Language, Logos, and Social Ontology: Naturalist and Post-Naturalist
Narratives of Human Rationality and Social Reality

By

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Abstract

I distinguish two ways that philosophers have approached and explained the reality and status of human social institutions. I call these approaches “naturalist” and “post-naturalist”. Common to both approaches is an understanding that the status of mind and its relation to the world or “nature” has implications on a conception of the status of institutional reality. Naturalists hold that mind is explicable within a scientific frame that conceives of mind as a fundamentally material process. By proxy, social reality is also materially explicable. Post-naturalists critique this view, holding instead that naturalism is parasitic on contemporary science—it therefore is non-compulsory and distorts how we ought to understand mind and social reality. A comparison of naturalism and post-naturalism will comprise the content of the first chapter. The second chapter turns to tracing out the dimensions of a post-naturalist narrative of mind and social reality. Post-naturalists conceive of mind and its activity of thought as sui generis, and it transpires from this that social institutions are better understood as a rational mind’s mode of the expression in the world. Post-naturalism conceives of social reality as a necessary dimension of thought. Thought requires a second person and thereby a tradition or context of norms that come to both structure its expression and become the products of expression. This is in contrast to the idea that social reality is a production of minds, and thereby derivative. Social reality, self-conscious thought, and thought of the second person are therefore three dimensions of a greater unity.
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Preface

Naturalism, Post-Naturalism, and the Mind-World Problematic

Participation in and formation of social reality marks a salient and unique dimension of human thought and action. Social reality defines our form of life—it is comprised of the culture and institutions that contribute so much to the shaping of a person’s life, experience, and self-understanding. Reflection on the fundamental nature of social reality raises a number of philosophical questions. How is social reality formed? How does social reality subsist, and persist in time? Is social reality imagined and projected onto the world? Is social reality merely contingently constructed? Or is it in some sense the necessary mode of human activity and practice—is it essential? Is it right to speak of institutions in themselves as entities—as facts? Or are they better thought as mere systems of rules that are agreed upon by a community at a given time? What are such agreements in the minds of agents? Are they rooted in power or do they spring from a certain form of common understanding? How do social institutions change in time? If social reality transforms, how fundamental are such transformations? Is social reality a feature of human biology describable in evolutionary-biological terms? If human beings are “rational” animals—that is, able to think and act on thought—what is the role of rationality in the formation and subsistence of social reality?

These questions, and others, define the sphere of philosophical enquiry called “social ontology”. “Ontology” is a domain of philosophical enquiry dealing with the status of objects, or beings in the world. Social ontology then is a certain
line of enquiry aiming to examine what can be said of the phenomenon of social reality—of institutions and of culture as such.

There are many kinds of social institutions: languages, laws, human rights, families, corporations, schools, currencies, governments, states, religious clerical orders, persons, citizens, the mass media, and innumerable others. Many of these institutions relate to each other in varying ways—the existence of some institutional arrangements rely on more fundamental institutions. For example, rights, laws, and schools, among others necessarily depend on language. Without language such institutions couldn’t exist. Some theorists hold, quite plausibly, that language is the most fundamental social institution—and that it is because of the development of language that other social institutions are enabled—a thesis I will examine in greater depth. It must be asked whether the conception of language here is one that is *expressive* or *designative*, and what implications either conception has on the general way language contributes to the formation of the rest of social reality.

Modernity has brought to the fore a conception of nature as a domain principally comprised of law-like, physical, causal relations. However this notion is often disrupted by a conception of the authentic exercise of human rationality. The structure of human reason, and natural law appear disjunctive. The disjunction raises the question, how do mind and world meet in single ontological context—insofar as both appear present in our experience of the world, how are they to be reconciled? For ease of reference I will refer to this problem as the “mind-world problematic”. The phenomenon of social reality is implicated in this problematic insofar as philosophers who consider the ontological dimension debate on how
social reality is to be understood as “natural”. Social realities are instated, deployed, and used by human beings—they bear a necessary connection to human reality. Human beings bring normative reasons to bear in their generating and participating in social institutions. Hence the reasons at play in the practices associated with social institutions are importantly associated with our conceptions of the good. Many social institutions are formed through deliberation—deciding what it is we ought to do and the means to its accomplishment. The predicate “we” is an important conceptual dimension here, inasmuch as social reality is a cooperative enterprise, wherein subjects are able to be moved by common reasons for acting towards a common end. Some social institutions like language and culture are essential to our very thought, our capacity for communication, and our mobility within our society. It seems then that social institutions either represent, or simply are, the forms of our individual and collective thought at play in our theoretical and practical modes of activity. This is difficult to reconcile with the modern idea of nature as a totality of nomos.

Nature, in one modern view, is understood in nomological terms wherein events relate in an order of determinate, regular causality. “The world” on this view is “causally closed”, and all phenomena must be understood in causal terms. On this view human beings, and their apparent rationality, cannot be understood as “outside” nature. If everything is to be understood in lawful terms, then human thought, normativity, and by proxy social reality, are to also be framed in those nomological terms, irrespective of the ways that experience and reflection on thought and normativity run against such a form of description. This view is
motivated by the rise of a scientific mode of explanation that sought (fairly successfully) to explain the world by subtracting to the greatest possible degree, any anthropocentric feature in our descriptions. It followed the Lockean distinction of “primary” and “secondary” qualities, maintaining that the best picture of world would obtain through the elimination of all secondary qualities in our explanations thereof. Secondary qualities are conceived as unreal and circumscribed, obscuring a truly objective picture of what is really there. In short, this view approaches the mind-world problematic through a denial of the authentic existence of mind and its subjective, or anthropocentric mode of reasoning, and perceiving. Mind, and its values, are either illusory, or are best explained “externally”, and “objectively” through the causal relations disclosed by modern empirical science. This is the general form of what will be called “naturalism”, or a “naturalist” conception of social reality in the following pages.

Naturalism will be distinguished from what I call “post-naturalism” or a “post-naturalist” conception of social reality. Post-naturalism recognizes the phenomenon of reason—the activity of mind—as sui generis, or anomalous, rejecting the reductive naturalistic enterprise of fitting reason into the realm of law. Post-naturalists do not endorse dualism or forms of hard Platonism wherein reason...

1 I appropriate the term “Post-naturalist” from Ben Schewel’s essay “Seven Ways of Looking at Religion.” Schewel distinguishes seven contemporary narratives of religious thought and practice. These are: Subtraction, Renewal, Trans-secular, Construct, Perennial, Post-Naturalist, and Developmental. The conception that I will call “Post-Naturalist” here differs slightly from the Schewel’s. On my account it will conjoin what Schewel calls “Post-Naturalist” and “Developmental”. Many of the positions that I group as “Post-Naturalist” does not seem to exclude a priori the historical transitions in social reality characteristic of what Schewel calls “Developmental”. See Schewel, “Seven Ways of Looking at Religion”.
is understood as in some sense a “supernatural” dimension, irreconcilable with a conception of the world disclosed in scientific enquiry. For the post-naturalists, reason is not supernatural; nor is it nomological in the way a traditional naturalism takes it to be. For some post-naturalists, naturalism is seen as an illicit, dogmatic, and obfuscating view, parasitic on the developments of modern science. In many ways naturalism paralyzes and distorts what science illuminates in our metaphysical understanding of the world. For post-naturalism, nature ought to be understood as a domain where both anomalous mind, and nomological world, subsist in continuity. This may be called an “expanded naturalism” insofar as it does not see the natural in the narrow constraints of a reductive monistic naturalism or empirical materialism. It will hold that rationality plays a causal role in our forms of life—and the way we account for social reality must be attentive to a dimension of an authentic rational causality without reducing it to mere blind biological processes. Post-naturalism approaches the mind-world problematic by recognizing that mind is *sui generis*, and that we can gain a clearer sense of reality by taking into account both lawful-causal and authentic rational properties in the world.

John Searle is a significant proponent of a naturalist vision of social reality, and I will devote much of the first chapter to an examination of his approach. While in some notable ways Searle’s views diverge from conventional varieties of naturalism, he maintains that social reality is a product of biological processes that are, at a more fundamental level, a production of the interactions of physical particles. In this way Searle holds that mind and its cognate properties are as
natural a phenomenon as digestion, or the secretion of bile. Hence consciousness and social reality are thought thoroughly explicable in natural scientific terms.

While Searle has spent some twenty years giving expression to a (biological) naturalist narrative of social reality, a post-naturalist vision has yet to be rendered. My two chapters then, have a first task of comparing and contrasting these two paradigmatic approaches to the mind-world problematic in its relation to social reality, and another task of articulating the dimensions and shape of a post-naturalist vision of social institutional reality. It will be seen that I sympathize with the post-naturalist vision in this regard. While naturalism rightly disrupted and criticized the dogmas of dualism and anti-naturalism, post-naturalism helps us to understand the place of thought and action in the world in a way that naturalism ultimately obscures. To this end the first chapter, “Thought, Activity, and Institutional Reality” will review and critique Searle’s biological naturalist picture, raising a number of objections to it gleaned from a number of philosophers who we might regard contributors to a post-naturalist vision. It will also begin an initial discussion of some elements of a post-naturalist approach to the mind-world problematic. The second chapter, “Three Dimensions of Thought: The Subject, The Second Person, and Institutional Reality” will proceed as its title suggests—spelling out salient features of a post-naturalist approach to the mind-world problematic, and how such approaches bear on our understanding of social reality.

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CHAPTER I

Thought, Activity, and Institutional Reality

1. Introductory Reflections

For some two decades John Searle has developed a theory through which the phenomenon of human social institutions can be understood in non-reductive yet naturalistic terms. On his view, the ontology of social reality is an extension of biology, and is thus a real and material phenomenon. Traditional socio-biological theories of society had enthusiastically embraced forms of reductionism in adducing a biological account of human social behavior. Many such accounts were broadly informed by behaviorism—a tradition that by and large culminated in philosophical and scientific failure. Searle’s “Biological Naturalism” stands unique (so he claims) in its resistance to modes of reductionism characteristic of classical socio-biological theories of consciousness and social reality. For Searle, social reality is the “higher-level” production of a more “fundamental” materialist and monistic ontology.

Searle’s conception begins with the material ontology disclosed by particle physics and evolutionary biology. Particles come together into systems that give rise to higher-level phenomena. Hence, consciousness and intentionality are higher-level productions of more fundamental particle interactions. The nomology whereby lower-level events causally give rise to higher-level phenomena is, on Searle’s view, sufficiently modeled and disclosed by the natural sciences.\(^2\) The account runs as follows: Non-living particles naturally converge into the appropriate systems that give rise to living organisms that in turn give rise to conscious organisms,

eventuating in the evolution of conscious, intelligent, language-deploying organisms of a kind able to form first-personal intentional states, and first-personal plural intentional states (collective intentionality). Conscious language-using organisms are able to deploy the appropriate modes of intentionality and language-use to generate mutual agreements constitutive of social reality. Over time such agreements take on more complex forms, giving rise to a social reality that comes to saturate the lives of its participants. The purpose for the generation and extension of institutionalized agreements in this way is rooted in our interests (or drives) to extend and secure power. This account of the ontology of social reality makes possible a naturalized and disenchanted social ontology. When we consider that thought, language, and social reality are transitively related to a fundamental material ontology, reason and its casual expression in social reality ceases to be an occult, mysterious, or anomalous phenomenon incongruous with a scientifically sound account of nature. The power by which mental states bring social realities into being is understood to be as natural a phenomenon as digestion, photosynthesis, or the secretion of bile.

According to Searle, social reality is only apparently anomalous because it is a domain of objective fact dependent on forms of human agreement. But this seems prima facie in tension with a properly materialist understanding of the world. How is a domain of objective fact, authored by intelligent organisms, possible? In pursuing this question, Searle partitions “brute facts” about the world from facts that are “observer-relative”. There is nothing about the “brute” nature of world that determines that Canada ought to have the borders that it currently does, or that the
pieces of paper and metal that one carries in one's pocket should have value as money, or that the sounds one makes from one's mouth should be considered words and utterances bearing publicly interpretable meaning and content. These are facts that depend on us, yet they exist independently of any one observer's attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions. In this way, they are "epistemologically objective"—in the sense that they are publically knowable and independent of any agent's private dispositions. Such facts depend on (and subsist in virtue of) a collective group of observers who recognize them as facts and engage in the appropriate practices that sustain their status. In this way they are unlike typical, empirically verifiable "matters of fact" or "brute facts" such as facts about polymer molecules, hydrogen atoms, distances and the like. For this reason Searle calls these facts "ontologically subjective".\(^3\) Collectively agreed-upon epistemologically objective, ontologically subjective facts issue from the power of the mind, and obtain by the mind's deployment of the appropriate speech acts, which establish the appropriate forms of collective intentionality. This distinctive capacity—to form social institutions at will—is of interest to Searle and the account he produces aims to explain the natural biological, mental and linguistic conditions by which social facts obtain.

\(^3\) Searle considers a fourfold schema: some facts are "ontologically objective" (e.g. Alpha Centauri is 4.36 light years from the earth) other facts are "ontologically subjective" (e.g. I have an insatiable desire for a cup of coffee). Ontologically objective and ontologically subjective facts may be either "epistemologically objective" or "epistemologically subjective". "Epistemologically objective" facts are publically knowable, whereas "epistemologically subjective" facts are knowable merely privately.
1.a. General Outline of Objections to Searle Social Ontology

In what follows I will both explicate the shape of, and to a degree, quarrel with Searle’s social ontology. I agree with Searle, that the phenomenon of social reality as such ought to be an object of philosophical enquiry, and Searle has done much to establish why this ought to be so. I too sympathize with the view that neither dualism nor varieties of reductive materialism succeed in providing a sound scheme whereby thought and social reality are genuine features of the world. The former renders the relationship of material and ideal causality unintelligible, whereas the latter is dogmatically committed to the articulation of the rational in physical terms. Searle’s “Biological Naturalism” cannot function as a viable approach to the reconciliation of mind and world, and thus cannot serve as a sound approach to our conception of social institutional reality. Searle seems moved by the aim to categorize institutional reality as of a piece with a “causally closed ontology”.

