SOCIAL ONTOLOGY NATURALIZED
Rebecca Mason, version of March 2015

The idea that social entities (e.g., money, marriage, the President of the United States), are less real than natural entities (e.g., mountains, tigers, water molecules), is pervasive in discussions of social ontology (Hacking, 1991; Hayek, 1943; Khalidi, 2013a, 2013b; Ruben, 1989; Searle, 1995, 2007, 2008, 2010; Thomasson, 2003a, 2003b; Tuomela, 2007).

1 The reason that social entities are supposed to be less real than natural entities is that they are, unlike natural entities, mind-dependent. For instance, F.A. Hayek claims that social entities are not defined in terms of “real properties” because “in the social sciences the things are what people think they are” (Hayek 1943, 3). Likewise, John Searle argues that social entities are less real than natural entities because they “exist only because we believe them to exist” (Searle 1995, 1) and “only are what they are, because that is what we believe that they are” (Searle 2007, 4). According to Searle, natural entities are real simpliciter, whereas social entities are only real to us. Similarly, Amie Thomasson argues that social entities are less real than natural entities because the former exist and have their nature in virtue of our thoughts about them (Thomasson 2003a).

2 Call this the Standard View of Social Reality.

The Standard View consists of two closely related theses about the relationship between social entities and our mental states.

DEPENDENCE: Social entities depend on our mental states.

SKETCHINESS: Social entities are less real than natural entities.

Moreover, according to proponents of the Standard View, Dependence entails Sketchiness. In other words, social entities are less real than natural entities because the former depend on our mental states. In what follows, I

1 Here, by ‘natural entity’ I mean entities that are found ‘in nature.’ It’s difficult to say exactly what makes an entity social versus what makes an entity natural in this sense. An analysis of this distinction is beyond the scope of this paper; instead, I work from paradigm cases.

2 Actually, Thomasson argues that some (but not all) social entities are mind-dependent (in the relevant sense), and are therefore less real than natural entities (Thomasson 2003a and 2003b). On her view, only institutional entities are problematically mind-dependent (she also thinks that artifacts are mind-dependent in the relevant sense). Following Searle (1995), Thomasson argues that institutional entities are a subset of social entities. That is, all institutional entities are social entities, but not all social entities are institutional entities. However, Searle and Thomasson define institutional entities as those entities that depend on our mental states (in the relevant sense) for their existence. Obviously, this does not provide us with a very helpful criterion for determining which social entities are problematically mind-dependent. In answer to the question: Which social entities are mind-dependent (in the relevant sense)? Thomasson answers: Institutional entities. But in response to the question: Which social entities are institutional entities? Thomasson answers: Those entities which are mind-dependent (in the relevant sense). Because the term “institutional entity” (or “institutional fact”) is poorly defined, I will simply use the term “social entity” (or “social fact”) instead. However, the examples I will discuss in what follows (i.e., money, marriage, being a permanent resident) are paradigmatic “institutional entities” according to Thomasson and others.
argue that the *Standard View* is false. Social entities do not depend on our mental states in any metaphysically interesting sense. I go on to defend an alternative view of social reality according to which social entities depend on our behavior and the relations that obtain between us. On my view, social entities are no less real than those entities which populate the so-called natural world.

Let’s begin by characterizing the *Standard View* more precisely. Proponents of the *Standard View* do not argue that social entities are mind dependent in the sense that our thoughts cause them to exist as they do; for, as Searle admits, mere causal mind dependence does not justify the thesis that social entities are less real than natural ones (Searle 1995, 156). Instead, they argue that social entities depend on our mental states in the sense that their very nature is determined by our ways of thinking about them.³ According to proponents of the *Standard View*, social entities are “constituted” by our mental states, rather than being caused by them. Thus, they argue that social entities depend on our mental states in a distinctively ontological sense.

It is a difficult question how a relation of ontological dependence ought to be defined—indeed, there may be a plurality of relations of ontological dependence, each with a distinctive metaphysical character and formal profile (see Koslicki forthcoming). But we can start by observing that, if the *Standard View* is true, the dependence relation that obtains between social entities and our mental states has several important logical properties.

First, it is *asymmetrical*. This is because social entities are supposed to depend on our mental states but not vice versa. Second, it is *irreflexive*. This is because the way in which social entities are supposed to depend on our mental states is different from the way in which they depend on themselves. Third, it is *transitive*. This is because the existence of the social world is supposed to be compatible with physicalism. If social entities depend on our mental states, and our mental states depend on the physical states that realize them, then social entities likewise depend on the physical world.

Finally, it is *metaphysically necessary* (Hayek, 1943; Guala, 2010; Ruben, 1989; Thomasson, 2003a).⁴ David Ruben is especially clear on this point. He says: “If everyone believes that there are social objects of kind s, then there must be things of kind s…widespread general classificatory belief that there are

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³ This is what Searle calls the “self-referentiality” of social kinds (Searle 1995, 32). Social kinds depend on our having certain attitudes that are about the kinds themselves (i.e., x is money because we believe it is money). This is the strongest of the three forms of mind-dependence Muhammad Khalidi identifies (Khalidi, 2013).

⁴ Guala has since changed his view (see Guala, 2015).
things of social kind s is sufficient for there being things of social kind s” (Ruben 1989, 74, emphasis in original). This feature of the dependence relation is motivated by the idea that social entities have arbitrary natures—that their properties are stipulated a priori.

Suppose we stipulate that a blicket is anything that is blue, and one mile from a rhododendron. In that case, nothing else is needed in order to make it the case that blickets are blue and one mile from the rhododendron. Moreover, so long as the properties of being blue, and being one mile from a rhododendron are instantiated, blickets exist. According to proponents of the Standard View, social entities are like blickets. For a given social entity, e, if we stipulate that e is anything that meets conditions C (where these conditions are simply a set of properties, p₁…pₙ), then e is C. Nothing more is needed in order to make it the case that e is C.

Thus, according to the Standard View, there is a distinctively ontological relation that obtains between social entities and our mental states which has the properties of being asymmetrical, irreflexive, transitive, and metaphysically necessary. For ease of exposition, I will call the ontological relation that has these properties grounding. Moreover, I shall say that the grounding relation obtains between facts. So far, I have spoken loosely of social (and natural) entities. But the world is ontologically heterogeneous—comprised of objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events. Therefore, it will be convenient to talk about social and natural facts, which have members of various ontological categories as constituents. According to this way of

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1 NB: The relation that is supposed to obtain between social entities and our mental states is synchronic, rather than diachronic. That is, if at time, t, we accept that a social entity, e, is C, then e is C at t (Guala, 2010, 261). This provides another reason to think that the relation that is supposed to obtain between social entities and our mental states is ontological, not causal.

