus, I allow for x in MATERIAL CONSTITUTION to be either a material object or material stuff. Moreover, I remain neutral on what sorts of material objects may constitute social objects. For instance, I leave open the possibility that the constituting objects are ordinary material objects, mereological fusions, aggregates, rigid or variable embodiments,¹⁵ or Aristotelianhylomorphic compounds.¹⁶ Lastly, I allow for a social object to be constituted by different material objects or stuff at different times. Turning now to RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE, the holding in virtue of relation is the relation exhibited by, e.g., the fact that act a is pious and the fact that a is loved by the gods, on a Euthyphronic view of piety. I take this to be the relation of metaphysical grounding.¹⁷ Finally, in saying that any social object z satisfies MATERIAL CONSTITUTION and RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE by its very nature, I am making an essentialist claim.¹⁸

¹³ I use “[x]” to denote “the fact that x .”

¹⁴ Thus, I am committed to the view that constitution is not identity. For some representative defenses of this view, see Wiggins (1968), Johnston (1992), Baker (1997), Thomson (1998), and Fine (2003).

¹⁵ See Fine (1999).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Koslicki (2008, 2018) and Evnine (2016).

¹⁷ For a discussion of metaphysical grounding, see Fine (2001, 2012), Schaffer (2009), Rosen (2010), Correia and Schnieder (2012), and Raven (forthcoming).

¹⁸ For a discussion of essentialist claims, see Fine (1994).

I will now refine this preliminary statement of the response-dependent view of social objects by examining two issues that arise in connection with RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE: who the relevant subjects are, and how the response of ‘taking’ something to constitute something else should be understood.

2.2 The subjects

Who are the relevant subjects, whose responses ground the existence of social objects? A natural proposal is that the relevant subjects in RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE are the members of the relevant population or social group(s). This proposal works well for some cases, especially simple imaginary ones. For instance, suppose that two people on a desert island agree that a certain river is to be the border between their respective territories. In this case, it is plausible to suppose that the river then constitutes the border in virtue of the responses of these two islanders, who are the members of the relevant population. The proposal also works well for some small-scale real-world cases, e.g. a case in which two housemates agree that a certain partition is to be the boundary between their respective parts of the living room.

However, the proposal does not fare so well when it comes to most large-scale real-world cases. For example, consider the border between Vermont and New Hampshire. This border is constituted by the west bank of the Connecticut River, as a result of an agreement between Vermont and the Continental Congress, and a subsequent ruling by the United States Supreme Court. In this case, the relevant subjects are not plausibly taken to be the members of the relevant population, viz. the residents of Vermont and New Hampshire. They are more plausibly taken to be the relevant *practical authorities*, namely the governments of Vermont and New Hampshire, as well as the government of the United States. More generally, I propose that in many large-

scale cases, the relevant subjects are the relevant practical authorities, who are taken to be authorities on the matter at hand by members of the relevant population.¹⁹ In some cases these authorities are individuals, but in many cases they are social entities such as nation-states, governments, or organizations. And in some cases these authorities are legitimate, whereas in other cases they are merely de facto authorities that are obeyed by sufficiently many members of the relevant population. For example, when the British government partitioned colonial British India into India and Pakistan in 1947, they were arguably acting as a de facto authority but not a legitimate authority.

Still, there are some large-scale cases in which the relevant subjects are not plausibly taken to be practical authorities. For example, consider the boundaries of a neighborhood, such as the East Village in New York City. There does not seem to be any particular practical authority or authorities whose responses determine the boundaries of such neighborhoods. To account for these cases, we may draw on Ásta's idea of *social standing* (2018, §1.4). Ásta suggests that some people who do not have authority nevertheless have social standing in virtue of how others view them, e.g. in virtue of being feared, respected, or admired. This social standing gives them some of the same powers that authorities have. For example, the school bully can order another kid to give her his lunch money, much as an authority can order members of the population to perform various acts. So those with social standing can play some of the same roles as authorities. My suggestion is that in the cases of interest to us where the relevant subjects are not practical authorities, they are individuals or social entities with social standing. For instance, in the case of neighborhoods, we may take the relevant subjects to be publicly

¹⁹ See Ásta (2018, Ch.1) and Hindriks (2006) for similar proposals regarding some social properties.

prominent and powerful members of the community, e.g., journalists, real estate developers, activists, business owners, and so on.

By taking the relevant subjects to be either practical authorities or individuals/entities with social standing, we can give a plausible account of all the cases of interest to us. The small-scale cases discussed above, in which the relevant subjects are the members of the relevant population, may be regarded as a limiting case in which all the members of the relevant population have social standing. There may also be some cases in which the relevant subjects include both practical authorities and individuals/entities with social standing. For example, the relevant subjects in the case of the United States of America may be taken to include the constituent fifty U.S. States (authorities), as well as other powerful nation-states (entities with social standing).

