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Collective Intentionality, Social Domination, and Reification

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Abstract: This paper addresses the way that social power and domination can be understood in terms of collective intentionality. I argue that the essence of stable forms of rational power and domination must be understood as the functional influence of material resource control and the power to control the norms and collective-intentional, constitutive rules that guide institutions. As a result, the routinization and internalization of these rules by subjects becomes the criterion of success for any system of social power and social domination. I then consider how this relates the phenomenon of reification, which I proceed to show is when consciousness has been shaped by constitutive rules and group collective intentionality that sustain relations of domination and control and accept them as basic social facts, as second nature. I then go on to show parallels between Searle and Lukács before outlining the distinction between descriptive and critical social ontology.

Keywords: Collective intentionality; Social power; Deontic power; Domination; Reification.

1 Introduction

This paper explores the social-ontological and collective-intentional features of social domination, but in a way informed by the concerns of the critical theory tradition and the concepts of rationalization and reification that inform it. In so doing, I will seek to link the phenomena of collective intentionality, domination and reification. More specifically, I want to advance the understanding of domination as a specific kind of power and control. My basic thesis is that the concept of social domination requires an understanding of consciousness and

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the cognition of social agents such that they are constitutive of any relation of domination. This entails a kind of routinization of constitutive rules and norms to the extent that they actively create and sustain unequal forms of social power that benefit superordinates within a hierarchically organized system of power relations. Reification, in this sense, is not simply a matter of making human traits "thinglike;" it is also, and perhaps more importantly, a kind of naturalization of certain forms of collective intentionality that serve unequal power relations. In this sense, domination requires that we also understand a reconstructed concept of reification – a condition of agency and cognition operating under the collective-intentional rules that serve to hide from cognitive view the actual nature of domination relations.

In my account, domination is a particular kind of social power that enables an agent to extract some kind of power or surplus benefit from another agent or group of agents. In this sense, domination is not simply a coercive force or relation, but rather a social relation where subordinates and superordinates actively participate in the relation due to the ways that constitutive rules are routinized into social norms and into the collective intentionality of subjects. When domination relations have achieved this level of routinization and rationalization, subjects will come to accept as valid such relations because those domination relations are rooted in the cognitive and evaluative capacities of their agency. As a result, they accept as legitimate and basic the collective-intentional rules that have been formed by unequal relations of power, and individuals thereby come to accept them as valid, as part of a basic sense of their world. Reification now can be conceived not only as a pathology of consciousness, as the expression of a particular form of constitutive rules and collective intentionality, but also as producing a particular kind of social reality, a set of social facts produced by these collective-intentional states and constitutive rules that serve to sustain the domination relations within the community. The reification of status functions and constitutive rules that promote domination relations are therefore a key aspect to understanding the ways such relations can endure and be sustained. They also give us a key insight into the specifically modern character of social power. This does not mean that all forms of reification are expressions of domination, but it does imply that domination becomes increasingly stabilized and deeply rooted once collective-intentional stances have been reified. Even more, this reification of consciousness as the proliferation of specific collective-intentional rule-sets conceals from view alternative forms of social reality that can be judged to be more in the objective interests of the members of that community.

Although the social ontology literature is not lacking in its discussion of social power as a topic of interest, it does not make domination or reification an issue of concern. My basic task in what follows is to show that the concept of

reification can, in a sense, be reconstructed through the descriptive vocabulary of collective intentionality and, as a result, be understood in a more coherent way as a phenomenon and pathology of consciousness and cognition. But even more, I want to suggest that the concept of reification can be seen as a means to understand the relationship between modern forms of domination and the shape of intentional consciousness and agency. It is a pathology of consciousness and rational cognition, to be sure, but it can be seen also as the linkage between the forms of social domination made possible by unequal control of material-social resources on the one hand and the kind of collective intentionality that such domination requires – through the specific norms, practices, values, and so on – to create and sustain those very domination relations. In this sense, reification can be understood as a specific kind of pathology of consciousness wherein the material power relations and interests of any social order, over time and to be successful and stable, must be able to shape and orient the collective intentionality of the members of that community so that the existent power relations are seen as basic, "natural," or at least valid in some fundamental sense.

In my reconstruction, the concept of reification is one that has in view the ways that consciousness fails to perceive how deontic powers, constitutive rules, norms, social facts, and so on, are created in order to shape and orient action, consciousness, practices and the very purposes of the community itself. In this sense, reification is a defective form of consciousness that both fails to perceive the domination relations that constitute society, but also, because it is shaped by the collective-intentional states and constitutive rule-sets that circumscribe those domination relations, an active dimension where individuals participate in collective plans of action, intention and meaning that support and create those same domination relations. This is important insofar as it connects the mainstream social ontology literature with the critical theory literature and, as a result, offers us a more compelling path forward to map the ways that a critical social ontology can be constructed along the lines of understanding how the purposes and ends of legitimate social relations are shaped and for what ends that are pursued. In this sense, my thesis will be that domination relations achieve legitimacy via the phenomenon of reification. This in turn can be conceived as the internalized acceptance of constitutive rule-sets that thereby produce a collective-intentional framework to sustain domination relations.