Shrinking from a traditionally materialist reductive naturalism, Searle’s “Biological Naturalism” holds that thought may have an ontological status as a subjectively real phenomenon, while also maintaining a truer status as an objectively material state of affairs. Hence Searle calls such ontological facts “ontologically subjective” and “epistemologically objective”.

My objections to this view will be threefold. First, I argue that Searle’s Biological Naturalism cannot work as a non-reductive theory. The thought that some facts are “epistemologically objective”, though “ontologically subjective” ineluctably entails the conclusion that the “ontologically objective” is the more genuine feature of world. Hence notwithstanding its claims to anti-reductivism,
Searle’s Biological Naturalism must be a reductive conceptual scheme. Otherwise it must accept that the “ontologically subjective” features of our experience, are objective and genuine features of the world. This first objection is a plainly conceptual objection—but to bring this back to the overarching context of the project of this chapter, it is to demonstrate the way in which naturalism in following materialistic premises is ineluctably reductive.⁴

My second objection begins to consider some features of a post-naturalist critique of Biological Naturalism. If Searle’s concept of mind (and by proxy social reality) is ultimately reductive, then it will not recognize human forms of rational action and their expression in institutional reality as genuine features of the world. It must holds that human values, reasons, and actions, are inauthentic features of the world from an objective, and external point of view. On this (distinctively modern) view, what is objective is denuded of all that is anthropocentric, all secondary qualities. The process to the ideal of better understanding the world then is thought achieved by the subtraction of anthropocentric qualities from our models thereof. Post-naturalists will take these premises as unnecessary, and in an important way distortive of our picture of the world. There is a real and ineliminable way in which we experience the anthropocentric dimensions of value, meaning, self-consciousness, and so forth, and this very real sense of rational deliberation, evaluation, awareness, and causality needn't be eliminated for the accommodation of an apparently sophisticated scientific understanding of the world. To hold that we must cede the anthropocentric represents a naturalist

⁴ See, Jaegwon Kim, “The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism”.

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dogma—one to which we needn’t subscribe. The second objection then will aim to show an alternative mode by which these categories can be conceived.

The final objection considers the conception of power deeply entangled in Biological Naturalism’s theory of society. Searle holds that power and its rational distribution are the cause for the existence of social reality. This notion proceeds from the same modern trend of subtracting the anthropocentric from an objective understanding of human behavior. Eschewing this subtraction narrative, we find two interrelated conclusions: First, the conception of power as a biological cause for social reality must be regarded as only locally valid, but not globally valid. For the recognition of authentic rational agency requires that we see human beings as acting on the basis of forms of strong or weak evaluations of the situations that world presents to them. Second, there are salient ways that we would regard social reality as essential to the actualization of our rational capacities. This conceives of social institutions, as in fact fundamental to the nature of human rationality and communication. On this view, rationality and social reality may be regarded as two dimension of one object.

As mentioned the driving aim of this paper is to consider two broad modes by which social reality can be conceptualized. The first is through a form of naturalism—represented in Searle’s account. The second view, “post-naturalism”, may be understood as a critique of, and a move to transcend naturalism once its dogmas have been eschewed. It will be clear that the view I ultimately sympathize with is post-naturalism, for it includes what is desirable in naturalism—that is, a respect for science and the realization of the inconsistencies of dualism traditionally
construed—however it seems that reductive naturalist and narrative of subtraction of the anthropocentric, is parasitic, distortive, and ultimately unnecessary.

2. Searle’s Ontology, and Social Ontology

Searle rejects dualism and anti-naturalism about the ontological status of mind and its cognate phenomena. He propounds “Biological Naturalism” which is also hostile to varieties of reductive materialism, such as eliminativism, computational theory of mind, identity theory. For Searle, consciousness and intentionality are not illusions, forms of computation, or mere behavior. Rather, consciousness is a phenomenon that exists “as such”—it is not reducible to something else. Talk about intentional states of consciousness are one legitimate level of description—a high level of description—of what are ultimately neurobiological states. For Searle, it is not to hold that such a high level of description is unreal, but rather that it is a mode of describing a process that is ultimately material and biological. Against dualism, Searle holds that we must understand the brain, and its material constitution as the causal nexus of consciousness as such. While we do not understand the fine structure by which (seemingly immaterial) conscious states arise from the brain, we can be confident that talk about normativity and intentionality is ultimately description at a higher-level about what turn out to be fundamentally lower-level phenomena. Dualism—the theory that Gilbert Ryle had aptly called the “dogma of the Ghost in the machine”—poses a hard metaphysical problem of intelligibility. For it cannot coherently account for how conscious and immaterial states causally affect material

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5 Searle, “Dualism Revisited”.
states and processes. The conception of a ghost in the machine is illustrative of the way that dualism attempts to bridge two irreconcilable metaphysical worldviews—the first that the world is a causally closed system of determinate material causality (the machine). The second is that the soul—and its expressions in self-consciousness, thought, and action is a domain of freedom (the ghost).

Searle believes that that we can simply eradicate the problem by denying dualism’s premises. We must accept that the world is composed of material entities, and that consciousness is an ontologically irreducible part of the material world. If we assume thought is a material phenomenon we can see that there are simply two levels, or perspectives, by which it can be described. One perspective and mode of description is the scientific, observer-independent, ontologically objective, and epistemologically objective. The other perspective is the non-scientific, observer-dependent, ontologically subjective, epistemologically objective (as well as subjective). Hence there are equally good interior and exterior modes of describing the phenomenon at hand. Once we accept this we can go about the task of scientifically uncovering the (only apparent) mystery of consciousness and thought, subscribing neither to dualism, nor reductive materialism.7

This line of thought shows us Searle’s conception of the “natural”, and the place of human thought and reason in nature. First, Searle introduces a conception of a “fundamental ontology”, and second, a conception of the imposition of functions onto objects. These conceptions together justify a thought that normative vocabularies emerge from the imposition of “functions” onto the world. Such

7 Searle, “Dualism Revisited”.
functions are not intrinsic to the world as such but are always “observer-relative”. The world absent of observers is exhausted by value-neutral entities that exist in value-neutral relations. When intelligent organisms evolve derivatively from the interaction of such material entities over time, the possibility of value comes into view. Hence, Searle’s thesis maintains that reality can be viewed from two perspectives:

i) Our own “observer-relative” perspective

and,

ii) The intrinsic features of objects in themselves.

By partitioning a perspective of the “intrinsic” outside, from the “observer-relative” inside, a conception of value could be reasonably understood as an “ontologically subjective” and “epistemologically objective” human construction. Value, and thought are “ontologically subjective” because they are not brute facts—they are anthropocentric features of how we experience the world and hence are not genuine features of reality as such. However, they are also “epistemologically objective” because they are knowable publically. It is a special feature of a human being’s biological makeup that it is able to form “collective intentional” states that enable facts that would otherwise be epistemologically subjective to come into a public domain of epistemological objectivity.

2.a “Functions”

As mentioned, Searle’s conception of social ontology begins with what he calls a “fundamental ontology” comprised of the entities and principles disclosed by
physics, and evolutionary biology. Searle suggests that an account of social ontology must be fit into this fundamental frame. Social reality is a product of mind, and mind is fundamentally a material reality. Mind, concept, norm and other apparently ideal phenomena do not constitute fundamental principles of nature, but emerge derivatively from material causes.

This fundamental ontology is centered on a particular conception of the relationship of mind to world where features of reality that are relative to mind are separated from features that are intrinsic to objects in themselves. Minds (or “observers”) impose “functions” onto the world that are not intrinsic to the world as such. A “function” is a teleological concept. We may say, “the function of a hammer is to drive nails”, or “the function of a heart is to pump blood through the body”. When such teleological concepts are subject to analysis they are found only relative to the intentions of the agents that have the linguistic and mental capacity to assign a function to the object in question. In reality we can describe these objects in terms of their sheer material constitution, which involves no concept of ends or purposes. Functions, in contrast, are fundamentally “observer-relative”, and “ontologically subjective”. They are not intrinsic properties of objects, but are projected onto an object through a special form of speech act.

Functions are deployed because they are useful to us, and help us accomplish practical and theoretical ends. Searle identifies three general kinds of functions:

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10 Searle writes, “…mind is just a set of higher-level features of the brain, as set of features that are at once ‘mental’ and ‘physical’. We will use the ‘mental,’ so construed, to show how ‘culture’ is constructed out of ‘nature’. " *Ibid*, p.9.
Chairs, screwdrivers, and bathtubs bear what he calls “agentive functions”. An agentive function is imposed onto an object to describe how it is used, or intended to be used by the agent. Such functions obtain because agents use the object in such a manner. We may note here that the tokens that we use as currency would be nothing but pieces of copper and zinc, or synthetic fibers, were they not used as a medium of exchange. Using money as money both confers and sustains the institutional reality of money. Other kinds of function operate as useful theoretical models. We may say, for example, that the “heart has the function of pumping blood throughout the body”—such a function is again not an intrinsic feature of the object but is imposed onto the object by an observer. The function operates as a useful tool to understand the relations and operations of a particular causal relation. This is called a “non-agentive function”, insofar as these functions are intended to describe processes independent of any agent. The final kind of function is the “symbolic” function where one object may be used to represent another. For example, particular marks on a page, or a picture, can serve as a representation of something else.

This account of functions follows from a Darwinian conception that displaces the role of natural or intrinsic teleology in life. Traditional Aristotelian biology thought that the account of a given life form could primarily be given through explanation of its telos—the final cause that determined the efficient, formal, and material causality. The end (e.g. survival) defined the logical structure, constitution, and behavior of a life form. Against this, the Darwinian explanatory revolution provided a new two-pronged mode of explaining biological phenomena. A
phenotype could be explained sufficiently, first by a causal-mechanical account of its structure, and second by a “functional” account. At the causal level, one would speak of the bio-chemical causal processes by which a phenotype performs what it performs, or appears as it appears, and so on. At the functional level one specifies how it is that a particular causal operation in a specific phenotype enables it to endure.12 Talk of the telos can then be displaced by an account of blind causal and functional factors. Talk of “purposes” may still be employed, though they are to be regarded as constructs, the validity of which is circumscribed to the observer who projects a teleological conceptual order onto objects.13

2.b Intentionality and Collective Intentionality

Integral to the formation of social reality is the concept of “collective intentionality”. Intentionality is the capacity of mind to orient itself towards, or to entertain states that are about something. Beliefs, perceptions, desires, and intentions are different kinds of intentional states, each of which bears a certain “direction of fit”.14 For example, the aim of a belief is to represent what is the case. It has what Searle calls a “world to mind” direction of fit—meaning that the mind aims to represent how the world is. Desires concern what ought to be the case, and have a “mind to world” direction of fit, meaning that the mind seeks not to represent the world as it is, but as it desires the world to be. Intentional states bear propositional content in a pre-linguistic, psychological mode. This can be represented in the form $S(p)$ where “$S$” represents the psychological state of believing, intending and so on,

12 Searle, “Theory of Mind and Darwin’s Legacy”.
14 Searle, Making the Social World, Chapter II, §V.
and “p” represents the propositional content of the intentional state. All such intentions carry over into language. With the development of language, it transpires that “S” represents the illocutionary force of a speech act, where “p” represents its propositional content. It is by first looking to the structure and nature of pre-linguistic intentionality, and then to language, that we can begin to understand how social reality emerges.\(^{15}\)

In addition to forms of intentionality specific to individual subjects, social reality requires a form of collective intentionality. It requires the capacity to move from a first personal form of intentionality (“I-intentionality”), to a first personal plural form of intentionality (“we-intentionality”). Collective intentionality is exhibited where agents engage in intentionally (not accidentally) cooperative behavior. Forms of conversation, public deliberation, and collective enterprises such as playing in a team or, playing in an orchestra, involve a concept that there is a “we” that intends, believes, desires and so forth. This is a special class of intentionality. I-intentionality is at play when an agent thinks and performs her own actions. We-intentionality enables the agent to place her I-intentionality within a context of engaging in cooperative activity with other agents.\(^{16}\) While collective intentionality is not reducible to a collection of I-intentionalities, it obtains in individual minds (in the first-personal plural form) and represents a distinctive kind of intentionality in the mind’s repertoire of potential forms of intentionality.\(^{17}\) Hence, collective intentionality is not a “super” intentionality—like a super-mind that binds I-

\(^{15}\) Searle, “Language and Social Ontology.”
\(^{16}\) Searle, The Construction of Social Reality, p. 25.
\(^{17}\) Ibid, p.24.
intentionalities together—a conception Searle imputes to Hegel.\(^\text{18}\) Rather the capacity to have first-person-plural forms of thought ought to be understood as a primitive function of mind present in all individual minds and is rooted in our biological code. In this way, collective intentionality may also be understood as pre-linguistic, insofar as both human beings and animals can have forms of collective intentionality.\(^\text{19}\) It also transpires that collective intentionality takes on a distinctive form when it finds its expression in language.