2.3 The response

How do we understand the relevant response of ‘taking’ something to constitute something else, which figures in RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE? A straightforward alternative is to construe this response as a *belief*: ‘taking’ *y* to constitute *z* means believing that *y* constitutes *z*. But this alternative is problematic for two reasons. First, the relevant response apparently has a volitional character. For example, my housemate and I can just decide to take the partition to constitute the boundary between our respective parts of the living room. Belief, however, is not volitional in this way.²⁰ If I look out of the window and see that it is raining, I cannot just decide to believe that it is sunny. Second, under certain circumstances it may be rational for a subject to take *y* to constitute *z*, while knowing that *y* does not constitute *z*. For example, it may be rational

²⁰ See, e.g., Williams (1973), Hieronymi (2006), and Setiya (2008).

for me to take the partition to constitute the boundary while knowing that it does not yet constitute the boundary, if I have good reason to believe that my doing so will prompt my housemate to do so as well. But arguably, it is never rational to believe that *p* while knowing that not *p*. For these reasons, we should not construe the relevant response as a belief.

Following others in the social ontology literature, I suggest that the relevant response be construed as *acceptance*: ‘taking’ *y* to constitute *z* means accepting that *y* constitutes *z*.²¹ And I propose that we understand the relevant notion of acceptance as follows:

ACCEPTANCE Subject *S* accepts proposition *p* iff *S*, in their role as an authority or individual/entity with standing, is committed to acting as if *p* were true.

Subject *S* may be an individual, or a social entity such as a nation-state, government, or organization. In either case, *S* must hold the relevant commitment in their capacity as a practical authority or individual/entity with social standing. Thus, the commitment must be public to some extent. For instance, the mayor of a town who is privately committed to acting as if a certain area constitutes the town park, but is not publicly committed to this in her role as mayor, would not count as accepting that the area constitutes the park. I will not attempt to analyze the relevant notion of commitment, leaving open the possibility that this notion may be further analyzed in terms of dispositions, plans, an activity of willing, or in some other way.²² Finally, I take it that the relevant commitment is made partly on the basis of pragmatic considerations such as self-interest, concern for the public good, or a sense of justice. Thus, acceptance is a pragmatic attitude. As such, it is plausibly taken to be volitional in a way that belief is not. And it is not subject to the same requirements of epistemic rationality as belief. The two problems raised above are thereby avoided.

²¹ See, e.g., Searle (1995, 2010), Tuomela (2002), Thomasson (2003), and Hindriks (2006).

²² See Chang (2013, §2) for a discussion of some possible analyses.

It is worth distinguishing cases in which acceptance of the relevant proposition is *immediate* from cases in which this acceptance is *mediated* by acceptance of a more general proposition. For example, in the case of the Vermont-New Hampshire border, the relevant authorities immediately accept that the west bank of the Connecticut River constitutes the Vermont-New Hampshire border. In contrast, in the case of dollar bills, what the relevant authorities immediately accept is a general proposition of the form $(\forall y)(Fy \rightarrow y \text{ constitutes a dollar bill})$, where ‘F’ names the features that are associated with pieces of paper that constitute dollar bills, e.g., being a piece of paper of a certain size and shape, bearing a certain inscription, and having a certain origin. In accepting this general proposition, the relevant authorities are committed to acting as if it were true. This commitment entails a commitment to act as if the piece of paper in my wallet (which bears the relevant features) constitutes a dollar bill. The authorities thus accept, in a mediate way, that this piece of paper constitutes a dollar bill. Note that it is irrelevant whether the authorities are aware of the existence of the piece of paper. Just as someone committed to picking up all the trash on the beach can thereby be committed to picking up a plastic bag whose existence they are unaware of, so too the authorities can be committed to acting as if the piece of paper in my wallet constitutes a dollar bill without being aware of the piece of paper’s existence.

Let me conclude by noting some important ways in which my notion of acceptance differs from John Searle’s influential notion of collective acceptance (Searle 1995, Ch. 1-2). First, our proposals differ on what is accepted. On the Searlean proposal it is a constitutive rule of the form *X counts as Y in context C*, whereas on my proposal it is a proposition of the form *y constitutes z* (and in some cases, a proposition of the form $(\forall y)(Fy \rightarrow y \text{ constitutes a } K)$). An

advantage of my proposal is that it does not rely upon a controversial distinction between regulative and constitutive rules,²³ and it does not invoke an obscure primitive relation of “counting as.” Second, our proposals differ over the subjects of acceptance. On the Searlean proposal it is always individual people that accept the relevant rules, whereas on my proposal both individuals and social entities may accept the relevant propositions. My proposal has the advantage that it is able to straightforwardly account for the vast array of real-world cases in which the relevant subjects seem to be social entities such as governments, nation-states, or organizations. Finally, our proposals differ as to the collective aspect of acceptance. On the Searlean proposal, collective acceptance is a primitive mental state that cannot be analyzed in terms of individual acceptance. My proposal does not posit any such mysterious primitive mental state. Instead, it makes acceptance a collective phenomenon insofar as practical authorities and those with social standing have these statuses partly in virtue of the attitudes and behaviors of members of the relevant population.