2 Social Power and Social Ontology

As a matter of preliminaries, Searle's account of social ontology as collective intentionality and constitutive rules means that we possess the cognitive capacity

to posit specific functions and statuses to people, objects and practices such that we collectively accept those statuses as "real" in an ontological sense. Hence, playing a game of poker requires that all those involved follow certain rules of the game, assign value to the physical cards played with, and so on. The game of poker is this set of rules and the behavior of rule-following that poker entails; it has a distinctive status and warrant because of these rules. The social field is essentially, for Searle, the result of collective forms of intentionality that produce social facts:

> Collective intentionality exists both in the form of cooperative behavior and in consciously shared attitudes such as shared desires, beliefs, and intentions. Whenever two or more agents share a belief, desire, intention or other intentional state, and wherever they are aware of so sharing, the agents in question have collective intentionality. (Searle 2007, p. 85)[1]

Searle next argues that this collective process of being able to share thoughts and intentions means that we can collectively *assign functions* to objects. Assignment of function means that we have the ability to

> count certain things as having a status that they do not have intrinsically, and then to grant, with that status, a set of functions, which can only be performed in virtue of the collective acceptance of the status and the corresponding function, that creates the very possibility of institutional facts. (Searle 2007, p. 89)

Thus, the basic formula "X counts as Y in C" means that any object is assigned a given function within any given context. We consider an individual a teacher, a president, or a police officer within given social contexts and we grant them certain powers or deny them certain powers depending on that context. A teacher may have authority over me within a classroom, but not in my living room. It is when the assignment of function becomes routinized and regularized by a group of people that they become "constitutive rules," which "not only regulate, they also create the very possibility of, or define, new forms of behavior." (Searle 2007, p. 88)[2]

This requires a slightly more complex operation of consciousness. It is not enough simply to assign a function to a person or thing. Searle maintains that, in order to create institutional facts, we also have to have the capacity to create what he calls "deontic powers," or to assign powers to others and to certain relations such that members of a group collectively possess certain dispositions in relation

1 Also cf. Searle (1996, p. 15ff.).
2 Cf. Searle (2010, p. 42ff.).

to them such as obligations, desires, and so on. This operational rule is delineated by Searle as:

> We (or I) make it the case by declaration that a Y status function exists in C and in so doing we (or I) create a relation R between Y and a certain person or persons, S, such that in virtue of SRY, S has the power to perform acts (of type) A. (Searle 2010, p. 101–102)

This creates a deontic power because now, if this rule is accepted by the members of any group, each will think, act and cognize the world according to the content of this rule.[3] It essentially assigns not only a function to a person or thing; it also assigns a set of specified duties and obligations to different members and relations, granting them specific powers within certain contexts. Therefore, this rule becomes more simply stated as:

> We collectively recognize or accept (There exists Y in C, and because SRY (S has power (S does A))).

Deontic power therefore results once these declarations of status function have been accepted and are recognized by any social group. As a result, each member of such a group will possess certain predispositions in certain contexts; they will accordingly adopt certain attitudes, certain obligations, desires, and so on, that orient their thoughts and actions. As these deontic powers cluster around certain practices over time, as they become organized, routinized and internalized in a systematic way: they form what Searle refers to as "Background power," or "a set of presuppositions, attitudes, dispositions, capacities, and practices of any community that set *normative* constraints on the members of that community in such a way that violations of those constraints are subject to the negative imposition of sanctions by *any member* of the community." (Searle 2010, p. 160) What is significant here is the way that the declaration of status functions becomes ingrained to achieve deontic power and, in turn, shape the intentional states of agents that specify social facts and social reality.[4] In this sense, the ways that we assign authority to others, allow them to pull us over for speeding, to arrange our work schedule, and so on, all depend on the extent that we have internalized and assume as basic their respective statuses as policemen or as bosses. Searle's account of constitutive rules suggests that the creation of social power requires a collective acceptance of the basic constitutive rules that form our collective inten-

3 Cf. the discussions by Andersson (2007) and Loddo (2012).

4 For an expanded discussion of Searle's conception of the Background and its relation to Background power, see Loddo (2012).

tionality. The concept of "deontic power" therefore can only come about once we see that there is an irreducibly cognitive basis for the construction and sustenance of social facts. Lacking this capacity to shape deontic powers, there is no way to maintain social power, since it is only by securing power relationships between members of any group that social institutions can achieve some sense of objective validity as well as any causal powers.

3 Social Power and Domination

The concept of power that Searle advocates is a convincing one, but it fails to move beyond a basic and generically descriptive understanding of social power. In essence, he proceeds from a basically Weberian account of power. For Weber, power is to be seen as a specific relation between two agents, A and B, where A has power over B iff A is has the capacity to get B to do something B would not otherwise do.[5] Searle's account of power relies on this conception with the important addition that this act of power must be intentionally produced. However, if we expand this idea into the specific category of power I am considering, that of domination, then we must add further that it is a kind of intentional power wielded with some end or purpose in mind, specifically the purpose of enhancing some benefit. This implies that A not only is able to get B to do something he would not otherwise do, but rather A gets B to do something that is specifically not in the interest of B, but is in the interest of A. Take Spinoza's basic definition of slavery when he maintains that: "If the purpose of the action is not to the advantage of the doer but of him who commands, then the doer is a slave, and does not serve his own interest." (Spinoza 1991, p. 178) Now we are working with a more specific understanding of power, which is the capacity to control the action of another for one's benefit.