Searle calls any fact involving collective intentionality of this kind a “social fact”. “Institutional facts”, which involve the collectively agreed upon application of functions to objects involve a distinctive form of collective intentionality, and are subset of “social facts”.\(^\text{20}\)

### 2.c Language and Power

For Searle, the structure of language (as conceived under Searle and J.L. Austin’s speech act theory) naturally generates the forms of “deontic” commitment that make possible forms of general agreement necessary for institutional reality. Social Contract theorists of the 17\(^\text{th}\) and 18\(^\text{th}\) Centuries, as well as contemporary social philosophers like Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu, represent social reality as emerging posterior to language. Searle considers this a mistaken view of what language is and how it operates at the most fundamental level. Attentiveness to language shows us that a “social contract” emerges naturally when an organism is able to have and use a syntactically, and conventionally structured language. The

\(^{18}\) For an interesting discussion as to why this interpretation of Hegel is mistaken see Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Chapter XIV


account runs as follows: Language is an extension of pre-linguistic forms of intentionality. Pre-linguistic intentional states bear propositional content and this is mirrored in language which also always bears propositional content of the form F(p), where “F” represents the illocutionary force and “p” the propositional content of an expression. Post-linguistic forms of intentionality have meaning, convention and sentences with syntactic structures. Meaning occurs where a speaker imposes conditions of satisfaction (whether descriptive or normative) on a given utterance. Convention is the next feature, where a speaker can expect that if a given sound is produced, a specific meaning was intended. Convention involves rudimentary norms where a certain mode of expression functions as the appropriate mode of representing a given state of affairs. When linguistic meaning and convention are added to mental categories (in the Kantian and Aristotelian sense), syntactical structures form.21

From this it transpires that utterances must necessarily involve forms of commitment that Searle calls “deontologies”. Any form of pre-linguistic, private intentionality is already a form of individualized commitment. Public utterances involve a stronger level of commitment between agents. When I say to another, “it is raining outside”, I am making a commitment to the truth of my claim. Others impute to me the authority to make such a claim, and I take up the responsibility and consequences involved therein. Different forms of speech act exhibit different forms of commitment. Commitments generate a peculiar form of intentionality that can be understood as “desire independent”. This emerges from conventions that constitute

21 Searle, “Language and Social Ontology”.
natural language. An expression of desire commits one to acting in such a way as to obtain the desired object, other things being equal.

Language is deployed to lay claim to power. The declaration that “this is my wife”, “this is my house”, “she is our leader” etc. are forms of language-use that bear a distinct structure, with a peculiar direction of fit. Searle distinguishes this use of language as a kind of speech-act called a “declaration”.\textsuperscript{22} Declarations are peculiar for they have a two-way direction of fit. They have a mind-to-world direction of fit because they have the structure of representing some epistemologically objective state of affairs. However, declarations also have a world-to-mind direction of fit insofar as they aim to change the world to accord with a desired end, or represent the world as having been changed in accordance with that end.

Declarations enable “status functions”—a special class of function that applies a status to a given object. While many agentive functions are applied to objects in virtue of the physical structure of the object (e.g. a hammer is a hammer in good part because its physical structure serves its function well) the status function is an application of a collectively recognized status to a person, or object. Declarative impositions of the status function take the posture “X counts as Y in C” (e.g. bills and coins produced by the Royal Canadian mint (X term) count as legal tender (Y term) in the state of Canada (C term)). The X term typically represents an object. The Y

\textsuperscript{22} Searle identifies five forms of speech act: Assertives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives, and Declarations, each of which functions towards particular ends and falls within world-to-mind, or mind-to-world directions of fit. See “Language and Social Ontology,” 443-59.
term represents a function imposed onto the object X. The C term specifies the context under which the Y term is appropriately imposed onto the X term.\textsuperscript{23}

The establishment of power relations is the principal reason for the application of the status function. Rights, duties, obligations, permissions, etc. are all iterations of negative and positive power generated by status function. The extension of deontologies in this way enables the use of power through language that annuls the requirement for physical exertion in the securing of one’s property, the accomplishment of one’s projects, the fulfillment of one’s interests, etc. Language is the essential ingredient because there is no fact of the matter concerning any such statuses. Status functions merely exist in virtue of the fact that decelerations are a possibility in our repertoire of speech acts, and hence language is the \textit{essential institution}—an institution that enables all other institutions. Once the capacity to use declarational speech acts is in place, institutions can be created at will so long as the appropriate forms of collective recognition is generated.\textsuperscript{24}

In \textit{The Construction of Social Reality} (1995), Searle articulates the status function as the product of a “constitutive rule”. A constitutive rule is a rule that generates the institutional fact. Hence for example, traffic laws are rules that merely regulate behavior, but the rules of a game such as chess “constitute” the game itself, and if the rules change a different game would obtain.\textsuperscript{25} In subsequent writing on the subject and in his recent book, \textit{Making the Social World} (2010), Searle revises this conception to render the constitutive rule as a special instance of the broader

\textsuperscript{24} Searle, “Language and Social Ontology”.
\textsuperscript{25} Searle, \textit{The Construction of Social Reality}, p.27.
phenomenon of the status function. All social reality, he claims, bears the fundamental logical form of the status function.\(^{26}\)

3. Reductionism and Biological Naturalism

Jaegwon Kim raises an objection to Biological Naturalism. Kim holds that Searle’s conception of intentional and material causality is *over determined*, and must ultimately entail a reductive account of thought. Searle places mental causality within a general layered ontology of material causality. This entails that any action amenable to a mental causal explanation should also have a material causal explanation. Thus what Searle suggests is that there are two explanations—that is, two ontologically distinct ways of understanding a single event-action. This is odd, for why should there be two *ontologically distinct* ways of understanding a single event-action? Such an account seems to render the mental cause superfluous; insofar as the real cause ought to be the material or object-intrinsic explanation we can produce.\(^{27}\) The status of “ontological subjectivity” helps little in overcoming the ever-persistent mind-body problem. Biological Naturalism purports to maintain a rational causality that emerges from a biological-material causality, but this is fundamentally unhelpful in providing a non-reductive account of rational causality.

4. “Ban on Anthropocentricity”

The second objection is more complex. In responding to Searle, I wish to bring to the fore some features of what we can regard a “post-naturalist” vision of social reality. Searle’s framework relegates thought and institutional reality to a sphere of ontological subjectivity, which occupies a less genuine place in reality than

\(^{26}\) Searle, “Language and Social Ontology”.

\(^{27}\) Kim, “Mental Causation in Searle’s ‘Biological Naturalism’”.

the world viewed from the objective frame “as it is in itself”. David Bakhurst, in his exposition of the 20th century Russian philosopher, Evald Ilyenkov, introduces an idea that he calls the “ban on anthropocentricity”—an attribute found in many modern philosophical worldviews. This holds that a proper account of the world in itself ought to omit reference to anything that is the product of human thought and activity (in the sense of anything that cannot be understood without essential reference to human perception, understanding, and agency). On this view, that which is anthropocentric—our values, practices, and ways of seeing the world, and so on—is part of a standpoint that obstructs a proper understanding of reality in itself. A truly objective frame is free of human perspective and value. Hence a certain conception of “projection” is conceived as the cause by which the distinctively anthropic phenomena of value and reason can be reconciled with nature.28 Interestingly much of this form of thought takes for granted that it too is a human standpoint—a standpoint that perhaps imputes a form of value to the subtraction of the human viewpoint.29 But this is not what shall concern me. A properly post-naturalist view would hold that the ban in salient ways presents a distorted and half-baked picture of human nature. It is not compulsory, and a sound and non-reductive account of reality could be held without endorsing a form of the ban. We must then see that Searle endorses some version of a ban on anthropocentricity, where human thought and action are circumscribed to a sphere of the “observer relative” and “ontologically subjective”. Preservation of a non-reductivism in our

28 Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*.
29 See, McDowell, “Non-Cognitivism and Rule Following”.

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approach requires divesting ourselves of the ban, to view thought, concepts and norms, and actions as in some sense sui generis—neither reducible to the material causality of nature traditionally construed, but in continuity therewith.

I think that reconstructing a scheme that moves beyond the ban can be approached from a number of different perspectives. Of these I will choose two, both of which are essential to a post-naturalist version of social reality. The first concerns conceptual knowledge. The second concerns the concept of human “action” and “spirit”. If the account of the former is successful, we have reason to rid ourselves of a partition of the “intrinsic” and “observer relative” perspectives Searle suggests.

4.a Conceptual Content

One form of the ban is expressed in the thought that world is given to thought in perception in the form of non-conceptual content. The “conceptual” is circumscribed to the mind of a subject, whereas the world must be understood as non-conceptual—outside of the categories of thought that are constitutive of our mediated ways of seeing the world. The world, which impinges itself on us is “given”—as the non-conceptual content of our perception. Perception is passive in the reception of the world, whereas thought is active in imposing its schemata onto the world. This is one important interpretation of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism.

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30 See G.W.F. Hegel’s Introduction to Phenomenology of Spirit: “It is a natural assumption that in philosophy, before we start to deal with its proper subject-matter, viz. the actual cognition of what truly is, one must first of all come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded either as the instrument to get hold of the Absolute, or as the medium through which one discovers it.” §73

31 We must note that the Critique of Pure Reason is a highly contested text that leaves itself open to a multiplicity of possible interpretations. The interpretation articulated here represents one prevalent interpretation of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism.
Kant had understood the content of our “representations” as given by the world, and that the form of representations are constructed by the mind. After Kant, Hegel was the inaugurator of a philosophical tradition that had sought to overcome the circumscription of the conceptual in this way. He, and his later interpreters, thought that the very idea of non-conceptual contents (“immediacy”) was untenable, and was a failure of Kant to take his system to its ultimate conclusion. It will be instructive to briefly review Kant’s position, and the Hegelian tradition’s reorientation (or “radicalization” as John McDowell following Robert Pippin call it32) of Transcendental Idealism.33 The subsequent discussion of the “unboundedness of the conceptual” will consider in particular McDowell’s insights in his Mind and World.

Kant held that the world, insofar as it was an object of perception and thought, was fundamentally a production of a cooperation between two faculties in the subject: a passive faculty of receptivity, and an active faculty of spontaneity. Receptivity—the faculty through which the contents of our representations are received—and spontaneity—the faculty through which the contents of representations are thought—are two necessary elements of knowledge in its broadest sense. Under the faculty of receptivity are intuitions. Intuition is the mode of representation by which an object is given to a subject—and of it there are two kinds. Empirical intuitions are representations of objects given to a subject in

32 See McDowell, “Hegel as Radicalization of Kant”.
33 Kant, unlike other proponents of the ban, has a much richer conception of mind and world than what will be represented here. Indeed, in some instances we may see him as among the first (with the possible exception of Spinoza) to proceed beyond this ban on anthropocentricity.
sensation. There is a causal relation between the object and its empirical representation—receptivity is passive in its subjection to the world’s impingements. “Pure” intuitions of space and time structure the permanent a priori backdrop for all our experiential knowledge. These intuitions must be “pure” for they are not present in any sheer sensation. Hence there is a causal relation between the shape of intuitions and the faculty of receptivity—this latter gives structure to its representations. Kant held that since the pure intuitions of space and time cannot be derived from sensation, they must proceed from the activity of mind, operating as the a priori (necessary and universal) condition for the reception of empirical intuitions, and the representation of any object for a subject. Intuitions however are insufficient for knowledge as such; human knowledge also involves the “spontaneity” of mind—a faculty that engages in the activity of thought. A primary function of this faculty is the subsumption of experience under a concept. This grants our representation form, and is the other enabling feature of human knowledge. The apprehension that thought plays a role in our knowledge arises by a particular kind of awareness, whereby a subject is aware of themselves as the thinker of their thoughts, the subject of their experiences and the author of their actions. This is a form of self-consciousness—that is, a subject’s power to know representations in the second order. Second order thought is apprehended through reflection on the feature of thought wherein one has consciousness that one has representations and experiences in the first order—when I have representations I know that these are not merely representations as such, but I have the

34 Critique of Pure Reason, B34| A20.
consciousness that they are *my* representations—the logical posture of which is modeled in the first-person predicate “I think”.

Hence, involved in our representations is a special conjunction of passive receptivity and an active faculty of thought (spontaneity).

Upon this, Kant concludes that *knowledge* in a broadest sense is the product of a conjunction of concept and intuition. Knowledge begins with the intuitions and “arises” from the faculty of spontaneity, which has thepower of bringing the manifold of empirical intuitions into an ordered representation under the “synthetic unity ofapperception”—that is of its perennial subjection to the form of discursiveness associable with self-consciousness. The *ban on the anthropocentric* is preserved in this interpretation of Kant wherein the conceptual is circumscribed to spontaneity. For Kant we must hold that the world as it is in itself, is beyond our representations, and is therefore non-conceptual. The impingements of the world deliver the raw data that are in themselves denuded of conceptual content. Kant appears to simply take this for granted—presumably holding that it is in some sense self-evident.

Kant likely did not see that such a distinction was not so self-evident.