2 There is considerable disagreement over the notion of grounding. For one thing, philosophers disagree over whether there is more than one relation that answers to the name. For instance, Kathryn Koslicki (forthcoming) argues that the term ‘grounding’ does not pick out a single or unified relation. Others are more sympathetic to the idea that there is only one (or only one fundamental) relation of ground (Audi, 2012a, 2012; Rosen, 2009; Schaffer, 2009). I shall ignore these subtleties in what follows. One’s choice of relation does not matter so long as it is ontological (rather than logical or causal) and has the right formal profile (asymmetrical, irreflexive, transitive, and metaphysically necessary).

3 In what follows, I assume that grounding claims are formulated in terms of a two-place, relational predicate such as ‘is grounded by’ (see Schaffer 2009 and Rosen 2010). However, none of my arguments hang on this choice. As far as I can tell, nothing substantial is lost if one prefers to formulate claims of ground in terms of a sentential connective such as ‘because’ (see Fine 2012). Moreover, I do not wish to commit myself to a fundamental ontology of facts. My decision to speak in terms of facts is a pragmatic one, made for ease of exposition.

4 Facts are individuated by their constituents, and the way in which these are combined. I will say that a given fact is social in virtue of having at least one social constituent (i.e., it is composed of at least one social object, property, relation, kind, event, etc.). For example, the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is a social fact because it contains the social property being money as a constituent. Or consider the fact that Barack Obama is President of the United States. This is a social fact because it contains the social property being the President of the United States as a
regimenting the \textit{Standard View}, \textsc{dependence} is the thesis that social facts are grounded by mental facts.

What about \textit{sketchiness}? My formulation of \textit{sketchiness} is intentionally vague. This is because it is not entirely clear what proponents of the \textit{Standard View} mean by endorsing it. Indeed, the word ‘real’ is used by philosophers to mark a variety of distinctions. Sometimes it is used to distinguish between existent and non-existent entities. But proponents of the \textit{Standard View} do not argue that social entities are non-existent. To the contrary, they maintain that our discourse about them is truth apt. For instance, it is true that some things are money (e.g., bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing) and some things are not (e.g., soggy leaves).

Other times, the word ‘real’ is used to distinguish between mind-independent and mind-dependent entities. But proponents of the \textit{Standard View} do not argue that social entities are less real than natural entities simply in virtue of being mind-dependent. For instance, Searle admits that mental states themselves are mind-dependent, but denies that they are less real than anything else in the natural world (Searle 1995, 11).

Another possible interpretation of philosophers’ use of the word ‘real’ corresponds to the idea of fundamentality: entities are more or less real to the extent that they are more or less fundamental (Fine 2001). However, like the whole of the social world, the vast majority of the natural world is not metaphysically fundamental either. Intuitively, water molecules are less fundamental than the atoms that compose them (hydrogen atoms can exist without water but not vice versa); atoms are less fundamental than their subatomic constituents (electrons can exist without hydrogen atoms but not vice versa); electrons, protons, and neutrons are less fundamental than quarks (quarks can exist without electrons but not vice versa), and so on. Indeed, if monism is true, then \textit{nothing} is fundamental except the entire cosmos (Schaffer, 2010). On the fundamentality interpretation of the word ‘real,’ the alleged contrast between the natural and the social world collapses. Thus, if social entities are less real than natural entities, it is not because they do not exist; nor is it simply because they depend on our mental states, or because they are not metaphysically fundamental.

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\item constituent. Social facts contrast with \textit{natural facts}, such as the fact that water is $\text{H}_2\text{O}$. Natural facts have exclusively natural constituents (\textit{i.e.}, they are composed exclusively of objects, properties, relations, kinds, or events that are found ‘in nature’). Likewise, we can speak of \textit{mental facts}, rather than mental states, properties, events, etc. Mental facts are those that have at least one mental constituent. For instance, the fact that S believes that $p$ is a mental fact because it involves a belief that S has. I will not address the complicated matter of definitively distinguishing kinds of facts given that many facts will include entities that are social, natural, and mental.
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Rather, according to proponents of the *Standard View*, social objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events are less real than natural objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events because the former (but not the latter) have their nature arbitrarily determined by our thoughts about them (Khalidi 2013a, 2013b; Thomasson, 2003a; Tuomela, 2007). For instance, with respect to social kinds like *money*, Amie Thomasson argues that our attitudes toward money “play a stipulative role in constituting the nature of the kind” (Thomasson 2003a, 590). Similarly, Muhammad Ali Khalidi argues that the nature of *being the President of the United States* or *being a permanent resident*, is likewise given by criteria we stipulate (Khalidi 2013a). Thus, he argues that these social entities “are invented rather than discovered” (Khalidi 2013a, 11). Accordingly, it is the allegedly stipulative and arbitrary nature of social objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events that lead proponents of the *Standard View* to conclude that they are less real than natural objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events, and in virtue of which they endorse the thesis I’ve called SKETCHINESS.

In section (1), I argue that DEPENDENCE, if true, does not entail SKETCHINESS. In section (2), I argue that DEPENDENCE is false—at least in the vast majority of cases.9 I go on to defend an alternative theory of social reality. On my view, there is no simple story to tell about how social facts are grounded. Sometimes social facts are grounded by facts involving our *behavior*. For example, the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is grounded by the fact that sufficiently many people use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt. Other times, social facts are grounded by facts involving the *relations* in which we stand. For example, the fact that fact that Mr. Newport is a capitalist is grounded by the fact that he owns Sweetums and earns profits generated by the labor of his employees.

However, in many cases social facts are grounded by other social facts. According to the view I defend, the social world has a hierarchical structure. Thus, some social facts are closer to the ground floor of social reality. Consider the fact that the Federal Reserve lowered long-term interest rates by purchasing large quantities of assets from the private sector. This is a highly complex social fact that is grounded by more fundamental social facts, such as facts involving money and private property (which are grounded by even more fundamental behavioral and relational facts). The simplest social

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9 I explain and defend this caveat in section 3.
facts are grounded by facts involving our behavior, and the relations in which we stand to one another and our environments. But these behavioral and relational facts support an intricate social superstructure that depends on the goings on at lower levels.

Earlier, I said that DEPENDENCE is false in the vast majority of cases. I postpone a discussion of this qualification until section (3). There, I argue that those social facts which are plausibly grounded by mental facts are not mentally grounded in virtue of being social; rather, they are mentally grounded in virtue of having constituents with mental natures.

(1)

John Searle's defense of the Standard View is canonical (Searle, 1995, 2007, 2008, 2010). According to Searle, social facts are ontologically mind-dependent because they are grounded by facts involving rules we accept. For example, Searle argues that the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is grounded by the fact that we accept a rule such as R: bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing count as money in the United States.