This kind of power – domination – is therefore distinct from a more general understanding of social power, since the latter can be used for the common ends, purposes and interests of the community as a whole, and not only the benefit of the one who wields power. Therefore, we have a concept of power that is different from the one pointed to by Searle and derived from Weber. Domination is captured in its simplest form by the formula $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow A_{\Sigma}$ where A_{Σ} signifies an enhanced benefit (Σ) to A *as a result* of the control it exerts over B. Recall that for Searle, social power is when A gets B to do something he would not otherwise seek to do,

5 Weber (1972) employs the terms "domination" (*Herrschaft*) and "authority" (*Autorität*) interchangeably in his discussion of social power.

it is simply A → B → φ, where φ signifies an act or deed or whatever that A wishes B to perform. For Searle, then, the "core notion of power is that A has power over S with respect to action B if and only if A can intentionally get S to do what A wants regarding B, whether S wants to do it or not." (Searle 2010, p. 151)

But, as I have been trying to show, this is necessary but not sufficient for *domination* since there is nothing in the definition to isolate an inequality of power and an inequality of benefit, both of which are required to capture the condition of slavery or domination, as per Spinoza's, as well as our own intuitive, understanding of the term. A teacher might get a student to φ – say to do his homework, or to open his book to a specific page, or whatever – but this is not necessarily an expression of *domination*, even though it is an expression of power in Searle's basic sense. It is only when φ-ing leads to A_{Σ}, or a condition of surplus benefit for A, that there is a domination relationship in play. This surplus benefit need not be only a material benefit; it can be psychological and emotional as well as economic or material. Dominance is a kind of power that places the *dominus* in a hierarchically superordinate position to the *servus* in order for that subordinate to supply some surplus benefit to the *dominus*.

The real question that concerns me here, however, is the extent to which such power relations are mutually constituted or are exerted through force over subordinates. Domination is therefore a condition where (i) a social relation is hierarchically structured between superordinate (*dominus*) and subordinate (*servus*); and (ii) the purpose of this hierarchy is the extraction of some benefit or the securing of some benefit from the subordinate. To this I would like to add the following condition in order to show how social ontological debates can illuminate the problem of domination: (iii) superordinates have the power to shape and create not only the concrete institutional forms of life for the community, *but to also be able to shape the collective-intentional and constitutive rule-sets of the members of the hierarchical group as a whole*. What this means is that a domination relation is one that must not only be hierarchical and extractive in some sense, it must also, in order to achieve efficiency, be rationalized into the norms and institutional logics of the community itself. Here is where the importance of collective intentionality can be seen to play an important role. For such a rationalized, routinized and internalized form of domination to achieve rational efficiency, the status functions and roles within the domination relationships must permeate the shared collective intentionality of the group as a whole. Sociologically, this can be a painful process as when new institutions begin to emerge within society, new economic and technological realities entail new social relationships, and so on. These kinds of social transition will only be effective if new forms of collective intentionality and constitutive rules are able to achieve deontic power among the community.

This would seem to lead us to a theory of domination not unlike that of Philip Pettit and his followers, who maintain that domination is the capacity of an agent to interfere on an arbitrary basis in the actions and choices that you wish to make (Pettit 1997; Lovett 2010). However, this is not the case. Domination cannot simply be my capacity to interfere with choices you would like to make. This would render the vast majority of domination out of scope, since domination can and most of the time does occur not through some conscious interference in your choices, but is veiled beneath rationalized and ostensibly valid norms that the dominated often help in creating. The key deficit in Pettit's account of domination therefore lies in his inability to see that domination also requires, in its efficient, more prevalent cases, the acceptance on the part of each agent that acts within the collective-intentional nexus of beliefs, norms and meanings that create deontic and institutional powers and social facts. Indeed, more than simply constitutive rules, these institutional powers also possess what Hindriks has called "status rules," or "rules that concern the enabling and constraining roles of institutions." (Hindriks 2009, p. 254) In this sense, status rules are those rules embodied within institutional logics and that radiate rules to be internalized by those who are to participate in those institutions: "As such, they reveal the way in which institutions affect the parameters of social interaction." (Hindriks 2009, p. 254)

If we take Searle's and Hindriks' respective ideas about the nature of constitutive and status rules, then we can see that the rationalization of domination relationships can lead to an internalization – by which I mean the implicit acceptance of legitimacy – of those relations, thereby hiding the dominating character of those relations from cognitive view. The source of the power is ultimately all of us – or at least all of us that consent to and go along with the general social facts and constitutive rules of the community to which we belong. Hence, Searle writes:

> Who exactly is exercising power over whom exactly? The answer I am suggesting is that in these cases anybody can exercise power over anybody. If you are a member of the society, and as such you know that you share the norms of that society, then you are in a position to exercise power because of your capacity for imposing informal sanctions against those show violate the norms, in the knowledge that your sanctions will be supported by others. (Searle 2010, p. 158–159)

Domination relies on the same kind of constitutive and status rules that generate forms of deontic power, but there is something more: it is a kind of power that is not simply against your or my will – it may be, but it does not *have* to be. What really counts is that the deontic status and powers of the social facts of the society or group are oriented toward the benefit of some of that group at the expense of

others. The power that exists does not serve us all, but ultimately benefits the superordinates within any hierarchy.