Following a Sellarsian critique on the “Myth of the Given”, we might ask of Kant, what are the conditions that satisfy the judgment that some contents of our

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36 “The thought that the representations given in intuition one and all belong to me, is therefore equivalent to the thought that I unite them in one *self-consciousness*, or can at least so unite them; and although this thought is not itself the consciousness of the synthesis of the representations, it presupposes the possibility of that synthesis. In other words only in so far as I can grasp the manifold of representations in one consciousness, do I call them one and all *mine*.” *CPR*, B134

37 See Kern, “Spontaneity and Receptivity in Kant’s Theory of Knowledge”.
knowledge are non-conceptual? What is the transactive mechanism by which the non-conceptual givens transition into a form of conceptual representation?\(^{38}\)

Perhaps it may be said that perception is passive and receives the world, whereas thought is active and constructs a picture of the world. The passivity of receptivity implies that it is causally subject to the world—and not subject to the determination of thought. Thus, lest we fall into a form of subjective idealism, there must be something external to thought—and that something is extra conceptual. However, the passivity of receptivity by no means precludes the idea that impingements on receptivity are always already conceptually structured, and that the faculty of spontaneity operates less as a faculty imposing itself on the world, but rather one that is active in revising its worldview on the basis of new impingements from a faculty of receptivity.\(^{39}\)

In *Mind and World* McDowell suggests that the view of the “unboundedness” of the conceptual enables us to move beyond the problematic set of views which Sellars calls the “Myth of the Given” (as well as the view sometimes thought to be its only alternative: Davidsonian coherentism).\(^{40}\) Implicating spontaneity in receptivity rids any ontological gap between the world and thought. Experience is understood to supply conceptual content to the understanding. A subject endowed with spontaneity then bears the freedom to reconcile its understanding with the (conceptually contentful) deliverances of experience. Thus spontaneity no longer takes a form of applying or “projecting” its concepts onto empirical givens, but

\(^{38}\) See Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, §1.


rather continuously adjusts itself to new deliverances of experience. Thus spontaneity is a subject’s capacity for self-critical, self-interpreting activity. This view needn’t bear the extreme form of anthropocentricism apparent in subjective idealism, for we may still regard the deliverances of sensibility as causal, and not dependent on a circumscribed subject-rationality. Rather, we can regard this causal influence as an ultimately rational (ostensibly rational-causal) influence on thought. Thus, our engagement with the world is always conceptual—and it is right to view that engagement as one of adjusting thought on the basis of concepts. What is incorrect is to take what McDowell calls a “sideways on” perspective—one that suggests that the conceptual awareness is circumscribed to spontaneity, and furthermore that we can gain a form of awareness of that concept/subject-transcendent view. Synthesizing spontaneity and receptivity in this way brings thought into an objective sphere—for there is no other sphere beyond that which the understanding experiences and which can be subject to the understanding. The world is no longer a realm denuded of thought, concept, and norm. This is the first side of a move beyond the ban on the anthropocentric.

4.b The Activity of Mind

When receptivity is understood as the passive recipient of conceptual content, spontaneity must be understood as a nexus of activity—an active faculty capable of reflexive self-revisions on the basis of new experience. This is a form of activity, and to move beyond the ban we must come to distinguish what qualifies spontaneity’s categorization as a nexus of activity, and action, from a conception of

the mind’s motions as merely nomological events. In this regard I want to consider some of the thought of Charles Taylor and Evald Ilyenkov, both of whom draw much from the thought of G.W.F. Hegel.42

In “Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind”, Taylor elucidates G.W.F. Hegel’s conception of the unity of thought and action. For Hegel, thought was pure activity. Taylor begins by distinguishing two broad strains in action theory: The first is a causal theory of action. On this view actions are simply events qua bodily movement rooted in physiological states, divested from any causal connection to an inner rational life.43 On the second view, actions are inhabited by purposes and represent sui generis capacities of agents. Under the second view there is no ontological gap between purposes and actions, which are genuine expressions of inner life: the two comprise a unity.44 This latter view is central to the Hegelian vision of mind as activity, and one that Taylor and Ilyenkov can be understood to articulate in further detail. We may trace the origin of this view to the Kantian conception of spontaneity. Thought, and self-consciousness are the activity of mind for Kant. However, for Hegel, self-consciousness, and thought as such, do not represent givens, but are rather achievements in a developmental process of mind’s activity. Points in the developmental process are movements (that may go well or badly) from an

42 For discussion of Ilyenkov’s Hegelian influence, see David Bakhurst, “Il’enkov’s Hegel.”
43 Taylor cites Davidson’s “Actions, Reasons and Causes” as exemplifying this conception. While Davidson does not deny the existence of an inner life, this latter is separable, and finds itself in a wholly different sphere from the causal events that govern bodily movement. See Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes”.
44 Taylor, Human Agency and Language.
unreflective impulsive consciousness to a reflective, engaged self-consciousness.\textsuperscript{45}
This movement not only represents the accomplishment of an individual subject, but also represents the transformational movements of social reality as a whole. Therefore, Hegel has a conception of individual and collective transformation in the difficult (and ostensibly infinite) developmental process towards higher levels of rational self-understanding.

The causal theory of action makes bad sense of the qualitative character of both unreflective and reflective consciousness. In its Dualist and Empiricist iteration it situates inner states as desires, and action as motivated by desire. Desire is preceded by a cause of which the agent is aware. All action—whether of an animal, and rational-animal—is conscious action, it leaves no place for the existence of forms of unconscious, unreflective states of thought and action. Non-dualist varieties of the causal theory, on the other hand, held that the causes of actions were opaque to the agent. This makes bad sense of a notion of second order reason—an agent’s capacity to be conscious of herself as a locus of her thoughts and deeds. Both views lacked the capacity to show how the nature of consciousness comes to be appropriately transformed from unreflective into reflective self-consciousness.\textsuperscript{46}

Mental life as activity is implicated in seeing it as something to be achieved. This requires abandoning an atomistic theory of thought as comprised of data, and understanding mental life as a category of activity. This is brought to light when we consider how self-understanding and self-perception come to expression on two levels: At one level self-perception is something we can either fail or succeed in—we

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, §II.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, §II.
can have either distortion or perspicuity in our self-understanding. Clarity is an achievement that obtains by movements from lesser to greater degrees of adequacy in our self-understanding. This form of activity is continual, and it is achieved in an arena of struggle, where subjects engage with other subjects—a process that has mutual recognition as its telos. On the other (deeper) level, self-perception is bound up in a form of life-activity (as opposed to merely being given). Desire and feeling are therefore a reflection of an inner life-process—thoughts are not simple and individualized mental contents, but rather moments in a process of thinking. This leads Hegel to a conception of history where each subject is conceived as at once an “effective” realization of a historical and institutional pattern, as well as an “expression” of a certain self-understanding of humankind.\textsuperscript{47}

In \textit{The Ideal in Human Activity}, Ilyenkov examines what he calls “the problem of the ideal”—that is, how it is that dialectical materialism could overcome or better understand the role of immaterial phenomena in the greater dialectical historical process. Ideal phenomena are those manifest in consciousness, as well as in social reality (for example a culture, value, meaning, etc.). For Ilyenkov, \textit{ideal} phenomena are not merely subjective phenomena, but are objective world properties, and further are the distinctive products of human activity.\textsuperscript{48} Thus human activity bears a special role in the dialectical process of bringing the ideal into being. Ilyenkov seems to suggest that activity is the driving force of thought as such. That the world is made an object of ideal thought is a product of the phenomenon of social labor. It is unclear whether his commitment to this latter claim is a mere obligatory testifying

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, §IV.
to the truth of dialectical materialism under the regime of the Soviet Union, however
his reflection on the phenomena of the ideal and the challenges it poses to a
reductive naturalist worldview merit consideration regardless.

For Ilyenkov, a proper account of the ideal cannot be approached
naturalistically, or materialistically.49 Objectively sensuous, qualitative features of
thought, value, meaning, and their expression in history resist such a form of
reductive explanation. The innovation of the Hegelian vision (and its materialist
successor in dialectical materialism) was that it situated the ideal as the “active
aspect of the relation of thinking man to nature.”50 The qualitative expression of the
ideal in activity distinguishes itself from the mere natural-event causality, where we
find the activity and the ideal continuously and historically transformed, and
operating to distinguish the human being from every other natural phenomenon.
Genuine human activity comes to be crystalized into a “spiritual culture”. This
spiritual culture is made manifest in the form of artifacts and institutional
practices—what comprise the “imprints” of human activity on the material world.51

The generation of artifacts is a significant feature of the objective ideal-
producing nature of human activity. Ilyenkov has us consider the work of a potter:
In the potter’s craft, the fashioning of the artifact comes to express a distinctive ideal
phenomenon—there is a design and intention in fashioning of a pottery item. The
artifact embodies the ideal phenomenon of the intention of its artificer, and its role
in the spiritual culture. However, this is not a property to be found in the material

49 Specifically in the pre-Marxian, empirical-materialist sense, see, The Ideal in
Human Activity, Chapter I, §8, p.147.
51 Ibid, §8, p.149.
composition of the pot as such, nor is it located in the hand and physiological movements of its fashioner. It is rather in the intention and activity of training of the body to shape the artifact in a particular way—a responsiveness to the spiritual culture of “social man”. Artifacts therefore are expressions of the ideal.\textsuperscript{52} The object bears an objective existence—we might say, employing Searle’s lexicon, that it is an “ontologically objective” phenomenon. The imbuing of the natural world with the ideal that emerges through human social activity is an “objective” natural process. Quoting Marx, Ilyenkov writes “Man does not act in nature from outside, but ‘confronts nature as one of her own forces’.”\textsuperscript{53} Thus the phenomenon of the subject’s acting and fashioning artifacts—the refashioning of the objective world, is for Ilyenkov an ideal though brute phenomenon—for it is the product of a “natural force” of human action.

5.2 Power and Agency

Power is a concept that is multidimensional and subtle, playing a conspicuous role in the phenomenon of social reality. Ostensibly its most clear place is in the arena of political action. For theorists as Thomas Hobbes power and self-interest were the foundations of social order. More recently, Michel Foucault argued that power runs far deeper—its dynamics shaping the norms and the thought of successive generations. Here I wish to focus briefly on a way that Searle treats the concept of power in relation to the formation social reality. He says, “Let us constantly remind ourselves that the whole point of the creation of institutional reality is not to invest objects or people with some special status valuable in itself,

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, §8, p.152.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, §8 page 166.
but to create and regulate power relationships between people.” Reasonably, Searle points to a view of social reality as an *enabling system*—insofar as it permits human beings in multifarious ways to accomplish ends, of securing safety, comfort, property, power, recognition and so on. This is accomplished by placing people in forms of commitment and obligation, and conferring on others the power to accomplish a desired end. The primary tool by which power is distributed in this way is the status function. Searle holds that there are two species of power to be distinguished: Power as it is exercised, and power in its latent form as *capacity*. For Searle there are two constraints on what we call exercised power: First, there is the “intentionality constraint” holding that power must always be exercised *intentionally* whereby someone intentionally exercises power over another. Second, the “exactness constraint” holds that the exercise of power must be specifiable in terms of one agent’s exercising power over another. Searle’s discussion proceeds to consider how forms of power in social reality, such as political power and forms of social or cultural power are describable within these constraints. These, however, are forms of power that are posterior to the prior notion that the cause of social reality is rooted in a fundamental interest in the acquisition and distribution of power—in the fact that we are much more powerful if we are within social reality than otherwise.

This again may be construed as a feature of a naturalistic (particularly biological naturalist) conception of the human form, insofar as the rational dimension of human life, is thought to emerge out of the operation of biological (and

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54 *Making the Social World*, Chapter 5 §V.
hence lawful) principles. Again, the discussion of power aims to provide an account of human action and social reality through a frame that implicitly subtracts the anthropocentric perspective. However, a vision of power, and social reality changes quite dramatically when we attempt to lift naturalism’s subtraction narrative. In the absence of the subtraction narrative two coherent conceptions are available:

First, the claim that power-interests are the prior cause of social reality, is a local, and not a global explanation. This finds its origin in the nature of the human being as a locus of thought. Needs or desires, whether they pertain to power or otherwise, do not in themselves define imperatives to action in a rational agent, insofar as it is the distinctive nature of a rational being to “step back” and *deliberate* on what alternatives of thought and action that agent wishes to take or endorse. Harry Frankfurt has argued that a difference between a mere organism and what we regard a “person” is the difference between an agent bearing desires in the first order (shared by both animals, and human beings) and an agent bearing an additional “second-order” sense that she is a locus of those dimensions of subjective experience and desire (unique to human beings).56 The defining feature of a rational animal then is a clear capacity to step back from itself, and subject itself to evaluation. In “Two Sorts of Naturalism” McDowell looks to a similar thought. The representation of freedom of action is inextricably tied to freedom of thought. A animal having acquired reason can contemplate alternatives to her action and subject her natural inclinations to critical scrutiny.57 This dimension of the natural life of a rational creature cannot be illumined by an appeal to the material “needs” of

56 See Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”.
57 McDowell, “Two Sorts of Naturalism”.
such a creature, insofar as “need” figures into the forms of consideration a rational and deliberative agent takes into account in the deliberative task deciding what she ought to do. Adherence to a normative reason of “need” represents one form of response to the deliberative question of what one ought to do. It is very well in the power of a rational agent to decide otherwise. That “need” operates as a consideration in the first order that a rational creature can reflect on from the perspective of the second order is precisely what defines human thought and rationality against mere animality. Humanity has its being in the space of second order thought. Traditional reductive naturalism denies the power to “step back” and deliberate—it attempts to persuade us that such a denial is compulsory. What post-naturalism demonstrates is that is not compulsory.

There is a stronger claim to be made in the analysis of thought in the second order. This holds that reductive naturalism is actually distort description of the intimate interrelation of social reality and thought. The second claim is that the phenomena of social reality and rationality are one—they both mutually require each other, and hence may better be understood as two dimensions of one thing. The institution of language will be the paradigm in this regard. The nature of thought has a duality of self-consciousness, and consciousness of the other. The two are mutually necessary for each other. Self-understanding, self-consciousness, even identity requires a community—as Taylor holds, “One is a self only among other selves”. One must be initiated into a culture—a set of practices whereby one may gain a form of identity, and may acquire a language in which one may dialogue with

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other selves. Hence in one sense social reality is primitive to identity, and it is primitive to thought—any rational agent requires forms of institutional commitment to develop and engage her rational capacity. For an agent to have thought, she must be able to ask herself “Do I know what I’m saying?”, “Is what I endorse true?” and so on—that is thought has the intrinsic structure of justification, of imparting reasons as to why one takes something to be thus and so, or normatively binding. This can only be met when one’s thought and language stand accountable to the reactions of others.59 Central then to the development of an agent’s capacity to think, is her initiation into a language, which is also a tradition that emerges in the intentional transaction between a subject and the second person. We have here three necessary dimensions of the shape of thought—a self, the second person, and a language, which mediates the relations of the two and is ostensibly a first or primordial institution necessary in thought-governed relations between an “I” and a “thou”.

