

XII. Towards a reistic social–historical philosophy*

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Abstract: The present essay advances a theory of social reality which concurs with the formal ontology developed in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Furthermore, we identify this formal ontology as reistic but in a rather wide sense: in the sense that social objects are primary whereas social relations are superstructured over them. This thesis has been developed in opposition to John Searle’s claim, made in his book *Construction of Social Reality* (1995), that the building blocks of social reality are institutions. We do not claim that this is the only valid theory of social reality. We simply hope that it has considerable explanatory power so that it can be used as a theory alternative to those already existing or to any new theory of society.

The paper has two parts. Part One sets out the theoretical foundations of the approach followed in it, whereas Part Two advances details of its application to sociology and history.

Key words: formal ontology, neo-utilitarianism, physicalism, reism, social constructivism, social objects

I.

1. Reistic formal ontology

Our social theory follows a reistic interpretation of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* that we have advanced elsewhere.¹ It claims that the world consists of ob-

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¹ Cf. Nikolay Milkov, “Tractarian Scaffoldings”, *Prima philosophia* **14** (2001), pp. 399–414.

jects and nothing beyond that. They are bulky, voluminous things, with borders and faces which are in contact with the boundaries and the faces of other objects. Being voluminous, they fill up the world.

The objects set up connections (*Verbindungen*) which build up states of affairs. In this state of affairs, objects “fit into one another like the links of a chain” (2.03). The important point is that “*there isn’t anything third* that connects the links. ... [T]he links *themselves* make connexion with one another.”² The very docking of the objects one to another makes them stick together; this is what secures the cohesion between them. There is no “relation” connecting them. This is a main idea in the *Tractatus*. With the help of this conception, Wittgenstein hoped to defeat the last remnants of the old subject–predicate logic, which “contains more convention and physics than had been realized”.³

Many authors have insisted that Tractarian objects are unsaturated, their unsaturatedness being similar to Frege’s unsaturatedness of functions and arguments. There is an important difference between Frege and Wittgenstein on this point though. Frege’s conception is chemical. According to him, the function and its argument merge into one another. In contrast, Tractarian objects are connected to one another topologically, not chemically. In the connection, they remain independent of one another.

Russell’s logical constructionalism, in its turn, uses the metaphor of a “logical skeleton” on which the data of experience are fleshed out. In contrast, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein does not speak of a skeleton. Instead, he makes use of the concept of *logical scaffolding*. It simply supports the formation of objects from outside, but does not connect them. As we are going to see in what follows, if the scaffolding is removed, it may well be the case that the objects remain stuck together.

² L. Wittgenstein, *Letters to C. K. Ogden*, ed. by G. H. von Wright, Oxford: Blackwell, 1973, p. 23. Elsewhere Wittgenstein said: “The elements are not connected with one another *by anything*. They simply are connected, and that connection just is the state of affairs in question.” *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, conversations recorded by Friedrich Waismann, ed. by B. F. McGuinness, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979, p. 252.

³ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. by R. Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny, Oxford: Blackwell, 1974, p. 204.

2. Social objects

In order to make our conception clearer, we shall first specify exactly what social objects are.

We accept as primary social objects reistic entities which are typically atomistic. Moreover, we divide them into five groups of increasing abstractness:

- (i) Material objects that are produced by human agents. To them belong:
(a) products of market economy; (b) technologies, working instruments, etc.
- (ii) Social agents with the roles they play in society, as well as social groups of different sizes and natures.
- (iii) Different performances like sporting matches, theatre performances, social presentations, etc.
- (iv) Social actions, but also parts of them⁴ like particular gestures (particular cases of *habitus* or *modus operandi*).
- (v) Theories, melodies, novels, and other artifacts.⁵

Furthermore, we assume that social objects set up what we shall call *social constructions*—or social individuals—like the game of soccer, German forestry, Oxford University, etc. This point is of special importance since—and we shall see this in the second part of the paper—in such disciplines as sociology, history, as well as in everyday life, we usually discuss, or ponder on, complex social objects that are better discussed as individuals. It goes without saying that there is no sharp boundary between social objects and social constructions. For practical reasons, we can consider social constructions social objects, and vice versa.