2.4 Final statement

Here, then, is the final statement of my proposed response-dependent view of social objects. On the response-dependent view, any social object z satisfies the following conditions by its very nature:

MATERIAL CONSTITUTION	At any time that z exists: $(\exists x)(x \text{ constitutes } z \ \& \ x \text{ is a material object or material stuff})$;
RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE	(Necessity) For any y such that y constitutes z : [y constitutes z] is grounded in [the relevant authorities or individuals/entities with standing accept that y constitutes z]; (Sufficiency) For any y such that the relevant authorities or individuals/entities with standing accept that y constitutes z : [the

²³ See Raz (1975/1999, §4.2) for a critical discussion of this distinction.

relevant authorities or individuals/entities with standing accept that y constitutes z] grounds [y constitutes z].

3. Creation by fiat

Thus far I have put forward a response-dependent view of social objects, which satisfies the constraints of non-reductive materialism. In this section I provide an argument in favor of adopting this response-dependent view of social objects, along with a response-*independent* view of ordinary material objects such as trees, rocks, tables, and chairs. The argument has the form of an inference to the best explanation: I argue that the response-dependent view of social objects, coupled with a response-independent view of ordinary material objects, is able to make sense of a striking apparent contrast between these respective objects.

This striking contrast has to do with the creation of social objects, on the one hand, and the creation of ordinary material objects, on the other hand. Under appropriate circumstances, social objects can apparently be created by acts of agreement, decree, declaration, or the like. For example, two people on a desert island can create a border by agreeing that a certain river is to be the border between their respective territories. The government of a desert island society can decree that seashells of a certain kind henceforth constitute money, thereby creating pieces of money. And the political leadership of a group of people inhabiting a certain territory can declare the independence of a new sovereign state, thereby founding a new nation-state.²⁴ In contrast, ordinary experience suggests that ordinary material objects cannot likewise be created by acts of

²⁴ Many authors in the social ontology literature have noted that social and/or institutional facts can apparently be created by fiat. See, e.g., Searle (1995, 2010), Thomasson (2003), and Hindriks (2006). But it has not been widely noted that spatially located social objects can also apparently be created by fiat.

agreement, decree, declaration, or the like. For example, a government cannot just decree into existence more trees; it would have to go and plant them. Nor can two children make a sandcastle by agreeing that some heap of sand constitutes a sandcastle; they would have to go and build the sandcastle by arranging some sand into the shape of a castle. Likewise, a carpenter cannot create a table by just declaring that some hunk of wood constitutes a table. But if ordinary material objects cannot be created by fiat, why is it that social objects can be created in this way? There is a striking contrast here that cries out for explanation.

One might try to *explain away* this striking contrast by arguing that social objects cannot be created by fiat, appearances notwithstanding. In particular, the eliminativist who denies the existence of social objects can argue that there are no social objects created by fiat in our imaginary scenarios, since there are no social objects, period. And the reductive materialist who maintains that every token social object is identical to a token ordinary material object can argue that there are no social objects created by fiat in these scenarios, since the social objects in these scenarios (the border, the pieces of money, the nation-state) are identical to ordinary material objects (e.g. the river, the seashells, the people), which are evidently not created by fiat. However, if eliminativism and reductive materialism are rejected for the reasons cited earlier, then the striking contrast cannot be explained away in either of these ways.

Still, one might try to explain away the striking contrast by arguing that ordinary material objects can be created by fiat, appearances notwithstanding. For instance, it may be argued that when the International Astronomical Union officially recognized certain constellations in 1928, it thereby created these constellations by fiat. But this is unconvincing. Constellations are just groups of stars. Since these groups of stars existed prior to 1928, the IAU's recognition did not

create them. Rather, the IAU's recognition gave a new classification to these existing groups of stars. Another putative example of creation by fiat of ordinary material objects is readymades in art. For instance, it might be thought that Marcel Duchamp created his famous artwork *Fountain* by fiat. I agree that in this case, Duchamp did create a new object. However, it is far from clear that this object was created by fiat. Arguably, Duchamp created *Fountain* by repositioning and inscribing a urinal, with the intention of submitting the resulting product to an art exhibit. But then *Fountain* was created in much the same way that ordinary material artifacts such as tables are created. Namely, through the intentional physical manipulation of preexisting material. Moreover, it is an open question whether *Fountain* should be classified as an ordinary material object as opposed to a social object. I believe that this question should be answered by a philosophical theory of artworks, and I venture that such a theory would countenance the creation of artworks by fiat only insofar as it construes artworks as social objects.