Moreover, Searle argues that social facts are less real than natural facts because they are ontologically mind-dependent. For Searle, realism is the thesis that the world exists independently of our representations of it (Searle 1995, 153). Because social facts are grounded by facts involving the rules we accept, and acceptance is a representational state, social facts are representation-dependent. Thus, Searle's commitment to SKETCHINESS follows from his commitment to DEPENDENCE, in conjunction with a representation-independence criterion of reality.

Over the years, Searle’s view has been modified in various ways, but his central claims have proven remarkably durable. For instance, although Amie

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10 Raimo Tuomela defends a similar view (Tuomela, 2007).

11 The claim that a fact could possess any degree of unreality is dubious. Indeed, if one thinks that reality should be understood in terms of what is factual, then to be real is to be factual and to be factual is to be real. On such a view, no fact can be unreal to any degree. However, we can get a grip on the idea that some facts are unreal or less real than others by distinguishing between genuine or objective facts and counterfeit or impostor facts. On this interpretation, natural facts are genuine facts, whereas social facts merely appear to be factual. Unlike natural facts, social facts don’t really obtain, although we act as if they do. Thus, what it means to claim that social facts are less real than natural ones is to say that natural facts are genuine facts whereas social facts are not (at least to a certain degree). According to this interpretation, the Standard View is a version of what Fine (2001) calls non-skeptical antirealism. I will not address the question of whether or not this kind of antirealism is intelligible, but see Fine 2001 for discussion.

12 Here, the relevant notion of ‘independence’ is ontological, not causal (Searle 1995, 156). That is, according to Searle, realism is the thesis that the world is not ontologically dependent on our representations.
Thomasson argues that many social facts are not plausibly grounded by facts involving the rules we accept (e.g., the fact that the economy is in a recession), she nonetheless maintains that “the simplest, most basic social facts on which all other social entities depend are facts of collective intentionality: That a group of people collectively believes or desires something, accepts a certain principle, etc.” (Thomasson 2003b, 278). Similarly, Muhammad Ali Khalidi argues that Searle overestimates the degree to which social facts depend on our mental states. However, according to Khalidi, all social facts are mentally grounded; it is just that some are less so than others (Khalidi 2013a, 7). Thus, like Searle, both Thomasson and Khalidi accept Dependence. Moreover, both Thomasson and Khalidi argue that Dependence entails Sketchiness. Specifically, they argue that (1) If the nature of an object, property, relation, kind, or event is stipulated arbitrarily, then it is not real (or it is not fully real), and (2) Because social facts are grounded by facts involving the rules we accept, the nature of social objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events that comprise them is stipulated arbitrarily.

On this view, an object, property, relation, kind, or event is real only if it has what I will call a real nature. An object, property, relation, kind, or event has a real nature if and only if it is non-arbitrarily determined by what the world is actually like. Real natures correspond to genuine taxonomic divisions—they ‘carve the world at its joints.’ By contrast, an object, property, relation, kind, or event has what I will call a nominal nature if and only if it is given by a set of arbitrary criteria that are determined by us (for instance, by our acceptance of rules such as R).

Entities and phenomena that have nominal natures are individuated by our thoughts, rather than by the world. Therefore, nominal natures do not manifest genuine taxonomic divisions. Nominal natures are ‘in the head,’ whereas real natures are ‘in the world.’ Thus, according to Thomasson, and Khalidi, social entities and phenomena are less real than natural entities and phenomena because the former have nominal natures whereas the latter have real natures. Moreover, they argue that social objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events have nominal natures because they depend on our acceptance of rules such as R.

Let’s grant for the sake of argument that, for example, the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United

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13 Brian Epstein rejects this formulation of Dependence (2014b). In section (2), I discuss an objection to Epstein’s alternative proposal.
14 The real/nominal distinction is taken from (Locke, 1975).
States is grounded by the fact that we accept a rule such as $R$: *bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing count as money in the United States*. Even so, it does not follow that money has a nominal nature. That is, it does not follow from the fact that we accept $R$, that the nature of the property of being money is stipulated arbitrarily.

To see this, it is important to distinguish between the essence of the property of being money, and the properties of particular entities that happen to instantiate the property of being money, (e.g., cowry shells, gold coins, bits of paper). The essence of money specifies *what it is to be money*; it supplies the *identity conditions* for the property of being money. The nature of the property of being money is given by its essence; therefore, the property of being money has a nominal nature only if the essence of money is stipulated arbitrarily.

However, by accepting a rule such as $R$, we do not stipulate the essence of the property of being money. This is because being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing is not a constituent of the essence of the property of being money. If being $x$ is a constituent of the essence of being $y$, then being $x$ is a necessary condition of being $y$. In other words, if an entity, $e$, has the property of being $y$, then $e$ has the property of being $x$. That is, an entity, $e$, has the property of being $y$ only if $e$ has the property of being $x$.

With respect to the property of being money, if being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing is a constituent of the essence of money, then, an entity, $e$, has the property of being money only if $e$ has the property of a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. But this conditional is false. An entity, $e$, can have the property of being money without having the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (e.g., cowry shells, gold coins, bills issued by the bank of Canada). Therefore, the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing is not a constituent of the essence of money.

Moreover, the essence of the property of being money is not at our discretion. We cannot just stipulate that being blue before time, $t$, is a constituent of the essence of money. In other words, it is not at our discretion whether being blue before $t$ is a necessary condition on being the property of being money. Therefore, money does not have a nominal nature. By contrast, it is entirely up to us whether cowry shells, gold coins,
or bits of paper instantiate the property of being money. By accepting a rule like R, we stipulate which entities have the property of being money. However, in so doing we do not stipulate the essence of the property of being money. A few more examples should help to drive the point home.

President of the United States. The essence of the property of being the President of the United States specifies what it is to be the President of the United States; it supplies the identity conditions for the property of being the President of the United States. The nature of the property of being the President of the United States is given by its essence; therefore, the property of being the President of the United States has a nominal nature only if we stipulate its essence arbitrarily.

The property of being the President of the United States does not have a nominal nature because, by accepting a rule like R, we do not stipulate the essence of the property of being the President of the United States. Indeed, the essence of the property of being the President of the United States is not at our discretion. We cannot just stipulate that being the manager of the coffee shop two blocks from the White House is a necessary condition on being the property of being the President of the United States. Therefore, the property of being the President of the United States does not have a nominal nature. By contrast, it is entirely up to us who instantiates the property of being the President of the United States. By accepting a rule like R, we stipulate which individual has the property of being the President of the United States. In so doing, however, we do not stipulate the essence of the property of being the President of the United States.

Permanent Resident of the United States. Khalidi argues that the nature of being a permanent resident of the United States is arbitrary because nothing prevents us from stipulating that all permanent residents must be proficient underwater swimmers (Khalidi 2013, 11-12). But this confuses the essence of the property of being a permanent resident of the United States with the eligibility requirements for instantiating the property of being a permanent resident of the United States.