⁴ On this point we oppose Rüdiger Bittner, according to whom actions are indivisible. Cf. R. Bittner, “One Action”, in: A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle’s Poetics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 97–110.

⁵ Among others, they were investigated by Roman Ingarden. Cf. Amie Thomasson, “Ingarden and the Ontology of Cultural Objects”, in: Arkadiusz Chrudzimski (ed.), *The Ontology of Roman Ingarden*, Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2005, pp. 115–136.

By way of elucidating, we underline the fact that these kinds of objects are primary terms in our social theory as long as they are the minimal units that social agents approve or disprove of, like or dislike, imitate or not, take over, or pass over.⁶ In other words, they are the subjects of our *practical judgments* in the wide sense of the word: our practical judgments—in contrast to those of Kant—are not reducible to moral judgments but are at work in every new situation of human *praxis*.

Apparently, our social objects are similar to what have recently been called “memes” which are usually defined as *units of cultural heredity*.⁷ Typically, we can be fascinated by them, we admire them; we strive to copy them, to imitate them, to join them, or we simply consider them (actions, for example) just and fair. And vice versa: we disprove of them, we ostracize them, etc.

Understood in this neo-utilitarian (and neo-Darwinian) way, our objects are social in the sense that they are products of collective intentionality. They are opposed to “brute objects” like stones and other minerals⁸—of course, when the latter are not subjects of practical interest.

3. An objects-oriented approach in social philosophy

With reference to our kind of naïve formal ontology, developed in § 1 and to our conception of social objects advanced in § 2, we criticise John Searle’s claim, advanced in his path-breaking book, *The Construction of Social Reality*,⁹ that the building blocks of the social world are the institutions which make social facts like citizenship, money, government, property, marriages, and sporting events possible.¹⁰ Institutions are products of collective intentionality.

⁶ We have already developed this neo-utilitarian thesis in the paper “After-Revolutionary Political Philosophy” (in print).

⁷ Cf. Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 6 ff.

⁸ These can be compared with Elisabeth Anscombe’s “brute facts”. Cf. G. E. M. Anscombe, “On Brute Facts”, *Analysis* **18** (1958), pp. 69–72.

⁹ John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: The Free Press, 1995.

¹⁰ Another prominent supporter of philosophical neo-institutionalism is David Bloor. Cf. for example his, “What is a Social Construct?”, *Facta Philosophica* **3** (2001), pp. 141–56.

The mischief in Searle's neo-institutionalist thesis is its downright idealism. Metaphorically speaking, institutions are not the building blocks of social reality but its scaffolding, simply reinforcing them from outside in order to facilitate their cohesion. However, an institution does not produce the connection; it only has a supporting function. When removed, the constructions often remain standing.

In other words, institutions are the superstructure of social life. Their basis, however, is everyday practical life with its material and cultural objects situated in space and time.

We can also express our idea by stating that social objects are the basic elements of social theory whereas institutions are its secondary elements. In support of this conception, we refer to Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (§ 99) which insisted that the system often changes because of the material that flows through it. Searle, in contrast, accepts that the system leads.

An even more serious argument against Searle's neo-institutionalism is that institutions emerge on the basis of a certain level of development of the social objects. Indeed, the institution of driving licenses was set up only after the car industry developed. Furthermore, even such *prima facie* "perennial" institutions as the family and the state emerged only at a certain stage of production of goods.¹¹

But our theory of social objects is also directed against the mainstream conception that the "subject-matter of sociological studies are the phenomena and the processes of different forms of collective human lives, the structures of different forms of human communities and groups."¹² The main argument against this conception is that we join a community or a social group, or we simply stay in it, in the same way we join other social objects: following an act of practical judgment (assessment) of an object. In other words, for us, the social groups themselves are social objects. To be more specific, they are social objects of the second group in our classification of social objects from § 2.

¹¹ Cf. Friedrich Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats*; in: K. Marx und F. Engels, *Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. 1, Bd. 29, Berlin: Dietz, 1975.