In Self-Consciousness, Sebastian Rödl argues that the structure of thought in its forms of first-personal thought of one’s self (thought of one’s actions, thought of one’s thought) and thought of the second person, ought to be regarded as one thing—all of a piece with thought as such.60 Self-consciousness, and consciousness of the second person are the same kind of consciousness—they bear the same form. Consciousness of another subject as a self-conscious agent emerges only from a form self-consciousness itself. When we apprehend something, we subsume it under a “general order”—the sound of leaves on a tree blowing in the wind is

59 Taylor, Sources of the Self, p.37.
60 Rödl, Self-Consciousness.
subsumed under an order of a non-rational substance. A communicative act committed by another, we subsume this under the general order of what Rödl calls a “practical life form”—we subsume it under a category of a self-conscious subject committing self-conscious acts. We subsume our own acts under the same order of reason that sustains self-consciousness—thought of the “I”—as a central feature that accompanies all of our thought and action. It is the same order of reason that enables a “you” reference—wherein the acts of another are subsumed under the same order of reason as the “I”. If the “I” and the “you” are the same act of reason, built into the structure of thought, then so is capability for two subjects to be moved by a shared order of reason—by a form of mutuality and agreement. Hence Rödl argues that mutual recognition occurs where two subjects are moved by a shared order of reason.\(^{61}\) From this Rödl holds that the nature of thought in judgment is that it is never for one alone, but for two.

Presumably the recognition of each other requires at the very least the mediating institution of language. Thought of the “I” and the “you” bears out its expression in language. And it is by language that we can know where we each stand, and come to be moved by the same thought. If this is true we find that a person’s sense of self in relation to others is bound to a linguistic tradition one develops within. That tradition imparts the forms of thought of previous generation to the current generation. Forms of individuality may emerge downstream after a subject’s powers of thought have been enabled by the tradition. A person may challenge or seek to change the norms of language and other institutions within a

given tradition. But this always occurs internally to the tradition itself, in a form of dialogue with one’s co-members in the tradition in question. Hence in this sense social reality is reoriented by thought—reflective and deliberative thought contributes to the evolution and transformations of social reality, but this must always be internal to the social milieu. This picture of the mutual dependence of thought and institutional reality figures in Hegel’s critique of the Contractarian theorists of the 17th century. And a similar critique may leveled against a form of naturalism that suggests that power and biological interests represent the prior conditions for the development of language and subsequent construction of social reality.

Searle also maintains that language is the “fundamental social institution”, and it is for reason that language can be used in a manner akin to a tool in the form of speech-acts that the construction of institutional reality is possible. In Searle’s theory we find that language occurs in the form of symbolic actions capable of reflecting pre-linguistic intentional states. Here thought can be construed as occurring outside of language, subsequently finding a special form of expression when language develops. Language and communication function as a means by which an organism can accomplish its ends. The means by which a language-employing organism generates social reality, however is a fundamentally “designative” account of language—an account that extends language onto objects

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62 In this, Taylor, and McDowell invoke the image of Neurath’s sailor, who implements changes and repairs to his vessel at sea. Such transformations always occur internal to vessel itself, while it proceeds on its course. The image represents the notion of a tradition as altering internally to itself.

63 See, Pippin, Robert B., “Hegel and Institutional Rationality.”
and arrangements by declarative sentences that designate meanings onto objects and arrangements.\textsuperscript{64} Contrary to this, and central to many post-naturalist views, social reality ought to be understood as “expressive”—a tradition, a language is a form and means of expression, wherein persons and communities express reasons and thought. When language is deployed and fine-tuned in dialogue, this in turn shapes and changes the nature of thought. Hence language does not merely have a consequentialist instrumental value of bringing us to desired ends, but rather that language emerges, and evolves in the nexus of dialogue between selves, but is also essential for rational life.\textsuperscript{65}

The insights here into the second person, and into language—construed as a first and fundamental social institution, reveals a notion of social reality not as emerging as a beneficial development for merely material organisms, not merely a form of power relations and negotiations, but rather as a necessary dimension in the emergence of thought. Thought requires its institutions, and institutional reality, and in turn institutional reality is shaped by thought. These two dimensions are necessary features of the life, self-understanding, and nature of rational organisms.

6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I aimed to deal with two ways that the phenomenon of social reality may be understood. These were the naturalist and post-naturalist approaches. I have also attempted to show why it is that post-naturalist enquiry into the reasons and shape of social reality is more illuminating than naturalism. Naturalism denies the distinctive structure of thought, and therefore purports to

\textsuperscript{64} Taylor, “Language and Human Nature” §I.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, §I.
articulate what thought is in the same vocabulary as the explanation of non-rational phenomena. Searle is the most explicit proponent of a naturalistic account of social reality. He develops a special variety of naturalism called “Biological Naturalism”. I then looked to three general reasons why we might regard Biological Naturalism as both tenuous, and unnecessary:

I. Contra Searle, Biological Naturalism cannot be non-reductive. As Jaegwon Kim has argued, Biological Naturalism must admit that those properties of the world it calls “observer relative” proceed from principles that are ultimately “intrinsic”. Hence that which is observer relative is circumscribed, and causally superficial. To try to hold the two together results in a form of “causal over-determination”, a thing cannot have both a non-intentional and intentional cause. One must be forfeited.

II. Naturalism presupposes a notion that David Bakhurst calls “the ban on anthropocentricity”. This view holds that it is necessary to subtract value, intentionality, and other dimensions of human life out of our account of nature. In its naturalist variant, the ban ostensibly emerges from a sense that the world is the totality of the things described by laws of the exact sciences, as well as a discomfort at the notion that thought is anomalous. A rightful resistance to dualism also plays a role in the endorsement of naturalism and physicalism. Hence we see that Searle aims to reduce thought and social reality to principles of biology that are in turn reducible to the principles of chemistry and physics. The ban on anthropocentricity however seems to fall into a number of problems, not the least of which is its appeal to forms of the
myth of the given, and the presentation of a fairly distorted vision of human life and natural history. When we move to lift the ban, new plausible conceptions of human thought and activity, and thereby social reality arise. A non-dualistic alternative taught to us by McDowell, following Sellars and ultimately Hegel, is that we needn’t accept the circumscription of the conceptual to the mind. We can rather implicate spontaneity in receptivity, holding instead that experience is the source of our conceptual knowledge. The second feature that emerges from this is that a minded being can better be conceived as a self that reorients itself in light of new experience. This shows that mind is a domain of genuine activity. Activity is manifest in reorientations in self-understanding, and our understanding of the world, as Taylor’s interpretation of Hegel shows us. From Ilyenkov we gain the insight that activity is further manifested in intuition when we consider the way in which rational agents reshape the world in the form of artifacts and in the form of social institutions. Here, a conception of mind and activity can be understood as *sui generis* and in a form of continuity with the realm of *nomos*, without proceeding into the problematic of dualism.

III. Finally, we can apply a similar thought to the question of power. From a naturalist point of view, power is often conceived as the prior cause of social reality. This seems true in Hobbes, where self-interest and the sense of powerlessness and insecurity in the state of nature demands that individuals construct social institutions as a matter of sheer rational self-interest. Searle sees social reality in continuity with biology. Social reality exists because it presents a significant evolutionary advantage—it provides a means to
distribute power. These conceptions of power emerge from maintaining the
ban on anthropocentricity. To lift the ban we might find two post-naturalist
insights apply to our thought on power: First, explanations of social
institutions as forms of the distribution of power are sound only as local rather
than global statements of social reality. They must be local because the rational
power of human agents enables a form of desire, action, and evaluation in the
second order. Second order desire and modes of evaluation take first order
forms of desire as considerations in a higher-level, rational, deliberative
process, and are not beholden to them as such. Second, social reality is an
integral feature of thought—it is both required for thought, and sustained by
thought. Thought of the kind that human beings have, necessarily requires
language, and thereby presupposes an institutional reality already. This
changes how we view institutional reality: it becomes, not a means to
distribute power, but a form of the minds expression of rationality in the
world.

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CHAPTER II

Three Dimensions of Thought: The Subject, The Second Person, and Institutional Reality

1. Introduction

In my previous chapter I traced the contours of two approaches to the mind-world problematic and the implications thereof on our conception of social reality. The first was a naturalist narrative perspicuously represented in John Searle's philosophy of mind and social ontology. The second was what I called "post-naturalism," which can be understood as both a critique of naturalism on the one hand, and an examination of the implications of moving beyond the naturalist frame on the other. The aim in this chapter is bring to light a number of further features of a viable post-naturalist approach to the mind-world problematic, and the relevance of the phenomenon of social reality therein.

To begin, let us briefly review what has been established thus far. Searle presents social ontology that is rooted in a broader ontological perspective he calls "Biological Naturalism" wherein social reality is conceived continuous with the principles at play in a greater nomic and monistic ontology. Searle maintains that there are two legitimate descriptive vocabularies for socially constituted events. On the one hand there are "observer-relative" descriptions, and on the other, "intrinsic" descriptions. There are thus two ways social reality may be described—the first is internal to social reality itself, the second is external and from the perspective of an "objective" world wherein the anthropocentric ways in which we experience our reality are subtracted from the account. The first objection I raised to this was that naturalism and reductivism of mind are necessarily wedded—the separation of
naturalism and reductivism that Searle asserts appears ad hoc, and cannot be maintained insofar as there must one form of description that may be adequately applied to the causal processes at play. To retain his naturalist credentials, Searle must ultimately maintain that “intrinsic” and “ontologically objective” descriptions reveal the true nature of social reality, and that the “ontologically subjective” domain of description must ultimately be ceded when we have a sufficiently advanced science of the brain. Retaining both the intrinsic and observer-relative forms of causality entails an unintelligible “over determination” as Jaegwon Kim has called it. Since social reality must be understood from an objective standpoint, Searle holds that we represent social reality as a form of evolutionary emergence. Social reality is sufficiently described in biological terms that provide a narrative of a particular language-using creature that comes to form social institutions through the application of declarative sentences in conjunction with its mental capacity for collective intentionality. As an evolutionary emergence, social reality then is a set of events, the explanation of which can be found in an appeal to causal antecedents that mark an evolutionary-biological process.

An important dimension of the naturalist’s endeavor is to provide a metaphysical picture denuded of all things anthropocentric. Part of the post-naturalist agenda is to show why it is that naturalism’s subtraction of the anthropocentric is non-compulsory, and distorting. We needn’t conceive post-naturalism to have a “constructive” project, though what seems to take the place of a

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66 See Kim, “The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism” and “Mental Causation in Searle’s ‘Biological Naturalism’”.
67 Searle, “Language and Social Ontology”.

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construction of theory in post-naturalism is a reexamination of how it is we may consider what is already at play, and how we may describe this without the premises of naturalism. One important premise post-naturalism eschews is what David Bakhurst calls the *ban on anthropocentricity*. In contrast, the post-naturalist admits that the reality of qualities considered anthropocentric will necessarily form an important part of how we approach the mind-world problematic, and how we describe social reality in relation to reality as such. In eschewing the *ban*, post-naturalists recognize reason and activity as genuine properties of the world—as *anomalous* or *sui generis*. Post-naturalism is not marked by a disrespect for science, insofar as it recognizes the nomological nature of events, and grants that scientific enquiry proves a powerful tool for the disclosure of verities pertaining to objects and phenomena subsumable under natural law. However, for the post-naturalist, the realm of law does not exhaust “nature”. Nature is comprised both of objects that are subject to cause and law, together with phenomena that reflect the normative, spontaneity of mind, the structure of which is not always law-like, and as Davidson suggests, is better described as “anomalous”.

In liberating ourselves from the subtraction narrative of naturalism, a post-naturalist alternative may be reconstructed from number possible angles. In this chapter I will consider three: *subject*, the *second person* (or “community”), and *social institutions*. It seems to me that many post-naturalist narratives converge on the conception that these three dimensions are essential features of the phenomenon of reason. Ostensibly, they may be understood as the contours of a single thing. Each

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68 Davidson, “Mental Events”. 
facet enables the subsistence of the others. In *Having Thought*, John Haugeland writes that the concept of “humanity” ought to be regarded, not as a mere zoological category of particular species, but rather “a more recent social and historical phenomenon—one which happens, however, so far as we know to be limited to *homo sapiens.*” The idea here is that the human life form—the actualizing of a set of natural capacities associated with the human life—is deeply embedded, or subsists in virtue of, this threefold relation—that of a self-consciousness subject, that of the subject’s consciousness of the second person (and the effect that knowledge of the second person has in the subject), and the institutional forms by which such consciousness of self and other finds expression. We might take it that this is an ineliminable feature of the human life form that makes it a rational life form. Davidson argues, in “The Emergence of Thought” that while thought is ineliminably a part of the human form, it cannot be described in physical terms. Reducing the rational to the physical will invariably fail in explaining the rational—for we cannot expect to find a way of mapping the events of a physical, lawful causality, onto the rational phenomena. These three dimensions of the human form cannot be adequately traced out in scientific terms. Rather they presuppose an expanded conception of nature—one that will be elaborated in the course of this chapter.