The property of being a permanent resident of the United States does not have a nominal nature because its essence is not at our discretion. We cannot just stipulate that being a proficient underwater swimmer is a constituent of the essence of the property of being a permanent resident of the United States. It is not up to us whether being a proficient underwater swimmer is a necessary condition of being the property of being a permanent resident of the United States. Therefore, the property of being a permanent resident of
the United States does not have a nominal nature. By contrast, it is entirely up to us who instantiates the property of being a permanent resident of the United States. By accepting a rule like R, we stipulate which individuals instantiate the property of being a permanent resident of the United States. However, in so doing, we do not stipulate the essence of the property of being a permanent resident of the United States.

Marriage. As before, the property of being married does not have a nominal nature because we do not stipulate the essence of that property by accepting a rule like R. Indeed, the essence of the property of being money is not at our discretion. We cannot just stipulate that being born on a Tuesday is a constituent of the essence of the property of being married. It is not up to us whether being born on a Tuesday is a necessary condition on being the property of being married. Therefore, the property of being married does not have a nominal nature. By contrast, it is entirely up to us who instantiates the property of being married. By accepting a rule like R, we stipulate which individuals instantiate the property of being married. However, in so doing, we do not stipulate the essence of the property of being married.

According to proponents of the Standard View, social entities and phenomena are less real than natural entities and phenomena because they have nominal natures. In this section, I have argued that by accepting rules such as R, we do not arbitrarily stipulate the essence of properties such as being money or being married. Rather, the essences of those properties are not at our discretion. Even if social facts are grounded by facts about the rules we accept, it does not follow that the constituents of social facts have nominal natures.

(2)

In section (1), I argued that DEPENDENCE, if true, does not entail SKETCHINESS. In this section, I argue that DEPENDENCE is false (at least in the vast majority of cases). According to proponents of the Standard View, social facts are grounded by mental facts. For example, Searle, Thomasson, and Khalidi argue that the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money is grounded by the fact that we accept R. In what follows, I argue that social facts are not grounded by facts involving the rules we accept; indeed, they are not grounded by facts involving any of our mental states.

According to proponents of the Standard View, the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is grounded by fact that we accept R: bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and
Printing count as money in the United States. Remember that the relation that is supposed to obtain between social facts and mental facts has the property of being metaphysically necessary. If so, then the following conditional is necessarily true: if we accept R, then bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States. But consider the following case.

**Plugged-in United States:** The United States has a barter economy. Citizens come to realize that barter is extremely inefficient. Thus, they resolve to establish a common medium of exchange and store of value. Citizens found the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, which has the responsibility of issuing bills that shall be their common currency. Moreover, they accept R—that is, they accept that bills issued by this office count as money in the United States. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing mints millions of bills. However, before the bills can be put into circulation, everyone on Earth is physically incapacitated and plugged into an experience machine by an alien species. The bills are never touched by anyone—they remain neatly stacked in the treasury.

According to economists, being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account are constitutive of the essence of being money. In other words, if an entity, \( e \), has the property of being money, then \( e \) has the property of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. Thus, \( e \) has the property of being money only if \( e \) has the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. But, in Plugged-In United States, bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing do not have the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. Therefore, bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing do not have the property of being money. Nonetheless, everyone accepts R. Thus, it is not the case that necessarily, if everyone accepts R, then bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States.

Let me be clear that the conclusion of Plugged-in United States, viz., that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are not money, is not just an intuition elicited by the thought experiment. That is, Plugged-in United States is not just meant to evoke the intuition that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are not money. To the contrary, the conclusion follows from the fact that if being \( x \) is a constituent of the essence of being \( y \), then, an entity, \( e \), has the property of being \( y \) only if \( e \) has the property of being \( x \).
The properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account are constituents of the essence of being money. According to economists, these properties define what it is to be money. Therefore, if bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing have the property of being money, then they have the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. However, in this case, bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing do not have the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. Therefore, they do not have the property of being money.

Thus, the claim that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are not money in *Plugged-in United States* cannot be rejected on the grounds that one does not ‘get’ the intuition that they are not money (or, on the grounds that one does ‘get’ the intuition that they are money). Rather, one must either deny the aforementioned fact about property instantiation, or deny that the essence of the property of being money is constituted by the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account.

Moreover, *Plugged-in United States* not only shows that the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is not grounded by the fact that individuals accept R, it also shows that the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is not grounded by anything individuals believe, desire, intend, recognize (or some combination of these). That is, this fact is not grounded by any of our mental states.

One’s choice of mental state type does not matter; nor does the content of individuals’ mental states. Individuals in *Plugged-in United States* may have any of these attitudes, and the contents of their mental states may be any number of rules or propositions. If bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing don’t have the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account, then they do not have the property of being money—regardless of what anyone thinks.

Nor can this conclusion be avoided by appealing to individuals’ behavioral dispositions. For even if individuals in *Plugged-in United States* are disposed to use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services and repayment of debt, those bills nonetheless lack the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value,
and unit of account in virtue of the fact that they are not actually used as payment for goods and services and repayment of debt.\textsuperscript{16}

However, proponents of the *Standard View* have recourse to an obvious reply. Perhaps the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is only *partially* grounded by the fact that individuals accept R.\textsuperscript{17} According to this line of argument, the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is partially grounded by (i) the fact that individuals accept R, and partially grounded by (ii) the fact that sufficiently many people use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt. In other words, (i) and (ii) *jointly* ground the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States.

On this view, the fact that we accept R does not metaphysically necessitate the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States by itself, for it only does so in conjunction with facts involving how those bills are used. However, when both facts obtain, they metaphysically necessitate the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States.

If the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is jointly grounded by (i) and (ii), then neither (i) nor (ii) should be sufficient for this fact to obtain. That is, if the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States is jointly grounded by (i) and (ii), then the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States obtains only if both (i) and (ii) obtain. Both are necessary; neither are sufficient.

We have already seen that if (i) obtains without (ii), then bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are not money. In *Plugged-in United States*, individuals accept R, but bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are not money. What if (ii) obtains without (i)? Consider the following case.

\textsuperscript{16} Suppose that aliens also implanted in American brains the disposition to use dirty socks as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt. Dirty socks are not money simply in virtue of their having the disposition to use dirty socks in this way. Dirty socks (or bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing) have the property of being money only if they have the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. Moreover, dirty socks have the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account only if they are actually used as payment for goods and services and repayment of debt by sufficiently many people.