We can see that for domination to be active, there must be a kind of internalization of certain norms and rules of action and thought within the subject. The idea here is that domination is not an interference in one's choices, but a deeper phenomenon of transforming one's intentionality in order to sustain hierarchical relations of control. Indeed, if we take the thesis of collective intentionality into account, domination and reification can be seen to mutually constitute one another. Specifically, consider the fact that forms of power are internalized by subjects and that these internalized concepts, ideas, norms, values, and so on, can constitute the consciousness and conscience of that subject. Erich Fromm calls this "authoritarian conscience": "In the formation of conscience . . . authorities such as the parents, the church, the state, public opinion are either consciously or unconsciously accepted as ethical and moral legislators whose laws and sanctions one adopts, thus internalizing them". (Fromm 1947, p. 148) But this further implies that: "The laws and sanctions of external authority become part of oneself, as it were, and instead of feeling responsible to something outside oneself, one feels responsible to something inside, to one's *conscience*." (Fromm 1947, p. 148) Hence, for B to accept the commands of A, B believes that-p is valid and in some sense right or that-p conforms to the basic constitutive rule-set that B has internalized granting that-p validity. This is recursive to the basic constitutive rules that assign the deontic powers to different individuals, practices, purposes, and so on. It implies that the subject has internalized a specific set of constitutive rules and a particular kind of collective intentionality. As such, A need not give specific commands to B; it becomes more precise to argue that both A and B operate under the collective-intentional rule-sets that they have been socialized to accept and which govern their agency and their basic intentionality.

This process of internalization is where much of the action is located. When the subject's cognition maps the constitutive rule-following of others in the community through the process of socialization, the rules can be said to be internalized. This occurs as a result of routinization and what are being routinized are the constitutive rules that shape the intentionality of the subject. If the mechanism of internalization is not efficient, then subjects will fail to be in sync with the requisite constitutive rules; they will fail to internalize them properly in the sense that do not become anchored in the intentional structures of consciousness that assign meaning and bases for action. Social power will therefore become crude, descending into coercion rather than efficient forms of rational power. Indeed, the more routinized these constitutive rules become, the more efficient power and authority will become as well (cf. Moore 1958, p. 179ff.; Douglas 1986). Domination relations can also be more easily accepted as part of the given reality since they

become a kind of "second nature;" the constitutive rules of such relations become part of the basic nexus of social facts constituting any given social reality. In this sense, reification is a cognitive pathology that affects the collective intentionality of social groups and which secures certain forms of domination relations and social facts that make forms of social power "second nature" and accepted as the basic contours of the community as a whole by its members. This is because what are being internalized through the process of routinization are certain constitutive rules of intentional consciousness. Subjects come to create and re-create the prevailing institutional structures through their practices and beliefs because underlying them are constitutive rules of consciousness that shape their cognitive and evaluative powers. They become, in a most basic sense, reified.

Internalization is aided by the process of recognition of norms and rule-following that occurs via the socialization process more generally. The relation of recognition in cementing power relations should not be underestimated. Although some within the critical theory tradition insist on its inherently emancipatory potential, we should point out that once constitutive rules become part of the fabric of social facts and institutional norms and then internalized by subjects, they are easily replicated and produce a legitimacy to the given social reality (cf. Celikates 2009; Laitinen 2011; Stahl 2011a; Testa 2011). Collective intentionality requires collective forms of acceptance, and this level of penetration of constitutive rules into subjective consciousness literally creates the foundations for institutional forms and social facts (cf. Testa 2015). However, more importantly, it grants an implicit, passive legitimacy to the norms and social reality that we inhabit, thereby reifying the power relations and domination relations of that society. The deontic power that adheres to the norms, values, practices, persons and relations within the existent reality come to be viewed as second nature, as part of the unreflected aspects of social reality. It can also penetrate into the active cognitive and intentional structures of the subject, colonizing rationality and the content of thought itself and thereby take a more active form than simply passive consciousness. Hence, we can glimpse at a fruitful moment for the intersection of reification of consciousness on the one hand and the internalization, recognition and acceptance of norms and the prevailing social reality, on the other. Recognition becomes a crucial mechanism through which the subject comes to internalize and absorb the constitutive rules and norms that domination relations require. What becomes apparent is that the norms that become internalized by the subject formulate a basic, indeed even axiomatic intentional structure – or a fundamental, indeed *reified* set of constitutive rules – which forms the basis of his consciousness as well as his cognitive and evaluative capacities. This results in an incapacity to call those constitutive rules into question since they form a basic, deontic framework within which consciousness operates.

It is therefore essential that we see domination as possessing both the material problem of uneven resource control and its link to shape institutional forms of life and constitutive rules. Social power, when successful, creates its own social reality in accordance with itself. Social power now has an ontological character in that it consists not only of the capacity to control and deploy social and natural resources, but more importantly, *to change the nature of social reality itself*. This is the superstructural expression of material-economic power. It is essential that any form of unequal resource control be accompanied by constitutive rules that sustain and legitimate it. Indeed, the increasing unequal control over resources within the community can entail an increased control over other institutions as well – education, culture, law, and so on – and thereby effect changes in the fabric of constitutive rules. This helps us see the relation between resource power and deontic power, and between the socio-economic domain of resource control on the one hand and the cognitive-subjective domain on the other, since the security of material or resource power (or powers over resources, such as ownership rights) requires that that there exist norms that individuals within the society follow and which they have internalized at the level of their collective intentionality to grant the institutions of economic and resource control any kind of causal powers. This is because for a norm to have a causal power, it must be able to organize individuals into groups with their own causal properties (Elder-Vass 2015); the norms that are shared by the group, their collective intentionality, produce the powers of those norms (cf. Douglas 1986). Capital, in this sense, is not simply a relation of material control: it must also be a congealed set of norms embedded in the collective intentionality of any group. It is, at its base, a *social* fact, not a *material* one.