In sections 2 to 3, I will consider the significance of second personal knowledge to self-knowledge and self-consciousness. The kind of knowledge that is self-consciousness, and the knowledge of another subject as a self-conscious agent, are

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69 Haugeland, *Having Thought.*

70 Davidson, “The Emergence of Thought.”
two sides of one thing. In approaching this subject, I will consider some insights that are raised in Sebastian Rödl’s *Self-Consciousness*. There, Rödl argues that the nature of self-conscious thought is not for one, but for two, and that the kind of thought in self-consciousness is also the kind of thought that makes mutual recognition possible—whereby subjects recognize each other as self-conscious subjects. However, I believe Rödl’s account omits (or rather only briefly considers) a form of dependency, whereby self-conscious thought—the power to understand one’s self as one’s self, requires other selves. A rational agent is conscious of herself as the subject of her own deeds—that is, she can stand in second order relations of thought, reflection and desire, which enable her to evaluate herself. But this form of evaluation seems to presuppose a particular tradition that the self finds herself in, and this tradition is shared with other selves. Hence the reflective thought engaged in by a self is dependent on a community. To better consider this dimension, I will review what Charles Taylor in his *Sources of the Self* has calls “webs of interlocution”—a fundamental dimension enabling the emergence of self-understanding, identity, and self-consciousness. The second person is essential to a subject’s self-consciousness, and subject’s self-consciousness is requisite for her understanding that another subject too is self-conscious. What transpires from this is that self and other are two mutually necessary contours of the shape of thought as such. From these two a third contour emerges—this is social reality, culture and the institutions that comprise it.

Section 4 turns our attention to John McDowell’s *Mind and World* wherein McDowell sheds light on how to understand the emergence of such a tradition—
codified or objectified forms of practice—as something neither supernatural, nor reducible to the realm of law, but rather in continuity with the latter. There it is argued that the self always finds itself within a particular tradition of a community’s accumulated wisdom that has come to define its form of life. The tradition is ultimately reflexive, but in a manner imminent to the tradition itself. Hence changes in the tradition cannot occur from the outside but must emerge from within. This sheds light on the way institutional reality is not merely a constructed set of tools that human beings use towards instrumental ends (at least not globally so). It is rather that institutional reality—particularly those facets that are deeply associated with the tradition so conceived—is integral to the nature of how and what we think. We occupy a standpoint internal to the tradition. In section 5, I discuss a particular problematic this brings to the fore, which I call the “subjective-objective agency problematic”. This isn’t to suggest that internalism is wrong, but rather that once we have an internalist account, there is a curious phenomenon that concerns how it is that a subject’s reflexivity is possible, and how transitions occur in the objective structure of social reality. This was a matter that seems to have concerned Hegel, and is still a subject of discussion among his contemporary interpreters (notably Robert Pippin, Axel Honneth, and Fredrick Neuhäuser among others). To better understand this, I look to Pippin’s interpretation of Hegel’s conception of Institutional Reality.

2. The First and Second Person

In the final chapter of Self-Consciousness, Sebastian Rödl holds that a sufficient account of first-personal predication requires us to deal with both first
personal and second personal forms of predication, insofar as they are two sides of one form of predication—first personal and second personal thought comprising two dimensions of a unity.\textsuperscript{71} The point of the argument is to show that the special form of the thought that is first-personal self-consciousness has a structure that extends into second personal forms of thought. This realization follows, for Rödl, from the thought that the causality of our thinking and acting (when all goes well, where it is intentional) flows out of what he calls a causality of reason, wherein a subject is able to distinguish the relevant order of reason for an action and belief, that adheres to a particular end. This causality of reason is what governs first personal thought in action and belief. However, it is also the principle at play that enables second personal explanation, knowledge, and reference, insofar as this dynamic of thought has room for the apprehension that there is another subject that too can be moved by the same causality of reason. The dimension worth considering here in particular is the conception of second personal thought and first personal thought as bound together in the structure of thought as such. This runs against a naturalist conception of first personal and second personal knowledge, as for the most part established \textit{a posteriori}. Rödl’s argument is divided into three sections. The first considers the form of second person explanation, the second deals with second personal knowledge, and the third deals with second person reference. I will summarize each briefly:

\textsuperscript{71} Rödl, \textit{Self-Consciousness}, p.166.
2.a Second Personal Explanation

Rödl first distinguishes two kinds of explanation of beliefs and actions: the “causality of thought” and “causality of reason”. The former is the mode whereby a subject represents why she thinks the content of her thought, or the reasons she is moved to act. Here, the subject represents to herself her reasons as causes for her actions. The causality of reason, in contrast, pertains to the objective status of her reasons. This order is not the individual subject’s alone, for as Rödl says, “there is no limit to the number of acts that may exemplify, and to the number of subjects whose acts may be explained by, such an order.”

First personal thought and action are moved by a causality of reason. And since another subject’s actions cannot be moved by a different metaphysical nature than our own, we must see their actions too as moved by a causality of reason. The conclusion of this first argument is to hold that explanations of the causality of thought simply are explanations of the causality of reason. Rödl develops this thought through the Kantian notion that intentional action is action that accords itself with the representation of a (practical) law. The representation of a law is representation of an end to which our reason and action must accord—such ends may be finite or infinite. The causality of intentional action, Rödl holds, does not derive itself from the end, but emerges in virtue of being caused by the representation of the end. This causality is the source of “accord” with the end. An agent acts only if the representation of the end causes the action by way of the agent’s deriving the action from the end. A representation is of an end in virtue

of being fit to cause actions in a way that ensures accord with the end.\(^{73}\) Hence acting out of wanting to do A, in a manner constitutive of the concept of wanting to do A, is doing A. The representation of the end and the actions that accord therewith are inseparable—they are a unity. Action and representation depend on a nexus of accord. The thought that accords with end is what is called “knowledge” and it is what constitutes the subject’s grasp of the relevant order of reason that accords with the end. In this way, we can see that the causalities of thought and reason are one.

2.b Second Personal Knowledge

In this second part, Rödl aims to show that a subject’s apprehending the second person as acting or believing intentionally is a term of explanation that is dependent on a form of explanation wherein we see ourselves and others moved by a causality of reason. Knowledge of ourselves as acting by a causality of reason, and knowledge of the second person, emerges from spontaneity and not receptivity. Rödl holds that in the perception of the movements of non-rational substances we subsume them under a general order of a concept. However, when the substance is a self-conscious subject, we then apprehend her acts through a different kind of general order—as of the same general kind that governs our own actions.

Spontaneous knowledge (as opposed to receptive knowledge) is unmediated—that is, knowledge of the object and the object known are one. Second personal knowledge is unmediated in this way. When one apprehends the acts of a second

\(^{73}\) Rödl gives the following examples: Something is an act of wanting justice in virtue of its power to cause actions, which are just (insofar as the wanting of justice is their cause). Something is an act of wanting to make coffee in virtue of its power to cause actions that serve the end of making coffee. *Ibid*, p.174.
person through an order of reason under which one also falls, then one has knowledge of the second person through spontaneity. Thus the object of second person knowledge does not exist independently of second personal knowledge of it. This entails that if one subject is to understand another subject, that one subject must read her thoughts and opinions into the other. It may be the case that the two subjects find a form of agreement with each other. However such agreement is significant only in virtue of its manifesting the same order of reason in both subjects. This is a common cause in each subject and is known to each subject spontaneously and not receptively—it renders agreement an emanation of one causality, as opposed to a mere coincidence.

2.c Second Personal Reference

In this final section, Rödl considers the way in which the second personal pronoun “you” is deployed. Rödl holds that the “you” cannot be understood as a demonstrative reference, insofar as demonstrative references are grounded in receptivity, whereas the you, insofar as it is a species of the I, must be understood to proceed from spontaneity. When a subject says demonstratively, “This S is F”, a second subject can understand the other subject by perceiving the same object. However when one subject addresses another by “you”, knowledge that I am the one who is addressed does not occur receptively, by perceiving myself, but by the intellect—by understanding that I am he who is being addressed, by another self-conscious subject. My thought about you must represent you as thinking about

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74 Ibid, p.184.
me—it must represent you as a self-conscious subject in the same way that I understand myself as a self-conscious subject.\textsuperscript{75}

Thus far Rödl’s account articulates a way in which second personal knowledge depends on first personal knowledge. However the chapter culminates in an argument that first personal knowledge also requires second personal knowledge—the two serve to enable each other’s subsistence. Mutual recognition—the phenomenon wherein two selves recognize each other as selves is for each subject to be moved by the same causality of reason, and this proceeds by a subject’s application of the appropriate order of reason. The appropriate order of reason proceeds from self-consciousness. An order of reason is general, insofar as it can be applied to an infinite number of objects. The thought of a tree as a tree can be thought of an infinite number of trees, or of the single tree should there be no other. In the same way, self-consciousness, awareness of one’s self as one’s self, is a thought that has a general form such that it can be appropriately applied to an infinite number of self-conscious subject. In this way, Rödl holds self consciousness is not merely for one alone, but can be applied to an infinity of other subjects.

3. Critical Reflections on Rödl

There are important lessons to take from Rödl’s account. The first is that the structure of self-consciousness and the nature of consciousness of the second person are so intermingled that we might plausibly describe it as a single from of consciousness, which figures in our speech in first and second personal forms of predication. Agreement and mutual recognition between two selves are both

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, p.190.
plausibly understood as emanations of a causality of reason wherein we understand each other as moved by the same rational causes, towards the same rational end. This form of knowledge is something that is there a priori in spontaneity itself. And hence when we use the reference “you”, we are not engaging in a form of demonstration, but are engaged in a certain form of communication wherein the other subject is recognized as a self-conscious subject. What is ostensibly problematic however, is the final thought Rödl comes to: Since consciousness of self represents a particular order of reason, and since an order of reason is general and not bound to anyone self-conscious substance, we may conclude that it is made for a multiplicity or infinity of substances. It seems to me however, that there is reason to hold that there is a certain way that consciousness of other subjects is integral to spontaneous thought of one’s self as one’s self—that our apprehension of any meaningfully infinite end is in some distinctive way conditioned by the second person. We have reason to think that the presence of the other bears some rational causal effect on ourselves—a notion that Rödl seems to leave empty, and unexamined at the very end of Self-consciousness.

4. “Webs of Interlocution”

In a manner akin to Rödl, Charles Taylor holds that enquiry into the concept of the self or person cannot adequately be understood through empirical science. That is to say the self is a very different kind of phenomenon than the entities and principles that scientific enquiry discloses. Hence naturalism, which suggests a project of developing a worldview on the basis of that which is disclosed by science, shows itself on closer analysis to distort our conception of the self. The feature of
the concept of self that Taylor considers is the self’s ineluctable need for identity, and the ways in which identity (and thereby selfhood) is inescapably associated in relation to a rational conception of the good. The understanding this domain of selfhood cannot emerge out of scientific enquiry into the self as a traditional object of study like any other. Taylor suggests that science presumes four criteria of any object it studies, and the self does not conform to any of them: (1) the object of study is to be considered objectively or 'absolutely', and not in terms of its meaning for the observer, (2) the object is independent of descriptions and interpretation offered by any subject, (3) the object can in principle be captured by explicit description, and (4) the object can in principle be described without reference to its surroundings.76 One problem in the application of these premises to the self is that the self is essentially constituted by a certain form of attention to that which matters for it—that is, our identity is defined for us by the way that things have significance and meaning for us. In this way, identity—a conception of our selves, who we are and what we do—is deeply entangled with the anthropocentric ways in which things matter to us. In this way, we are not selves in the same way we are biological organisms—the sense in which we are selves is dependent on our rational power to “move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good.”77 In this way the self exists in a space that cannot be adequately captured by the four premises governing a scientific research project.

So far this bears much in common with the details of self-consciousness articulated by Rödl. Indeed it seems that a unique feature of sapient consciousness

76 Taylor, Sources of the Self, p.34.
77 Ibid.
for Rödl is our capacity to hold in view finite and infinite ends, and to be moved thereby in thought and action. Being moved thereby is a function of the causality of reason, and not causality of law. However, something else emerges in Taylor’s discussion. The self is a special kind of object deeply embedded in, and emerging out of, uniquely anthropocentric practices, one central feature of which is the way that we engage in forms of self-interpretation and evaluation—which must always arise in and through language. Taylor therefore holds that the study of persons is the study of agents who exist in or are strongly constituted by language. This constitution presupposes a “language community”—affirming the view that one is a self only among other selves, and that those others enable one to understand one’s self as oneself. Thus, for Taylor, it is not just that self-consciousness is a form of consciousness representable as general order of reason to be applied to one’s self and an infinity of others through a spontaneity of mind. Rather, the self and its consciousness is deeply oriented and moved by the second person. In this way, the second person is integral to the phenomenon of the first, and each are two dimensions of a single thing because each are mutually dependent.

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78 Rödl distinguishes thought about action as having the structure of “finite” and “infinite” ends in view. In thought about belief, he makes a parallel distinction between the form of “finite” and “infinite” explanations. A finite end is exhausted when one’s desire for a particular end can be exhausted by completing the tasks associated therewith (e.g. wanting to fix one’s bicycle is completed by fixing the bicycle. By contrast an infinite end is inexhaustible (e.g. wanting to remain healthy when one already is healthy, does not culminate in a finite end). Importantly, a finite end explains actions as a “part” of itself, whereas infinite ends explain actions as a “manifestation” of itself. See, Self-consciousness, pp. 34-8.
79 Taylor, Sources of the Self, p.35.
80 Ibid.
The need for language and the need for the other to whom one exists in communicative relations is one form of dependence that self has on the other. Another is the way we are in need of others to bring us into the language community through our upbringing. This enables us to enter into forms of communication and conversation with others. A crucial feature of conversation is its power to enable oneself and one’s interlocutor to share a horizon—the object considered in conversation becomes an object of contemplation for two subjects together. The sense in which one cannot be a self on one’s own but only in relation to others is what Taylor calls “webs of interlocution”.