If the striking contrast between social objects and ordinary material objects is not explained away, how is it to be explained? I contend that the response-dependent view of social objects, coupled with a response-*independent* view of ordinary material objects, provides a satisfying explanation. According to the response-dependent view of social objects, social objects satisfy MATERIAL CONSTITUTION and RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE by their very nature. It follows that under appropriate circumstances – namely, circumstances in which a suitable constituting material object or material stuff already exists – these objects can be brought into existence by the relevant authorities or individuals/entities with standing accepting the relevant propositions. And an act of agreement, decree, declaration, or the like can constitute or otherwise bring about the requisite acceptance. According to the response-independent view of ordinary

material objects, any ordinary material object z satisfies MATERIAL CONSTITUTION and the following RESPONSE-INDEPENDENCE condition by its very nature:

RESPONSE-INDEPENDENCE (\sim Necessity) For any y that constitutes z : $\sim\{[y$ constitutes $z]$ is grounded in $[y$ is taken to constitute $z]\}$;

 (\sim Sufficiency) For any y that is taken to constitute z : $\sim\{[y$ is taken to constitute $z]$ grounds $[y$ constitutes $z]\}$.

It follows that there are no analogous circumstances in which ordinary material objects can be brought into existence through the sorts of responses that ground the existence of social objects. That is why ordinary material objects, unlike social objects, cannot be created by acts of agreement, decree, declaration, or the like.²⁵

4. Objectivity and reality

If social objects are response-dependent, as I have argued, then they lack *objectivity* insofar as they fail to exist independently of being taken to exist. For on the response-dependent view, the existence of any social object z is partly grounded in the existence of some constituting material object or stuff, and partly grounded in the fact that this material object or stuff is taken to constitute z . But in taking some object or stuff to constitute z , a subject is *eo ipso* taking z to exist. Thus, social objects do not exist independently of being taken to exist. In contrast, if ordinary material objects are response-independent, as I have argued, then they do not likewise fail to exist independently of being taken to exist.

²⁵ Those who would prefer to explain the striking contrast in terms of the nature of certain facts, rather than the nature of certain objects, may be able to re-construe the proposed explanation in terms of the response-dependent grounds of facts concerning the existence of social objects, and the response-independent grounds of facts concerning the existence of ordinary material objects.

The non-reductive materialist can appeal to this difference in the objectivity of social objects and ordinary material objects to explain – or explain away – the antirealist intuition. Whether the intuition is to be explained or explained away will depend on the non-reductive materialist’s further commitments, in particular her conception of reality. The non-reductive materialist may embrace a conception of reality on which being objective is a necessary condition for being real, or fully real.^{26 27} This ‘antirealist’ non-reductive materialist can *explain* the antirealist intuition by maintaining that it is correctly getting at the fact that the reality of social objects is compromised by their lack of objectivity. Alternatively, the non-reductive materialist may embrace a conception of reality on which being objective is not a necessary condition for being real, or fully real. For instance, she may embrace a conception on which to be real is to exist,²⁸ or a conception on which to be real is to play an irreducible causal and explanatory role.²⁹ This ‘realist’ non-reductive materialist can *explain away* the antirealist intuition by maintaining that it is based on a mistaken association between objectivity and reality. I will not take a stand here on which of these two routes – the realist route or the antirealist route – should be pursued by the non-reductive materialist. That hinges on which conception of reality should be adopted, which is a deep and vexing issue that I cannot hope to resolve here. Suffice it to say that both routes accomplish the task set out in this paper, which

²⁶ Such a conception of reality, which links reality with objectivity, is familiar from the literature on response-dependence. See, e.g., Pettit (1991, p. 590), Wright (1992, p. 229), and Johnston (1993 p. 106).

²⁷ A conception of reality on which objectivity is necessary for being fully real (but not for being less-than-fully real) is one on which reality comes in degrees. For a recent exploration of this idea, see McDaniel (2013; 2017, Ch. 5 and 7).

²⁸ See, e.g., McDaniel (2013, p. 1) and Haslanger (2018, p. 269).

²⁹ See, e.g., Barnes (2017, pp. 2432-3).

was to make sense of the antirealist intuition from within a non-reductive materialist view of social objects.

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