4 Reification, Collective Intentionality and Social Domination

Now we are in a position to put together the various pieces I have explored thus far into a more general theory. If we view domination as distinct from power, it nevertheless still holds that the deontic nature of power that Searle describes also holds for both general forms of power as well as relations where domination is in play. This means that for domination relations to be stable, accepted, and recognized in some sense as valid by their participants, the collective intentionality of those participants has to be shaped in such a way for them endorse the norms and practices that instantiate those domination relations. Hence, we can see that there is a particular form of consciousness, a particular kind of intentionality that accompanies

the material forms of power any society may manifest. This is not simply an *effect* of domination, of social power more generally; it is also *constitutive* of that domination. It is in this sense that the concept of reification can be reconstructed along the lines of a form of collective-intentional set of constitutive rules that assign statuses and functions to social relations, social roles, social practices, and so on, that in turn grant domination relations and other forms of power their legitimacy, resilience, social acceptance and legitimacy. Reification can now be understood as a specific kind of pathology of consciousness that conceals from view other forms of social cooperation and social relations that might be in the objective interests of those participants, a pathology of second order levels of consciousness and its capacities of self-reflection (cf. Stahl 2011b). This is what Lukács was after in many ways when he employed the term: he was searching for a way to comprehend the blockages, the limitations to critical consciousness that would allow individuals to see their objective place within the social totality.

This means that Lukács's conception of reification is more than simply a matter of commodity fetishism. Rather, it seems more fruitful to view it as a theory about the nature of rationalized forms of authority that cloud and abstract the real origins of social power and conceal domination from view. This is because reification is caused by the prevalence of the commodity form, but the epistemic pathology must be seen in philosophical terms. The term *Verdinglichung* is best rendered as "to-become-thing-like." This is important when seen within the context of German Idealism, as Lukács knew all too well. A "thing" (*Ding*) is, in Kantian philosophy, the epistemic status of an object that has not yet become a valid object for cognition.[6] The *Ding* in this sense is an object, but one without any cognitive status; it is essentially invisible to the rational grasp of the subject. The *Ding* becomes a *Gegenstand* when it becomes a distinct object of consciousness for the subject and, finally, an *Objekt* when it is grasped by the subject's powers of rational cognition. There is therefore a series of statuses that any object of consciousness can possess, and the term "reification" (*Verdinglichung*) indicates a kind of reduction of the cognitive status of the object-domain from something understood to something that no longer has epistemic status for the subject.[7] Hence, reification is best understood, as Berger and Luckmann put it,

6 For some, the neo-Kantian valences of Lukács's concept of reification are problematic. However, it seems to me that Lukács counterposes the problem of reification as a neo-Kantian structure of cognition to the dialectical, Hegelian account of non-reified, rational cognition. For more on the neo-Kantian aspects of Lukács's understanding of reification, see Lichtheim (1970) and Rockmore (1992).

7 See the important discussion by Dannemann (1987, p. 131ff.) as well as the sociological account of the reification of consciousness by Berger and Pullberg (1965).

"as an extreme process of objectivation, whereby the objectivated world loses its comprehensibility as a human enterprise and becomes fixated as a non-human, non-humanizable, inert facticity." (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 89)

But how can this come about? The basic thesis here is that social power be understood as the capacity to shape the collective-intentional states that social actors internalize and utilize as their own means to comprehend and create the social world. The essence of the story now becomes that reification is a particular form in how social power and social domination can be maintained and how power relations can be cultivated and sustained through the declaration and internalization of constitutive and status rules, thereby creating a specific form of social reality. This is why Lukács, for instance, maintains that knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) is the primary means to explode the prevailing power relations and the reality it maintains. Indeed, although not aware of the descriptive language that Searle employs, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács seems to be aware of the kind of power I have been describing in Searle's terms:

> For the coercive measures taken by society in individual cases are often hard and brutally materialistic, but the strength of every society is in the last resort a spiritual power (*geistige Macht*). And from this we can only be liberated by knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). This knowledge cannot be of the abstract kind that remains in one's head…. It must be knowledge that has become flesh of one's flesh and blood of one's blood; to use Marx's phrase, it must be "practical critical activity." (Lukács 1971, p. 262)

The insight here echoes what Searle's account of power also describes: that the nature of social power is essentially cognitive and mental ("spiritual" or *geistige* is a Hegelian term for the collective concepts that individuals utilize in constructing objective knowledge). In other words, the "spiritual" (*geistige*) element here can also understood in collective-intentional terms: power over others, as Lukács construes it, is one where the ideological frames of knowledge and the basis for the validity and legitimacy of institutions (in his case, of capitalist institutions) shape the collective intentionality of that group; it formulates and then makes ambient specific kinds of constitutive rules that are governed by the logic of capitalist forms of production, consumption, etc., but which are also internalized by subjects within the rule-governed institutional environment. Hence, the intentionalist and mentalist frames of domination are related to the structural realities of the society. It is not enough for intentional states to produce power alone; they must accompany some structural reality that can be rationalized, routinized and internalized. The outcome of this process is a reification of consciousness – an incapacity to call into question the deontic powers that congeal around them and make them part of one's *habitus*.