What such webs of interlocution reveal is that the self’s rational life—the kind of life and experience implicated in the special form of knowledge that is self-consciousness—depends on a community to effectively call it into being.

The third dimension or “contour” of thought is that of institutional reality. We begin to see this already with the very idea of the second person, insofar as the relation of self and other requires a form of interlocution, and therefore a form of language. Language may be considered one of the most fundamental (if not the fundamental) social institutions. The entirety of our form of life is built on language. Further in bearing particular norms objectively, language may be considered in itself a tradition, or a necessary dimension of a tradition that represents the objectification of particular norms. The insights of John McDowell’s Mind and World, are helpful in articulating this point. Moreover, it provides insights into how we may

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81 Ibid, p. 36.
reconcile the phenomenon of thought and social reality with our conception of nature as such.


In the fifth chapter of *Mind and World* McDowell discusses the implications of conceptualizing spontaneity as autonomous, and hence outside the realm of natural law. On a conception wherein nature is conceived as a nomological totality, this may mean genuine spontaneity is outside “nature” or “supernatural”. On such a view, nature is, in Weberian terms, “disenchanted”\(^82\)—everything, including the subject and thought is to be understood nomologically and monistically.\(^83\) As a nomological totality, nature is understood as a sphere of material events causally affected by antecedent events in strict relations fundamentally devoid of all secondary qualities such as meanings, significance, thought, and so on. On this view the totality of the natural sphere could be sufficiently articulated in the language of modern science—a conception that some authors have called a “hermeneutic of natural history”.\(^84\) It necessarily follows that the anomalous features of human thought and practice—which are conceptual and meaning laden—appear outside of realm of law, and

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\(^{82}\) *Mind and World*, Lecture IV. §3

\(^{83}\) I borrow Davidson taxonomy of nomological theory here. *Nomological monism* denotes that there are correlating laws for any event. *Nomological dualism* affirms a form of parallelism, interactionism, and epiphenomenalism about that status of the mental in any given event. *Anomalous dualism* holds that there is a general failure of laws to correlate with the mental and physical. Finally, there is *anomalous monism* (Davidson’s position) that while all events obey a form of nomology, mental events do not and cannot fall under any law. Of course, I am not endorsing this scheme here, since what McDowell presents seems to be a form of naturalized anomaly without monism. What this does not lead to is a form of anti-naturalism dualism because thought is reframed as *sui generis*, in a form of continuity with the realm of law. See Davidson, “Mental Events”.

\(^{84}\) See Honneth, “Between Hermeneutics and Hegelianism: John McDowell and the Challenge of Moral Realism”.
therefore are “unnatural”. The ideal of an autonomous sphere of reasons, or space of reasons, and the human capacity to be responsive to reasons appears “spooky”, super-natural, or aberrant to nature traditionally construed.

As we have seen, there are a number of ready responses to the problem of nature and reason: one naturalist approach is to deny that reason and thought are anomalous. This is to treat reason reductively, and articulate a conception of reason as akin to any other nomological expressible phenomenon. For example, eliminativists say thought is illusory, or is the mere designation of a pre-scientific and folk-psychological mode of description—an inferior precursor for what would be better understood in more precise scientific (neurological) modes of description. Another (perhaps “anti-naturalist”) response situates reason in a wholly anomalous or platonic sphere—this is to hold that experiences in the world represent one sphere, while reason finds itself a wholly other sphere. The two do not cohere or overlap. In non-dualistic variants, such a theory holds that the mental has no place or efficacy in realm of law, nor does the realm of law exert a direct influence in spontaneity. These represent two broad kinds of response to the role of thought in nature. The first kind is what McDowell calls “Bald Naturalism” while the latter is called “Rampant Platonism”. For McDowell both visions of reason and nature proceed from a particular mental block that needs to be dispelled.

One possible, and plausible, course of overcoming the block involves the expansion of the conception of nature such that it includes reason as sui generis—

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85 Mind and World, Lecture IV, §4
86 Mind and World, IV, §4, see also Davidson’s theory of “Anomalous Monism” in “Mental Events”.
87 Ibid, Lecture IV, §2.
neither as a sphere disconnected from the realm of law, nor reducible to it, but rather in continuity therewith. The insight of “second nature” aids us in conceiving of the possibility of this continuity, whereby we can think of spontaneity as the actualization of the natural form of the human being. Spontaneity marks a distinctive property of the nature of human beings—that is it is in some sense an effect of the natural history of humans that they are the kinds of creatures that acquire and deploy rational powers. 88 This is an imminent dimension of human nature. The natural process whereby such powers obtain in a human agent is through a process of education—through an agent’s initiation into a tradition. To cement this point, McDowell uses Aristotle’s conception of ethical understanding—a conception that conceived of the ethical in terms of the natural insofar as practical wisdom is an exercise of the sorts of animals that are rational. Hence for Aristotle, no contradiction is conceived between the rational agency of human beings, and nature as such. 89 This Aristotelian vision holds that the ethical is a specific domain of rational requirements that are present in reality independently of a rational subject’s responsiveness to them. 90 An order of ethical reasons may be understood as one tract in a space of reasons—a domain of thinkable content independent of the thinking agent. Responsiveness to an ethical domain in the space of reasons requires a subject’s acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. Such capacities are brought about in the subject’s maturation and initiation into a tradition. 91

88 Mind and World, Lecture IV, §6.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
Here one sees a manner of eschewing naturalism’s subtraction of the anthropocentric, and instead integrating (without reducing) anthropocentric properties into a conception of the nature: we can accept that the conceptual (in this case moral properties and values) are not a domain circumscribed to the internal nature of a thinking subject. Rather the conceptual is present in the world and taken in, or “received” by the subject. Here we needn’t think of the deliverances of phronesis as something we merely construct—but the objective features of the human life-world, that human agents coming into take up receptively. In this sense we can understand moral knowledge as not merely deducible from universal maxims inherent in analysis of the structure and nature of spontaneity (of reflection on what it means to be a “rational” subject), but instead as properties objectively present in the world as such.

McDowell introduces a metaphor of a subject having her “eyes opened” to a tract in the space of reasons. The metaphor speaks to a process whereby a person comes to a form of self-understanding (or self-consciousness) of themselves as an agent in possession of beliefs and desires in the second order—a perspective from which a subject can engage in a form of self and social criticism. Evaluation of one’s life, and one’s tradition become possible in the acquisition of second nature. However the possibility of critique emerges only in the context of the hermeneutical tradition into which the subject is initiated. The movement from our primary nature

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92 As discussed in my previous chapter, McDowell suggests that a removal of the ban on anthropocentricity involves the implicating of spontaneity in receptivity—what Kant had thought to inhere only in the mind which projected itself onto experience, could rather be thought inherent in experience itself—the role of the mind is to continuously revise itself on the basis of new experience.
(shared with mere animals) to the latter state (which is definitive of the rational characteristics natural to human beings) is an active process whereby a person moves from a first, or primary nature into “second nature”. The transition obtains primarily through the acquisition of a language. The acquisition of second nature through the process of Bildung is a process whereby an order of reason (as Rödl calls it), or objective rational structure discloses itself to a person. Hence a person begins to see meaning in nature—we can think of this as reinstating a (partially) enchanted conception of nature, one where orders of reason are present and imminent in the natural world, but pertain principally to a sphere of human lived experience within that world. This is not to suggest that we rightfully impute meaning to the falling of crows, or the crashing of thunder, rather it respects the disenchanted lawful relations disclosed by natural science, as a mode of explaining, that which occurs at the level of the realm of law. However, it also admits that the realm of law does not exhaust what is real or natural. The encountering of a text, or the perception of ethical and moral meaning in states of affairs, is the perception of meaning in the world. Again the power to perceive and respond to meaning in this way must be understood as a part of human natural history. McDowell quoting

93 “…natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what. The tradition is subject to reflective mediation by each generation that inherits it. Indeed, a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance. But if an individual human being is to realize her potential of taking her place in that succession, which is the same thing as acquiring a mind, the capacity to think and act intentionally at all, the first thing that needs to happen is for her to be initiated into a tradition as it stands.” – Ibid, Lecture VI, §8
94 Mind and World, Lecture V, §3
Wittgenstein says “‘Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing’”.\(^{95}\)

With this, we can note that the disclosure of an order within the space of reasons always occurs within in a hermeneutic context—what we may call a tradition. We consider that mind is a faculty that reorients itself on the basis of new experience. Presumably it is reasonable to conceive of these forms of reorientation on the basis of new experience as playing out not only in an individual subject’s life, but in the life of her community. In this sense we might consider the tradition the form of a community’s accumulated wisdom, codified into the objective norms and rules that are characteristic of it, and the following of which marks participation therein. The idea of “tradition” does not feature until the very end of Mind and World, and what is said there is brief. In an afterword on this same lecture, McDowell elaborates that the conception of initiation into a tradition first occurs through the initiation into a language. A language serves as a repository for a tradition—so initiation into a language is initiation into a conception of the layout of the space of reasons.\(^{96}\) The significance of this conception is that it limits the reach of our practical reasoning. The conception seems to imply that we cannot reach beyond the hermeneutical context of a tradition that we find ourselves in. Revision and reflexivity of the tradition occur imminently within the tradition itself. New practical knowledge and wisdom occur within a distinctive context of the historically accumulated practical wisdom of a tradition into which we are initiated in the process of education. Revisions to the tradition occur, not from stepping

\(^{95}\) Ibid, Lecture V, §3

\(^{96}\) Ibid, Afterword Part IV, §3
outside it, but from within the tradition itself. Hence the significance of the metaphor of Neurath’s boat, repairs to which occur while the boat is already at sea.\textsuperscript{97}

6. Institutional Reality and the “Subjective-objective-agency Problematic”

This conception of tradition fits well with the Hegelian conception of the “objective spirit”—that is the concretization of reason into social reality.\textsuperscript{98} Running against a particular individualist or atomistic ontology of social reality, Hegel held that the self, and the institutional and cultural context in which that self existed were deeply entangled. For Hegel, a subject’s practical reason is always conditioned by the determinations of objective spirit—of the forms of institutions and rules available at a particular time. Yet Hegel does not endorse a form of relativism in this regard, insofar as he believes the right and the good are still binding on the subject and on social reality. Reconciling the two—the subjective (pertaining to the orientation and practical reasonings of a self) and objective dimensions of the good (pertaining to the conditions of the community and social reality)—I believe is an important demand upon a post-natural social ontology. I provisionally call this the “subjective-objective-agency problematic”. Since a subject’s thought, both practical and theoretical, is contextualized and determined by the constraints of the general institutional context and tradition that we are within, no subject can occupy a standpoint external to the tradition of which she a part. Yet the objective conditions of institutional reality change on the basis of a new sense of how our traditions ought to be—and thus it is a natural to engage in a form of critical reflection on the

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, Lecture IV, §7
\textsuperscript{98} See, Phenomenology of Spirit, (BB), VI
nature of our understanding in light of new experience, and the nature of our social reality in light of new knowledge. However, the very phenomenon of thinking is condition by our institutional reality—practical reason is for the most part the following of rules objectively situated in the tradition. The problematic asks, what is it about subjective thought that enables a form of transition in the objective conditions of institutional reality, such that we can decide that a prevailing set of institutional arrangements fails to accord with what is practically binding, when our thought of what is practically binding is implicated defined the particular institutional context? To gain clearer perspective into the feature of this problematic, it will be of use to consider some insights from an article by Robert Pippin entitled “Hegel and Institutional Rationality”.

6.a Hegel and Institutional Rationality

As Pippin notes, Hegel's conception of the state as the apex of rationality, has often been subject to the charge of endorsing a scandalous variety of conservatism. This has primarily arisen from an interpretation of Hegel's claim that it is only in the state that “man” finds “rational” existence, and, likewise, the connected notion that freedom is found in the state. We may however see such interpretations as misguided when we consider the role Hegel imputes to institutional reality in shaping, forming, and giving rise to rationality. Such Hegelian ideas can better be construed as delineating a distinctive theory of practical and theoretical rationality—of how human thought is actualized through its concretization in social reality, which in turn, is best conceived as a dynamic and developmental phenomenon. Pippin states that for Hegel “conforming to right”, “being rational in
and for itself” and participating in particular institutions all amount to the same thing—that is the state of actual freedom.\(^{99}\)

For Hegel, the shape of rationality has two sides: On the first, practical reason in the subject is manifest in the following of institutional rules. On the second, the quality of the reasons at play in the subject’s institutional reality is bound by the institution’s objective rational status.\(^{100}\) And hence there is a subjective and objective side to rationality—the subjective pertains to the subject’s actualizing a conception of the good, however the conception is dependent on the institutional actuality that the subject is located within. It is not the case (as the previously noted false interpretation of Hegel holds) that the right is actualized in the mere adherence and practice of institutional rules of the time. Rather institutional reality may or may not be in conformity with the right—therefore there are historical periods wherein the objective structure of culture and institutional reality are effectively empty, and for the most part devoid of rationality. Presumably, then, other forms of objective spirit draw closer to the criteria of bringing rationality to proper actuality. Hence Hegel’s conception of freedom—which is to be the highest expression of rationality—is not a condition that merely inheres in the individual, in the mere analysis of the forms of thought that guide the individual’s practical and theoretical activity. Rather, since the individual is bound to her social reality, and since her practical reason is determined by the institutional structure and context in which she lives, freedom is better conceived a developmental and collective

\(^{99}\) Pippin, “Hegel and Institutional Rationality” §1.
\(^{100}\) Ibid, §1
achievement occurring in the objective movements of social reality towards the 
apotheosis of proper rational freedom.