\textsuperscript{17} If the fact that x is grounded by the fact that y, the fact that x may also be grounded by the fact that z, where y \neq z. In other words, x may have a plurality of grounds, y and z. If the fact that x is partially grounded by the fact that y and partially grounded by the fact that z, then neither y nor z, on their own, is metaphysically sufficient for x (Schaffer, 2009).
Gold Standard United States: Imagine a possible world in which everyone firmly believes that nothing is money unless its value is determined by the value of a fixed quantity of gold. In this world, everyone believes that in 1971, when President Nixon canceled the convertibility of American dollars into gold, bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing ceased being money. However, because commerce is a necessary part of everyday life, everyone in the United States nonetheless uses bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt anyway.

In this world, everyone—including politicians, distinguished economists, and governmental employees—neither believes that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money, nor accepts that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States. This is because they believe that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money only if their value is determined by the value of a fixed quantity of gold, and they do not accept that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money because they do not believe that the value of those bills is determined by the value of a fixed quantity of gold.

The essence of the property of being money is constituted by the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. Thus, an entity, \( e \), has the properties of being money if and only if it has the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. In Gold Standard United States, bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing have the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account despite the fact that no one accepts \( R \). Therefore, bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing have the property of being money. This is because sufficiently many people use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt. This shows that the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money is not even partially grounded by mental facts. To the contrary, facts involving how bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are used suffice for them to be money (a point to which I shall return shortly).

Cases such as Plugged-In United States and Gold Standard United States show that dependence is false. Social facts are not even partially grounded by mental facts. Brian Epstein offers an alternative explanation of how social facts are grounded. According to Epstein, social facts may still bear an ontological relation to mental facts even if they are not mentally grounded. On his view,
social facts are grounded by the fact that social entities and phenomena instantiate certain other properties, such as the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (2014a and 2014b). For example, on Epstein’s view, the fact that an object, o, is money is grounded by the fact that o is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

Although Epstein denies that social facts are mentally grounded, he argues that mental facts may yet play an important role in the creation of social reality. This is because mental facts can function to ‘anchor’ the properties in virtue of which social facts obtain. On Epstein’s view, anchoring facts establish grounding facts. So, while social facts may not be grounded by mental facts, they may nonetheless be anchored by mental facts. For instance, on the view Epstein defends, the fact that some object, o, is money obtains in virtue of the fact that o is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. But this grounding fact must be anchored by another fact, such as the fact that we accept R. Thus, the fact that we accept R anchors the fact that o is money in virtue of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

Initially, this strategy looks promising—for money exists only if some kind of thing or other has the property of being money. However, I must admit that I find it very hard to see how social facts could obtain in virtue of the instantiation properties like the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. For instantiating the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing is neither necessary nor sufficient for instantiating the property of being money.

Consider Plugged-in United States. In that world, although everyone accepts R, bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing do not instantiate the property of being money, for they do not instantiate the property of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. And yet, we may coherently suppose that o exists in that world, and that o is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Thus, it is false that, if o is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, then, o is money—even relative to an anchoring context.¹⁹

¹⁸ Epstein’s own example is the fact that some object, o, is a recycling bin. But it is not obvious to me that this is a social fact. To substantiate this intuition, more needs to be said about what makes a fact social (or, in particular, what makes a fact’s constituents social).

¹⁹ What about a proposal according to which the fact that an object, o, is money is partially grounded by the fact that o is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and partially grounded by the fact that we collectively accept a rule such as R? This looks more promising. As we’ve just seen, on its own, the fact that o is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing does not metaphysically necessitate the fact that o is money, and, on its own, the fact that we collectively accept R does not metaphysically necessitate that o is money. Do these facts jointly ground the fact that o is money? No. Even if both of these facts obtain, it is not metaphysically necessary that o is money. Once again, consider Plugged-in United
Moreover, an object, o, can have the property of being money without having the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. This is because, even relative to a context in which we accept R, objects other than bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing can have the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, and being a measure and store of value.20

So far, I have argued that DEPENDENCE is false. This is because facts involving the rules we accept do not metaphysically necessitate the relevant social facts. For instance, the fact that we accept R does not necessarily necessitate the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States. I argued that one’s choice of mental state type is irrelevant; as is the CONTENT of individuals’ mental states. Moreover, I argued that Epstein’s alternative proposal also fails. However, obviously social facts do not obtain brutally. That is, social facts obtain in virtue of other facts. But which facts are these?

Before answering this question, I would like to offer a diagnosis of where previous answers have gone wrong. Many facts are said to depend on other facts in a distinctively ontological sense. For example, the fact that some object, o, is red is said to depend on the fact that o is crimson. In this case, the fact that o is crimson does not cause o to have the property of being red. Rather, the relation between the property of being crimson and the property

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20 In fact, I think Epstein comes very close to getting things right. Elsewhere I argue that the property of being money is a higher-order property. That is, an object, o, instantiates the property of being money if (and only if) o instantiates a property which instantiates the property of being money. It is not the case that o is money if o instantiates the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. However, if the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing has the property of being money, and if o instantiates the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, then o has the property of being money.

Epstein tries to capture this state of affairs by appealing to the relation he calls ‘anchoring.’ However, this new relation is not needed to explain in virtue of what an object, o, instantiates the property of being money. Rather, the fact that o is money is grounded by the fact that the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing instantiates the property of being money, and o instantiates the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

The fact that the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing instantiates the property of being money is not grounded (or ‘anchored’) by the fact that we accept a rule like R. It is not the case that if we accept R, then the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing has the property of being money. Instead, the fact that the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing instantiates the property of being money is grounded by the fact that sufficiently many people use objects which instantiate the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services and repayment of debts.

If sufficiently many people use objects which instantiate the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services and repayment of debts, then the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing has the property of being money (and so do any objects which instantiate the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing).
of being red is ontological. The fact that \( o \) is red is grounded by the fact that \( o \) is crimson.

By contrast, the fact that \( o \) is red is not plausibly grounded by the fact that \( o \) is round. In other words, the fact that \( o \) is red is not grounded by the fact that \( o \) is round. Why? Presumably because the nature of redness has nothing to do with the nature of roundness. An object can have the property of being red without the property of being round. However, the nature of redness is intimately connected to the nature of the property of being crimson—the latter is a determinate shade of the former. This is why it is necessarily true that if \( o \) is crimson, then \( o \) is red.

This suggests the following constraint on a relation of ontological dependence: the fact that \( p \) is grounded by the fact that \( q \) only if the essences of the relevant worldly items that compose those facts are intimately related (Fine 1995, 2001, 2012; Koslicki 2012; Audi 2012a and 2002b). The reason why the fact that \( o \) is red is not grounded by the fact that \( o \) is round is because it does not satisfy this constraint: the essence of redness and the essence roundness are not intimately related.

According to proponents of the Standard View, the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money is grounded by facts involving our mental states. But this proposal fails to satisfy the aforementioned constraint. Money does not have a mental essence. Indeed, the essence of money has nothing to do with our mental states. Therefore, we should not expect the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money in the United States to have mental grounds.