For Lukács, this means that we must look at the problem of reification as a specific deformation of cognition and consciousness, but also as a specific form of life and practice.[8] It is a problem not only of reflection, but also of the ways that we shape and orient our practical activity. In this sense, what is central here is the way that thought and action can be linked, and Searle's conception of collective intentionality can help square this circle. The practices into which the subject is socialized carry with them specific cognitive rules, particular forms of collective intentionality that become routinized and internalized, and this is not only a set of cultural norms, but also a specific kind of objectivated, congealed rationalism that is embodied in the mechanistic and quantified features of capitalist life. But behind this remains a set of rules – rules which shape and orient consciousness itself and maintain the specific nexus of social facts that maintain relations of power and dominance. As such, these very norms, rules, intentional mental states, and their associated practices become background assumptions shared by the members of the community as a whole, no longer a discrete object (*Objekt*) of cognition and, therefore, no longer an object of critique.

Reification now becomes a process whereby any individual lacks the capacity to conceptualize rationally the social forms of life in which he participates.[9] By this, I mean that there is an inability to see the link between the norms and values that underwrite one's social reality and the domination relations that pervade it. Power to shape collective intentionality is therefore a specific kind of power, a specific kind of *domination* (when done to protect unequal, exploitive forms of social organization, relations and institutions). This kind of power is one where social actors have been able to make ambient within the community declarations of function and status such that certain kinds of interests can be achieved or at least secured. In this sense, institutions are articulated, new institutional rules elaborated, and cultural forms of life reworked in order to make ambient within

8 As Andrew Feenberg correctly notes, "As a form of objectivity, reification is in the first instance practical rather than theoretical. In constantly buying and selling commodities, including intellectual products, or working in mechanized industries, or engaging with bureaucratic administrations, the members of a capitalist society live the reified relationships that construct that society. The reified form of objectivity of the society gives coherence and meaning to social objects arising from and feeding back into the practical relationship to those objects, and it shapes the corresponding subjectivity of the atomized actors." (Feenberg 2014, p. 76–77)

9 Although he is no doubt unaware of the fact, Searle's exploration of Background power leads him touch on the basic principle behind the concept of reification when he writes: "Many people simply go along, unreflectively, with social situations in which they find themselves. But this can amount to a form of inauthenticity or even bad faith, because they are creating desire independent reasons which are rationally binding on them but which they might not have created if they had thought about the question." (Searle 2010, p. 132)

the society new forms of status function and, once successfully internalized by a significant number of subjects, to become norms that guide action and create new social facts.[10] But these new social facts are now a function of the elites that control the very institutions that generate and routinize the status functions and constitutive rules that subjects internalize. Reification is therefore not only a defect of cognition, it is also constitutive of the social dominance of elites over subordinates. Hence, power over resources, or inequalities of resource control, can – and will – lead to control and influence over institutions and to influence over the constitutive rules and collective intentionality of the members of that community. Reification is now something we can see as a consequence of this model of social power: it is the pathology of consciousness that cannot call into question or bring to critical consciousness the domination relations inherent within this circuit of the production of norms and consciousness.

This is because of the formula that Searle points to as a "status function by declaration." The key here is that reification is the result of a specific way that constitutive rules orient consciousness. Since domination, as I described it above, requires that a hierarchically structured inequality is in play, one that also extracts benefits from the subordinate to the superordinate levels of the hierarchy, the constitutive rule-set that must take shape to sustain such hierarchical forms of power must serve to orient the intentionality of subjects toward seeing the hierarchical relations either as legitimate or must be internalized in such a way that these relations become invisible, reified, and no longer objects of contestation. This is the deontic power that Searle claims status functions possess by declaration. However, more importantly, following the exactness constraint, we can see that for elites to have a stable form of authority over members of any group, they must translate their power from one that is imposed on the members of that group *externally* to one that is collectively accepted and therefore endorsed by the members of that group *internally*.[11] However, even though this takes place,

10 Hindriks correctly notes: "Status rules regulate directly, because their formulations specify powers, rights, and obligations: they explicate the normative attributes that are characteristic of a particular status. Constitutive rules contain the conditions that have to be met in a particular context for a certain status to be instantiated. If a constitutive rule is collectively accepted and its conditions are indeed met, the relevant status will indeed be instantiated." (Hindriks 2009, p. 265)

11 This distinction is based on that of Tuomela (2013). For Tuomela, authority in any group context can be either external or internal. He describes the difference: "In the case of internally authorized operatives and leaders for a group, the authority they bear is given by the members, e.g., through their collective acceptance…. The authorization concerns group-central matters and the authoritative powers are over the group members qua members. The case of externally authorized leaders is similar, but its source is group-external, e.g., based on another group's dominance." (Tuomela 2013, p. 160)

the rules, norms, and so on that the group comes to accept as their own still have been generated by those who wish to benefit from those rules, even though they may not be able to see this.[12] I may accept that I should pay a tuition increase and this because everyone else accepts it as the way things are, but this does not mean it is necessarily a rule that is in my interest or in any sense beneficial for me, even though I may accept it as "the way it is" and therefore as legitimate. Reification works in precisely this way: it conceals from view not only the mechanisms of power, but it also, and more importantly, hides from view better arrangements that could benefit the group as a whole. The basic point here is that whereas externally authorized authority over a group is conceived as dominance, internal authority is looked upon as internal to the group itself.

The key of reification to the puzzle of modern forms of social domination and power is that it is the mechanism that allows externally authorized power to become internally authorized power. It transforms, in Rousseau's famous phrase, "power into right and obligation into duty." This can help us address the intentionality constraint and the exactness constraint and how they relate to the concept of reification, since it is not simply a single agent or a group of agents that exert this power, but it is itself a property of hierarchically arranged groups. Indeed, the key here is that we see this in dynamic or historical terms: that power is at first exerted externally, but can only become stable and efficient once it is accepted over time by the totality of the community. Power and dominance become mutually created by superordinates and subordinates alike, and this can only occur through the reification of these power relations – their objectivation, internalization and naturalization through the collective-intentional and constitutive rule-sets that govern and constitute the institutions and norms of that community.