From Pippin’s discussion of Hegel so far, it is apparent that a salient 
dimension of Hegel’s conception of institutional rationality is a conception of 
freedom as a form of institutional rule following (in a manner akin to the 
Wittgensteinian conception of proper rule following—of going on in the appropriate 
way). However, for Hegel, an inner, subjective, normative commitment to the right 
(a conception Hegel shares with Kant and Fichte) is imperative on the individual—a 
subject must choose the right and rational institutional rules. That is, there are 
objective (pertaining to institutional reality) and subjective (pertaining to a person’s 
normative, practical deliberation) sides to Hegel’s conception of practical reason. 
The conjunction may be stated more explicitly as follows: The first is that in 
participating in Institution X—that is in following its rules—one can be said to be 
practically rational. However, the merely relative conception of the right this 
engenders must be avoided by the second conception that institution X ought it be a 
rational institution. This latter seems to entail that an individual ought to employ a 
form of practical rationality in opting to participate in the rules of institution X and 
not in those of institution Y. Rationality on both subjective and objective sides— 
both in the way social reality is ordered, and a subject’s finding her (rational) 
aspirations fulfilled therein are both requisite criteria for freedom. However a 
problematic arises as to how it is that institutional reality is transformed, or 
develops towards the actualization of objective rationality. How do the subjective 
and objective sides conceptions come together? In particular, we may ask, if the
subject’s expression of practical reason is conditioned by her institutional context, how is it possible that she can “opt” to participate in the right institutions?

First, it is important to note that Hegel rejects as a solution to this problematic, the methodological individualism taken up by Contractarian theorists among others. The methodological individualism of Contractarian theories believed that the ideal or free society would be the product of the aggregation of the will or preferences of each individual. This was rooted in a particular ontological conception of the individual as in some sense prior to social reality—that the individual had a sense of justice, and the good in some primordial form. The individual then brought this to bear in the formation of social reality—ostensibly after leaving whatever pre-social state of affairs (e.g. “the state of nature”) characteristic of the primordial life-world of this hypothetical individual. Pippin suggests that Hegel’s critiques of this Contractarian thesis can be organized into two groups: The first is his criticism of the abstractness of the hypothetical pre-institutional subjectivity. The second concerns the problems of motivation and alienation. Common to the two criticisms is a notion that a person’s social relations precede individuality insofar as individuality is brought to bear in the nexus of the individual’s social reality.

Of the first objection, Hegel holds that the Contractarian individual, who is hypothetical, pre-institutional, and who proceeds into institutional reality by ostensibly innate rational (as in calculative, as opposed to thought-responsive) principles (whether as a rational egoist, or preference maximizer and so on) is too abstract—it departs from the reality of the individual in social relationships (a

context where the individual is always found). An individual’s sense of individuality is tightly woven into the nature and features of her relations to other subjects. Hegel does however hold that individuality and independence have an important role and legitimate place—however unlike the Contractarians, Hegel does not hold that individuality is readily given in some primordial sense. It is rather, achieved collectively. Any form of individuality rests on a form of dependence on social relations, in manner much akin to Taylor’s conception of “webs of interlocution”.

The second objection, concerns motivation. There is a question as to how particular practical imperatives come into being, or gain a grip on the individual—that is, how is it that the individual is moved to actualize normatively binding deeds. Hegel is critical of Kant’s notion that pure reason itself is sufficient as a form of explanation of normative action. Kant had thought that freedom and subjection to the moral law were reciprocal; that conformity to the constraints of rationality were in themselves true freedom, and hence being truly autonomous consisted in conformity to the form of rationality itself (abstractly and hypothetically construed). However, for Hegel, this led Kant to the problematic notion of the categorical imperative. This notion entailed that commitment to the claim of rationality should mean that anyone else in a similar situation as myself, under supposition that I am acting in a perfectly rational manner, would be moved by the same reasons for action if they too were thinking in a ideal rational way. However, for Hegel, the notion that the individual acts rationally cannot entail such an eternal principle as the categorical imperative—Kant had been too concerned with the “hypothetical”,

\[102\] Ibid, §5.
and did not see that the “actuality” of moral principles could not bear on what he conceived. The actuality of morality is always defined by the institutional context that opens or obscures particular avenues for practical reason and action. Thus again, the agent’s practical deliberation is actualized in what rules that agent opts to abide by under a particular circumstance. For Hegel, Kant’s concern for the dictates of morality for purely rational will, shed little light on how it is moral motivations gain a grip on the subject.103

Where does this leave us in our conception of how it is that norms grip individual subjects? We might ask where does this leave us with subjective-objective agency problematic? One manner of understanding this, as Pippin suggests, is that a subject’s being moved practically is not to be understood as something one elects to do as if outside the institutional context one is in—as if from some standpoint where one can deduce the correct and binding rational maxim. A subject filling some institutional role X, confronts claims about what is permissible and impermissible to do—of course there is variation in the ways a subject can respond to the rules of a given institutional role. For Hegel all that counts as a subject’s practical reason is that participation in a practice—in offering, accepting and rejecting institutional reasons—is all that counts as having the sorts of reasons that allow an action to be genuinely that of the subject’s.104 Practical rationality is always institution bound. However, one way we may approach the problematic is to consider how it is that the subject experiences the objective rationality of the cultural and institutional rules available to her. In this regard Hegel considers

Sophocles’ *Antigone* where the dilemma of Antigone and Creon over the appropriate means to bury Polynices’ body runs up against conflicting rules and norms existent in the political, religious, and familial institutions of their time. There are thus contradictions in the objective norms, and the only means of betterment is not for one agent to step outside the institutional context, but is rather to find a new mode of coherence. Coherence in the objective norms then is a collective achievement—it occurs by a mode of slow struggle wherein subjects run up against difficulties produced by their objective social situation. Movement and transition then transpires from within the system itself.

I take this to be one mode of approaching the problematic I have articulated above. Of course there is much more to be said about the phenomenology of subjects confronting and resolving contractions in the objective institutional landscape. The questions of how such resolutions are found—how it is new modes of life are generated, their connections to the objective history of institutional reality, and the subjective phenomenology of agents who live them, are matters for further enquiry for the post-naturalist perspective.

7. Conclusions

In this chapter my aim was to look at a number of post-naturalist ways of considering the subject, the second person, and institutional reality. I have called these three phenomena contours of a single thing—insofar as they are all mutually reinforcing, mutually sustaining dimensions of thought actualized subjectively, intersubjectively, and objectively. My conclusions are as follows:

\[\text{Ibid, §9.}\]
I. From Rödl we see that the nature of self-consciousness is not for one but for many. The power of a self to think and know the other is an integral feature of first personal thought as such. That is, the conditions of first and second personal knowledge obtain a priori, and issue from spontaneity. To understand another self is to perceive them as responsive or moved by the same causality of reason as one’s self. Awareness that one and another are moved by the same causality of reason are two features of the same form of consciousness. However in addition to this, we have reason to think of the second person as having a certain causal effect on our sense of self. Relations to other selves are always communicative, and hence an authentic relation of one self to another is built upon language. This is what Taylor calls “webs of interlocution”—the notion that to know oneself as oneself requires being in a form of dialogue with those others to which one imputes self-consciousness. The dynamic is shot through with language, and hence the institution of language, consciousness of self, and consciousness of other selves may plausibly be understood as one thing. Furthermore these contours, as Taylor argues, cannot be reduced to or articulated within the frame of science, insofar as science in concerned with a different object—the world as it is independent of all things anthropocentric. Because of the phenomenon of the self, we cannot take science as explicating a total picture of reality, but rather merely one domain thereof.

II. The insights to be gleaned from McDowell’s *Mind and World* are twofold. First, it continues the discussion examined in Taylor’s argument against naturalism. Mind, and its powers of apprehension and activity are *sui generis*, neither
reducible to the realm of law (as bald naturalism had attempted to do) nor existent in some platonic, supernatural domain. Rather the spontaneity of mind is the fulfillment of human nature. This is an expanded conception of nature, where on the hand there is the domain of lawful causal relations, and on the other secondary and anthropocentric dimensions embodying the conceptions of the good or the right that exist in a sphere solely for rational beings capable of discerning and responding to meaning in reality. Second McDowell’s conception of the tradition brings insight into how it is that our collective position in the space of reasons bears an institutionalized form, objectified into the culture and institutions—particularly the language that characterize the environment into which we are raised. The tradition is not static, for it changes over time. The individual, however, cannot occupy a perspective external to the tradition, and hence changes in the tradition must occur from within.

III. In section 5 and 5.1 I considered a distinctive problematic that emerges in our understanding of the good in relation to a subject’s agency within institutional reality. The problematic which I have called the “subjective-objective agency problematic” concerned how it is that subjective (pertaining to the subject) and objective (pertaining to the institutional reality) actualizations of the good cohere—how are they brought together, and in particular how is it that an agent is able to opt for social practices that better actualize the good when the agent’s practical reason is conditioned and made possible by the objective rules that comprise social reality. This problematic presupposes a Hegelian
notion of practical reason, which conjoins objective rule following (in the Wittgensteinian sense) and subjective, rational, autonomy (in the Kantian/Fichtean sense). I then considered how it is that Hegel, in Pippin’s interpretation, approaches the issue. First, the Contractarian approach that espoused methodological individualism is rejected insofar as it portrays the individual as aloof from the social practices of her time and context. Sociality is primitive and not derivative. Second, the Kantian idea that we can deduce what is right from universal maxims will not do, insofar as the actuality of moral and ethical life is found in the actual options available to an agent that are there in her social milieu. We might consider that social reality changes through forms of contradiction in the objective norms present in various institutions of social existence. It may be that political norms, the norms that pertain to religious or family life create contradictions that individual comes up against. The pressure of such tension likely causes the end of particular norms, and the strengthening of other norms, and possible the emergence of new norms. However much still needs to be said of the way in which the subject comes into interaction with such norms. Another likely project for a post-naturalist social ontology then is to consider the very phenomenology of the individual in social reality—what are the experience of the self whose life-world is shaped by the various determinations of institutional reality, and what are the features thereof that cause tension and impel transition. But this must wait for another day.

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General Conclusions on Chapters I and II

In the course of this thesis I have attempted to categorize two approaches to what I called “mind-world-problematic”. These were naturalism and post-naturalism. Both approaches entail possible ways of thinking about social reality, nature, and how it is that the two come together. Both approaches maintain that the human capacity to generate and participate in social reality is an integral and important feature and dimension of mind. Naturalists hold that social reality must be understood as a production of mind, which in turn is a product of neurophysiology—and thereby is a part of the lawful processes at play in nature. Post-naturalists hold that mind and thought are sui generis, and that in salient ways social reality is integral to mind and thought. It therefore is not something mind generates, but something integral to that which we call mind.

In the first chapter I considered elements of a naturalist social ontology. The primary exposition of naturalism I examined was John Searle’s “biological” naturalism. Biological naturalism holds that mind should be understood as a biological (i.e. neurological) phenomenon. Since social reality emerges from the distinct (ultimately neurological) features of mental intentionality and language, social reality too could be understood as an emergence causally derivative from the principles at play human biology, which in turn is reducible the principles at play in chemistry and physics. A feature of the naturalist project of articulating a nomological, monistic solution to the mind-world problematic is a sense that our ontology should be taken directly from the nomological, material ontology presupposed and disclosed by the natural sciences.
Post-naturalism in part is a critique of reductive naturalism. Post-naturalists hold that mind is *sui generis* and *anomalous*—and that a sound account of its qualitative features cannot be articulated in scientific terms, for mind operates on very different principles than what is typical of the objects of interest in scientific enquiry. Naturalism posits itself in league with contemporary science, yet post-naturalists typically see naturalism as parasitic, distorting what science illuminates in our sense of reality. Science and its developments can be respected, however, its advances are not in themselves incoherent with a conception of mind and reason as *sui generis*—that is that mind and its properties are neither open to nomological description, nor utterly transcendental or supernatural. In this way mind, self-consciousness, and normativity—are not amenable to the scientific gaze, insofar as a different mode or form of enquiry discloses their verities and dynamics. Thus in the first chapter, I attempted to demonstrate how it is that an alternate account may be given from a post-naturalist angle that runs against a number of fundamental features in Searle’s naturalistic description of social reality.

In the second chapter I explored elements of a post-naturalist approach to the conception of social reality and its relation to mind. Therein, I considered in greater depth the way post-naturalist views seem to conclude that social reality, rather than a separable product of the activity of mind, is instead integral to that which we call *thought* as such. Self-consciousness and consciousness of other selves are intimately related forms of thought. Sebastian Rödl, as was seen, argued that these are two sides of a single form of consciousness. Other post-naturalist views, such as that held by Charles Taylor, impute a form of causality to consciousness of
the second person, insofar as such consciousness is what enables first person
knowledge—consciousness of self—to subsist. Finally consciousness of self and
other comes to expression only through the instituting of norms that comprise
language as well as other institutions constitutive of social reality. From this
conception, a particular problematic emerges that I have called the “subjective-
objective agency problematic”. This concerns how it is that the subjective and
objective sides of rational agency interact—how it is that social rules are rendered
obsolete by transitions in the minds of those who participate therein. Finally I
suggested that this ought to be a question for further post-naturalist enquiry into
the features and dimensions of social reality.

My overall aim here was, on one hand, to bring to light and catalogue two
alternate ways of looking at the mind-world problematic and their implications on
our view of the status of social institutions. With this I hoped to contribute to the
discourse on social ontology by contextualizing the general forms of thought in
philosophy on the ontological status of institutions as such. On the other hand, my
aim was to lay particular emphasis on the fact that the reductive naturalist vision of
social reality is not the only viable alternative consistent with the developments and
transitions of modernity. Rather there are other alternatives, critical of the reductive
naturalist frame and ostensibly more plausible and productive in making better
sense of the relations of reason, nature, and social reality.

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