According to Epstein’s alternative proposal, the fact that \( o \) is money is grounded by the fact that \( o \) is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. But the essence of the property of being a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing has nothing to do with the essence of money. This is why objects other than bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing can instantiate the property of being money (e.g., cowry shells, gold coins, bills issued by the Bank of Canada). Therefore, Epstein’s proposal also fails to satisfy the aforementioned constraint.

Whatever fact grounds the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money should manifest the essence of money, viz.,

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21 The Standard View should not be confused with idealism about social reality. That is, according to proponents of the Standard View, money are not literally mental. Nor should the Standard View, be confused with skepticism about social reality. Proponents of the Standard View do not argue that the social world does not exist—that it is an illusion, hallucination, fiction or other mental entity of some sort (see Thomasson 2003a, 605).
commonly-used medium of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. The following proposal suggests itself: the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money is grounded by the fact that sufficiently many people in the United States use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt. This proposal satisfies the aforementioned constraint because the essence of money is closely related to the essence of the property of being used as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt. This is because the essence of money has to do with how certain objects are used.

Moreover, as we considered *Gold Standard United States*, the relation between these facts is metaphysically necessary. Necessarily, if sufficiently many people use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services and repayment of debt, then bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money. Thus, on this proposal, the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money is grounded by facts involving how we behave.\(^{22}\)

\(^{22}\) Nevertheless, some may find it hard to imagine a world in which bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are used as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt, without anyone accepting a rule like R. I think that this is largely because the Bureau of Engraving and Printing is already a highly sophisticated social institution, and the use of fiat money is already an extremely complex social practice. Such complex institutions and practices would seem to depend on more than just how we happen to behave. Thus, it may be useful to start by considering a case involving a rudimentary form of money. Let us imagine how money might have first emerged in human societies thousands of years ago, long before the United States began printing singles.

Allegedly, cowry shells are the oldest and most widely-used form of currency in human history. How did they come to acquire the property of being money? The orthodox story begins with a barter economy in which early humans traded amongst one another to satisfy their basic wants and needs (for an alternative explanation of how money evolved see Graeber 2012). At least initially, cowry shells were merely a commodity—they were exchanged for various other goods and services of comparable value: these cowry shells for a chicken; that chicken for a new pair of sandals; a new pair of sandals for a sack of potatoes; and so on.

The trouble with a barter economy is that it requires a coincidence of wants for trade to take place. For instance, if Lacey has a bushel of barley and wants a bolt of linen, she must find someone who both has a bolt of linen, and wants to trade it for a bushel of barley. In these circumstances, it may frequently be the case that individuals are unable to find anyone who both has what they want and wants what they have. However, we may imagine that in Lacey’s village there are some commodities that are more sought-after than others. Let’s suppose that cowry shells are in high demand. Although Lacey is not in the market for a new string of cowry shells, she decides to give Samuel her bushel of barley in exchange for Samuel’s cowries. Why?

We might imagine her reasoning as follows: “It is unlikely that I will be able to find someone who wishes to trade a bolt of linen for a bushel of barley. However, because cowry shells are highly sought after around here, it is more likely that I will be able to find someone who wishes to trade a bolt of linen for a string of cowry shells.” Thus, although Lacey does not presently want Samuel’s cowries, she accepts them in exchange for her barley because she knows that she will be able to use them to acquire what she does want. If enough individuals reason and behave as Lacey does, then it is highly plausible that cowry shells will come to acquire the property of being a commonly used medium of exchange and store of value (the latter property is derived from the value of cowries as commodities). Because money *just is* a commonly used medium of exchange and store of value, the fact that sufficiently many people use cowry shells as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt, makes it the case that they are money in Lacey’s village.

Once the practice of using cowries as payment for goods and services and repayment of debt becomes entrenched, we might imagine that villagers begin issuing promissory notes for some number of cowry shells that they have in storage (hauling around buckets of cowries is inconvenient). If these IOUs
However, because the various social objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events that comprise social facts do not share a common nature, we shouldn't expect all social facts to be grounded in the same way. The fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money is grounded by facts involving our behavior, but other social facts are more plausibly grounded by facts involving the way in which individuals are related (to each other, and to aspects of their environment). Consider the fact that Mr. Newport is a capitalist. This social fact is grounded by the fact that Mr. Newport owns Sweetums and earns profits generated by the labor of his employees. Moreover, the relation that holds between these facts is metaphysically necessary. Necessarily, if Mr. Newport owns Sweetums and earns profits generated by the labor of Sweetums’ employees, then he is a capitalist.23

On my view, the most fundamental social facts are grounded by behavioral and relational facts; however, more complex (and less fundamental) social facts are built on behavioral and relational foundations. Thus we can think of the social world as having a hierarchical structure. Behavioral and relational facts comprise the ground floor of social reality. However, the upper-levels are sustained by grounding relations that obtain between social facts. For instance, the fact that the United States economy is in a recession is grounded by the fact that the GDP fell for two consecutive quarters. Although this social fact is immediately grounded by a social fact, it is mediately grounded by behavioral facts.24 Thus, it is ultimately in virtue of facts involving our behavior, and how we are related, that all social facts obtain.

However, our acceptance of rules such as R may still play an important role in the creation of the social world. This is because many social facts obtain only if individuals engage in cooperative behavior, and our acceptance of R are accepted as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt by sufficiently many people, then these bits of paper will have acquired the property of being a commonly used medium of exchange. Although these IOUs do not have intrinsic value, their value is tied to that of the cowry shells. Thus, they inherit the property of being a store of value. In this way, facts involving our behavior give rise to commodity money and then representative money. How does fiat money evolve from representative money? We might imagine circumstances in which some governing official suspends the convertibility of IOUs to cowry shells (as Nixon did in 1971 when he suspended the convertibility of U.S. dollars into gold). Fiat money is born. The actual story of how fiat money comes into existence is quite a bit more complicated, and very controversial among monetary economists.23 Although many social facts are grounded by relational facts, behavioral facts are given pride of place in the theory of social reality I defend. This is because our behavior is causally responsible for the fact that we stand in certain relations. For example, Mr. Newport instantiates the property of being a capitalist, at least proximately, because of how he behaved: he bought a factory, started a company, hired workers, etc.24 Specifically, the fact that the United States economy is in a recession is immediately grounded by the fact that the GDP fell for two consecutive quarters; but it is mediately grounded by facts involving how Americans behave (i.e., they are spending less money over a certain period of time).
facilitates social cooperation. For instance, on my own, there is nothing I can do to make it the case that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money. Sufficiency many people must be willing to use them as payment for goods and services, and repayment of debt. One reason why individuals might be willing to do so is that they accept a rule such as R. Thus, the fact that R is accepted by everyone causes them to use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in the ways that make it the case that those bills are money. However, it would be implausible to think that collective acceptance is the only mental state that could bring about the relevant cooperative behavior.