Consider Lukács's thesis about the relation between reified consciousness and the production of commodities under capitalism. He cites Marx's use of the example of the production of cotton: "Does a worker in a cotton factory produce

12 George Gabel argues on this point that reification can be seen to occur when any social value "ceases to be a matter of personal achievement and becomes dependent on 'participation' in a valuing factor 'external to the person.'" (Gabel 1963, p. 76) What this means is that the normative and evaluative powers of the reified subject are tied to an externally authored and structured set of norms and values that are simply internalized by the subject instead of being spontaneously created by him. In a sense, this adds an importance valence to the concept of reification insofar as it can be shown to affect not only cognitive, but also evaluative and cathectic layers of the personality and self. Nevertheless, the main structural point remains the same: that we are dealing with a situation wherein the subject is gradually socialized by external, heteronomously structured values and norms.

merely cotton textiles? No, he produces capital. He produces values which serve afresh to command his labor and by means of it to create new values." (Marx 1978, p. 283) Now, this reveals an implicit social-ontological account of the kind of domination I am describing. Marx is arguing that there is an inherently ontological status to capital, that it is a material relation only insofar as the objective practices of the group (of society as a whole) are directed and organized in specific ways according to its rules, and this can only happen once they share a collective intentionality that shapes those practices, ideas, norms, beliefs, and so on – i.e., once they have absorbed the objectivated rules of capital via socialization. Hence, in a descriptive sense, reification is the creation of social reality through the shaping of collective intentionality, but it is a normative category insofar as it shapes a reality that is imbued by relations of domination, or particularist ends and purposes as opposed to relations that encourage collectively legitimate ends and purposes. Reification therefore acts in two ways at once: it simultaneously makes implicitly valid and legitimate the constitutive and status rules that are heteronomously internalized by the subject and which orient his intentional mental states. However, it also conceals from view the very idea that social facts are created by us, that the world we inhabit is essentially a human world and can be manipulated and shaped according to higher, perhaps more ethically compelling purposes than at present. It creates a false social ontology to repress and submerge the more rational socio-ontological potentialities of human sociality.

But how does this relate back to the conceptual vocabulary that Searle outlines in his theory of "deontic power"? If we take Searle's basic account of a constitutive rule as the assignment of function, or "X counts as Y in C," then we can understand domination as possible once members of a community begin to accept and to internalize as part of their basic mental states and as intentional states underwriting their actions those assignments of function and constitutive rules that benefit not that agent, but another member or subgroup of that community as a whole. A new set of social facts can be seen to be created once this new constitutive rule, or set of constitutive rules, become more basic to the collective intentionality of that group as a whole. Reification can therefore be seen as the result of this kind of dominating power. It consists in the ways that collective-intentional states of mind, the ways that the assignment of meaning for any community are shaped in order to make legitimate the prevailing form of social inequality and domination relations. For Lukács, this occurred because of a routinization of the ways that the labor process and the commodity form were able to dominate consciousness through routinized practices, norms and values. It was, to put it another way, the result of the ways that powerful forms of socio-economic imperatives for production and consumption shape the subjectivity of the subject and, in the end, the social reality of those subjects.

5 Social Ontology: Descriptive Versus Critical

We can now see that the concept of reification, when reconstructed along the lines of the collective intentionality approach, leads us to see two different approaches to social ontology. I will call them descriptive and critical respectively. The first, as exemplified by Searle, is an account of how power works and how social facts are constructed via mental states. His account tells us nothing normative about which kinds of social facts we can consider good or desirable and which are pathological. But Lukács's theory of reification maintains an essentially critical orientation in that he holds out for us the idea that reification is a pathology of consciousness insofar as it conceals from view a more just form of social reality. Searle would not make such a claim, since he is concerned more with describing the mechanisms – in terms of language, speech-acts and consciousness – that circumscribe social action and the generation of social facts. But the critical conception of social ontology has in view the thesis that it is only by understanding the totality of human social life and its potential aims and goals that reification can be overcome. Social ontology is not only mentalist; for Lukács, it also has an objective dimension based on social-relational practices and how those relations and practices are organized and for what ends.

Returning to Spinoza for a moment, we can see the distinction arise between the slave and the free person defined thus: "A slave is one who has to obey his master's commands which look only to the interests of him who commands … a subject is one who, by command of the sovereign power, acts for the common good, and therefore for his own good also." (Spinoza 1991, p. 178–179) Lukács, like Rousseau and Marx before him, has something similar, though distinct, in view, for he is working within a structure of thought that holds that we can judge the different kinds of social reality based on the way that the social totality is organized to realize the ontological potentialities inherent in human social (i.e., group-based, cooperative) practice. For him reification results from a rationalized set of values and norms that distorts consciousness through the medium of exchange value and the cash nexus to code all socio-human activities and products through the lens of exchange. But as I have argued above, it is also much more than this. We can see that Lukács's thesis contains the nucleus of a richer concept wherein forms of collective intentionality coordinate new forms of legitimate power and domination, in particular – under capitalism – the legitimacy of an economic system that embeds its logic of exploitation and commodification into social reality itself. Lukács also further argues that once this reification of consciousness has been overcome, we will cease to see social facts as "objects" and instead see them as constituted by "social relations" and by human praxis (Lukács 1971, p. 180). We will, in this sense, cease to see them as reified objects that simply

exist and instead see them as constituted by relations of labor and by relations of power that we are implicit in recreating and sustaining.

The critical-ontological moment occurs once we see that Lukács is advocating the thesis that non-reified thought (i.e., critical reasoning) is in play whenever we see that any social fact is in fact not a distinct thing, object or entity in and of itself, but *is itself constituted by a social relation*, or more specifically, the *product of a social relation or series of social relations*. Social reality is not simply a construction of the constitutive rule-sets that Searle's linguistic-based theory of social ontology describes. Rather, the constitutive rules and collective-intentional states shape and legitimize certain forms of practical activities that we then see as basic and "natural" to our world. The key for Lukács is that social ontology is not simply a *cognitive-constructivist* process, but also a *socio-praxiological* process in the world in that it denotes the ways we organize our social relations, our cooperative efforts, and our inherently social-relational powers as a community. Hence, social reality can be seen as achieving different forms based on the ways we orient and shape our cooperative, interdependent, practical activity.[13] As such, any society that produces ends or goods that are non-beneficial to itself as a whole does damage to its constituent members. The problem with capitalism, put simply, is that it organizes the ensemble of the totality of social relations for ends and purposes that benefit a particular group within the community (i.e., those who own capital). It entails seeing that there is a difference between the *meaning* of anything and the *substance* of what anything actually is (cf. Ruben 1985). We are able to see that beneath the endless array of commodities, products, goods, and so on, there really exists social relations of production – and we can now see that this brings us into the realm of a critical social ontology, since we are now forced to ask what are the proper, the good, the non-pathological forms of social relations that ought to be instantiated, but are instead being distorted and limited by capitalist social formations. More crucially, reification hides from critical consciousness the notion that human action, human labor, human practices and products are in fact essentially cooperative insofar as they require intersection of plans and sub-plans in order for social reality to be produced and reproduced (Goldmann 1971; cf. Bratman 1992).[14]

13 Lukács writes that this is an insight implicit already in Marx whose "*method* always operates with concepts of existence graduated according to the various levels of praxis." (Lukács 1971, p. 127–128)

14 For some recent treatments of Lukács's approach to ontology, see Oldrini (2012) and Stahl (2015).

A critical social ontology therefore has in view the notion that the world must be reappropriated by those who in fact produce and constitute it. Reification is therefore only a part of a larger critical social-ontological project, but it is a crucial part in that it is a pathology of the epistemic and cognitive domain of consciousness that helps sustain a pathological social reality as well as repress a critical stance toward it. Through reification, subjects see the collective-intentional frames that they operate within as "second nature" and therefore alternative ways of living and organizing our social relations become frustrated. Lukács's cognitive approach to the problem of capitalist society therefore entails a capacity to posit an alternative form of social facts, an alternative understanding of the purposes and ends of the community and its practices to the prevailing, existent reality. This means that Lukács's understanding of reification possesses at its core an inherently normative and critical dimension. What emerges from this distinction is therefore that even though Searle's and Lukács's respective approaches can be seen to converge on the explanatory mechanisms of consciousness that describe certain kinds of power and the production of social facts, they diverge in that Lukács points us toward a deeper, indeed, more compelling normative dimension to social ontology, one that cannot be explored here with any sophistication.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to show how a critical social ontology can make use of the theory of collective intentionality elaborated by Searle and the theory of reification explored by Lukács. In its most basic form, the problem of rationalized social power and domination requires, to some basic extent, the capacity to shape and control the constitutive rule-sets that subjects internalize and which they come to accept as valid rules for positing status functions in the world. In this sense, reification is precisely that pathology of consciousness that results from the objectivation of those constitutive rule-sets and the kinds of status functions that will cement, or in some basic way sustain, the hierarchically extractive forms of power that domination seeks to secure. But we must also take this insight further and see that reification of consciousness not only shapes the ways that any group constructs its social reality in cognitive terms, but also how it shapes the concrete, socio-relational and socio-praxiological forms of activity that members of such a group endorse and see as valid.

Viewed in such a way, reification has far-reaching consequences for the ways that we conceive of the nature of social power, domination and social ontology. We cannot simply understand the freedom of members of any group in terms of them

enjoying a state of non-domination conceived as "non-arbitrary interference," (Pettit 1997; Lovett 2010) since this view assumes that the rationality of such agents is not already tinged by the collective intentionality shaped by power relations. Similarly, we cannot look to an Idealist-inspired view from the theory of recognition or some synthesis between these two positions, since the same problem pervades the consciousness and intentional mental states of those members, not to mention the institutional rule-sets that socialize them. Rather, it seems to me that it is only through understanding how reification constitutes a warping of the ways that we conceive of the legitimate, rational and "correct" forms of social-relational practices, cooperation, and the purposes and ends of such practices and cooperation that any form of critical confrontation with a given social reality can begin. Social domination's richness as a critical concept becomes clear when we see that it both requires and creates the collective-intentional mental states and constitutive rule-sets of the institutions and the members of any group; it is a capacity not only to shape these rules, it does so with the express purpose of organizing social-cooperative practices for hierarchically beneficial ends rather than common ends. In this sense, a critical social ontology should be pursued not only for how it diagnoses the pathologies of modern society, but also for how it can help illuminate a common interest for all social members and the enhancement of their mutual freedom.

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