According to this way of thinking about social reality, the intuitive contrast between the natural and social world breaks down. This is because our mental states play an important role in the creation of many paradigmatically natural facts. As a result, the idea that social facts are less real than natural facts doesn't even get off the ground. Consider polyethylene. That substance was not discovered in the wilderness in the same way one might discover gold or water. Rather, it was initially produced in a laboratory by scientists who applied extremely high pressure to a mixture of ethylene and benzaldehyde. However, like other paradigmatically natural properties (e.g., being water), polyethylene it is microstructurally individuated. That is, the essence of polyethylene is given by its chemical microstructure. And yet, polyethylene was created as consequence of intentional behavior. Other examples of natural entities that exist as a consequence of intentional behavior include genetically engineered plant and animal species. But the suggestion that polyethylene, horses, and corn are less real than gold or tigers is implausible on its face.

I have argued that social facts are not grounded by mental facts; rather, they are grounded by facts involving how we behave and how we are related.

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25 Francesco Guala (2015) argues that these rules function as coordination devices that facilitate the convergence of those actions and beliefs that give rise to the existence of money (Guala 2015, 60). According to Guala, social facts are grounded by “systems of actions and beliefs in equilibrium” (66). Importantly, he argues that the relevant beliefs need not be about the social entities in question; rather, they are directed toward the attitudes of other people (65). On his view, “The role of collective attitudes—when they do play a role—is causal. Accepting a set of conditions C facilitates the formation of mutually consistent beliefs about the behavior of a large number of individuals seeking coordination” (63).

26 One might try to establish a contrast between social and natural facts on the grounds that social facts are necessarily causally mind-dependent, whereas natural facts are only contingently causally mind-dependent. For instance, there is a possible world in which polyethylene is not created by humans in a laboratory, but exists 'in nature' like water and gold. However, there is no possible world in which money exists 'in nature.' Necessarily, money is the consequence of intentional behavior. I grant that this is a difference between social and natural facts, but I wonder why it matters (at least with respect to SKEPTICISM). Why should the fact that polyethylene is not a consequence of intentional behavior in some other possible world make polyethylene more real than money in the actual world?
Nonetheless, a proponent of the *Standard View* might argue that social facts are grounded by mental facts in virtue of the fact that behavior is mentally grounded. According to this objection, our mental states do not simply cause our behavior. Although our mental states may cause our bodies to move in various ways, they do not cause those bodily movements to be the behaviors that they are. The relation that obtains between our mental states and our bodily movements is causal; but the relation that obtains between our mental states and our behavior is ontological.

Consider the bodily movements involved in the action denoted by the phrase “paying for goods and services”: person A hands person B a certain piece of paper (or a gold coin, or a cowry shell, etc.), and person B hands person A, say, a bushel of barley. Or person C, say, uses scissors to cut the hair of person D, and person D then hands person C a piece of paper (or a gold coin, or a cowry shell, etc.). What makes it the case that these bodily movements are buying and selling behavior, rather than, for example, a ritual dance to honor the gods? According to the present line of argument, they have the property of being buying and selling behavior in virtue of facts about what we believe, desire, and intend.

Although the relevant bodily movements may be caused by our mental states, those mental states do not cause those bodily movements to have the property of being buying and selling behavior. To the contrary, the relation that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts is ontological. In other words, behavior is ontologically mind-dependent. Because, on my view, social facts depend on behavioral facts in a distinctively ontological sense, social facts are transittively grounded by mental facts because behavioral facts are grounded by mental facts. In other words, social facts are grounded by mental facts in virtue of being grounded by behavioral facts. If so, then *DEPENDENCE* is true after all.27

In order for this objection to succeed, however, it must be the case that the relation of ontological dependence that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts is *type identical* to the relation of ontological dependence that obtains between behavioral facts and social facts. If the relation of ontological dependence that obtains between these pairs of facts is not type identical, then the following inference schema is invalid:

1. Behavioral facts depend on mental facts.
2. Social facts depend on behavioral facts.

27 Although I received a version of this objection from numerous people, I must admit that I did not fully appreciate its force until it was posed in this way by David Buller.
3. Therefore, social facts depend on mental facts.

In other words, if the relation of ontological dependence in premise one (say, grounding) is not type identical to the relation of ontological dependence in premise two (say, grounding*), then the conclusion does not follow. Even if both grounding and grounding* are transitive relations, we cannot infer anything about a relation holds across these non-identical relations in such a way as to conclude that social facts are grounded/grounded* by mental facts. Call this The Problem of Cross-Relational Transitivity.28

To understand this problem more clearly, consider how it arises with respect to other relations such as causation and proper parthood.29 Both of these relations are transitive. If A causes B, and B causes C, then A causes C. And if A is a proper part of B, and B is a proper part of C, then A is a proper part of C. However, if A causes B, and B is a proper part of C, it does not follow that A causes C or that A is a proper part of C. Indeed, we cannot infer from the fact that A causes B and that B is a proper part of C, that there is any relation that obtains between A and C.

Similarly, if the relation of ontological dependence that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts is not type identical to the relation of ontological dependence that obtains between behavioral facts and social facts, then we cannot infer that there is any relation that obtains between mental facts and social facts. Moreover, there is reason to believe that the relation that obtains between mental and behavioral facts is not the same relation that obtains between behavioral facts and social facts.

This is because the relation that obtains between behavioral facts and social facts has a property that the relation that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts does not. The relation that obtains between behavioral facts and social facts has the property of being metaphysically necessary, but the relation that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts does not. Necessarily, if sufficiently many people use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and Payment for goods and services and repayment of debt, then bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money. However, it is not the case that, necessarily, if individuals have the relevant mental states, then their bodily movements are buying and selling behavior.

To see why the latter relation lacks this property, consider a modification of

28 Elsewhere, I argue that the Problem of Cross-Relational Transitivity poses serious problems for the view that reality is hierarchically structured.
29 To be clear, I do not mean to endorse the thesis that causation and proper parthood are dependence relations.
**Plugged-In United States.** In the original case, individuals have all of the mental states that would, if they were not physically incapacitated, cause them to use bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services and repayment of debt. Indeed, from their point of view, it seems as though they are using bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to pay for goods and services, and to repay debt. However, because they are physically incapacitated and plugged into an experience machine, their mental states do not cause any bodily movements, and, a fortiori, do not ground any behavior.

In the modified version of this case, we can imagine that not only are the Earthlings (wirelessly) plugged into experience machines and sedated, the alien species can also control the movements of Earthling bodies telepathically. In fact, the aliens telepathically cause the Earthling bodies to move as if they were using bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as payment for goods and services and repayment of debt: Person A hands person B a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and person B hands person A, say, a bushel of barley; and person C, say, uses scissors to cut the hair of person D, and person D then hands person C a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing; etc.

However, these bodily movements do not plausibly count as buying and selling behavior; for the bodily movements are not produced by the appropriate mental states. Although the humans have the appropriate mental states, their mental states are not causally responsible for their bodily movements. And although the aliens are causally responsible for their bodily movements, they do not have the appropriate mental states (we may suppose that they produce the bodily movements at random). Thus, unlike the relation that obtains between behavioral facts and social facts, the relation that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts is not metaphysically necessary.

This case shows that the relation that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts is not the same relation that obtains between behavioral facts and social facts. This is because one relation has a property that the other lacks. The relation that obtains between behavioral facts and social facts has the property of being metaphysically necessary, whereas the relation that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts does not. By Leibniz Law, this entails that the relations are distinct. And if the relations are distinct, then we cannot infer from the fact that behavioral facts are grounded by mental facts that there is any relation that obtains between mental facts and social facts. Thus, even if behavior is ontologically mind-dependent, it does not follow that social objects, properties, relations, kinds, and events are thereby
ontologically mind-dependent.30

(3)

So far, I have argued that DEPENDENCE is false. Social facts are not grounded by mental facts; rather, they are grounded by facts involving what we do, how we are related, and even other social facts. But it might be argued that this claim is too strong. Perhaps the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money is not grounded by mental facts; however, there are other social facts which do have mental grounds.

Consider the fact that some individual, S, has the property of being racist. Isn't the fact that S is racist grounded by the fact that S has some beliefs, or other non-cognitive attitudes (e.g., S believes that some races are superior or inferior to others, or S hates members of a certain race because they are members of that race)?31 Another example is the fact that S is a Cubs fan. Isn't the fact that S is a Cubs fan is grounded by the fact that S has some positive attitude towards the Chicago Cubs (e.g., loving the Cubs, desiring that the Cubs win)? If so, then at least some social facts are grounded by mental facts—they are ontologically mind-dependent.

Let's employ our modal test again. If the fact that S is racist is grounded by the fact that she believes that blacks are inherently inferior to whites, then, if S believes that blacks are inherently inferior to whites, necessarily, S is racist. True. Thus, it looks as though the fact that S is racist is grounded by mental facts, e.g., facts involving what S believes.32

What about the fact that S is a Cubs fan? Does the fact that S has some positive attitudes towards the Cubs metaphysically necessitate the fact that S

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30 However, ontological dependence is sometimes construed existentially (See Lowe 2005 and Koslicki 2013 for an overview of the literature on ontological dependence). If ontological dependence is construed existentially, then a proponent of the Standard View can argue that there is a single non-causal dependence relation that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts, and behavioral facts and social facts. According to this line of argument, behavioral facts exist only if mental facts exist, and social facts exist only if behavioral facts exist, therefore, social facts exist only if mental facts exist. In other words, if social facts existentially depend on behavioral facts, and behavioral facts existentially depend on mental facts, then we can infer that social facts existentially depend on mental facts. But existential dependence is too coarse-grained to capture a genuine relation of ontological dependence (Koslicki 2013). For suppose that there are entities that exist necessarily (e.g., numbers), then everything will ontologically depend on them (Koslicki 2013, 40). But it is not the case that absolutely everything ontologically depends, say, on the number eight. Therefore, proponents of the Standard View cannot appeal to the fact that social facts exist only if mental facts exist to defend DEPENDENCE. While this existential claim may be true, it does not follow from it that social facts are ontologically mind-dependent.

31 Following others (Mills, 2003; Shelby, 2002), I shall assume that the fact that someone is racist is at least sometimes grounded by their beliefs.

32 We must be careful to remember that being racist isn't merely a state of mind. This is because we often ascribe the property of being racist to institutions as well as agents. Although the fact that some institution is racist may be grounded by the fact that the agents that participate in the institution have some racist beliefs or feelings, institutional racism is possible even where none of the agents that participate in the institution have racist beliefs or feelings (Glasgow, 2014, 72-74).
is a Cubs fan? The answer to this question is less clear. We would be reluctant to admit that S is a Cubs fan if she did not also attend games at Wrigley Field, watch the Cubs on television, follow news about the Cubs in newspapers and online, and talk about the Cubs with others. Just loving the Cubs doesn’t cut it.

But now consider a case in which S attends games at Wrigley Field, watches the Cubs on television, follows news about the Cubs in newspapers and online, and talks about the Cubs with others, but does so only because she wants to impress her boss. In fact, S has no positive attitudes towards the Cubs. To the contrary, she loves the New York Yankees, and hates the Chicago Cubs. In this case, we would likewise be reluctant to admit that S is a Cubs fan. So it looks as though the fact that S is a Cubs fan is partially grounded by mental facts, and partially grounded by behavioral facts.

That some social facts are mentally grounded should be unsurprising given the aforementioned suggestion that there is an important connection between grounding facts and nature-giving facts. Remember that if the fact that $p$ is grounded by the fact that $q$, then the constituents of $p$ and $q$ have natures that are intimately related in some way. However, insofar as what it is for S to be racist is for S to have certain attitudes towards members of various races, the fact that S is racist and the fact that S believes that blacks are inherently inferior to whites have constituents whose natures are intimately related. Moreover, insofar as (part of) what it is for S to be a Cubs fan is for her to have certain positive attitudes towards the Chicago Cubs, the fact that S is a Cubs fan and the fact that S loves the Cubs have constituents with natures that are intimately related.

This marks an important difference between the fact that S is racist, for example, and the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money. The fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money is not a fact involving anyone’s mental states. By contrast, the fact that S is racist is a fact involving some of S’s beliefs. On my view, we should expect a social fact to have mental grounds only if it has constituents with mental natures. Because the vast majority of social facts do not have constituents with mental natures, the vast majority of social facts are not mentally grounded.

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In this paper, I have argued against the Standard View of Social Reality. First, I argued that DEPENDENCE, if true, does not entail SKETCHINESS. Next, I
argued that DEPENDENCE is false. According to the alternative view I defend, social facts are grounded by facts involving our behavior and the relations in which we stand.

Moreover, I argued that even if behavioral facts are grounded by mental facts, it does not follow that social facts are mentally grounded. This is because the relation that obtains between mental facts and behavioral facts, and the relation that obtains between behavioral facts and mental facts are non-identical. Finally, I argued that although there are some social facts that are plausibly grounded by mental facts (e.g., the fact that S is racist), it is not in virtue of being social that these facts have mental grounds. Rather, they have mental grounds because they are composed of constituents that have mental natures.

References