¹² Jan Szczepański, *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii*, Warszawa: Państwowe wydawnictwo naukowe, 1963, p. 9.

Moreover, institutions (which are surely relational) themselves can be treated as objects—in particular, as objects of our practical judgments.

4. Example: Stock-market ontology

Typical examples of social objects are products of the stock market. The ontology of the stock market is the ontology of goods and commodities, produced by companies and corporations.

Characteristic of this kind of ontology are the constant changes in objects which may be successfully described with the resources of marketplace ontology. These changes are set up by the preferences (practical judgments) of individual persons who accept certain goods, and reject others.

This is a *dynamic*, set in motion by market-tastes which are socially formed—they are determined by social-psychological patterns. In more concrete terms, individual market-tastes and preferences are products of collective intentionalities that divide consumers into *Nissan*-buyers and *Toyota*-buyers, etc.

The goods and commodities are produced by organic wholes other than institutions: they are created by companies and corporations. These are group-individuals which in many respects behave like persons (i.e. objects): they have their professional philosophy, specific style, etc. (In contrast, institutions are not person-like—they are characteristically faceless.) In short, they have their own worlds (cf.: “Welcome to the Nissan world!”), formed through the collective intentionality of their producers and consumers. They identify their individuality through brands, which construct various proprietary goods: Versace suits and dresses, Salamander shoes, Levis’ jeans, Daimler-Benz cars, etc.

Changes in stock-market ontology find expression in stock-market diagrams and indexes.

5. The surface of social life

The “river of time” (Russell)^{13,14} brings ever new social objects to, what we shall call, the “surface of *social life*”.¹⁵ On this point we again follow Wittgen-

¹³ We picked up this phrase from Russell’s celebrated essay “On History”: “On the Banks of the River of Time, the sad procession of human generations is marching slowly to the grave.” Bertrand Russell, “On History”, in: *idem, Philosophical Essays*, New York: Si-

stein (this time, in the interpretation of Theodore Schatzki) who spoke in a somewhat similar sense about the surface of *human life*.¹⁶ We shall restate this idea of Wittgenstein thusly: The surface of social life consists of ever new and changing social objects.

Furthermore, our reist social ontology conceives of the objects of social life as solid planks (or as Lego bricks¹⁷). For our convenience, we can present the particular social constructions (individuals) as resembling Otto Neurath's boats, composed of such and such planks, navigating in the "river of time". Being exposed to the resistance of the environment (to the ravages of time) during its journey (through every social storm and squall), the boat's planks (the social objects) need repeated renovation. Moreover, such acts of mending are to be accomplished immediately, without pause. Indeed, as Quine convincingly showed, the boat of social life (of ordinary language, in particular) cannot be harboured and repaired in a drydock.

Here we embrace Barry Smith's social theory that sees social reality as a complex construction, consisting of many layers.¹⁸ These often have sub-parts that are interlocked into one another. They can be conceived of as assembly-structures (*Montagebaustrukturen*) in which different parts are hierarchically super-structured one over the other. We can easily replace them; or we can increase the size (the zoom) of particular objects, sometimes at the cost of others; or move them in another direction; etc. We shall call this method of conceiving social objects and individuals that of assembly-construction.

mon and Schuster, 1910, pp. 60–69; here p. 69.

¹⁴ Paraphrasing William James, we can also speak of the "stream of life".

¹⁵ This is the next topological concept we shall introduce in our analysis.

¹⁶ Cf. Theodore Schatzki, "Elements of a Wittgensteinian Philosophy of the Human Sciences", *Synthese* **87** (1991), pp. 311–29. Apparently, this interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* can be easily connected with the formal ontology of the *Tractatus* we reconstructed in § 1. Indeed, both have a clear topological stance.

¹⁷ In this suggestion we follow some contemporary ontologies that see ontological individuals as Lego bricks. Cf. Jan Westerhoff, *Ontological Categories: Their Nature and Significance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 92, 113.

¹⁸ Cf. Barry Smith, "Ontologie des Mesokosmos: Soziale Objekte und Umwelten", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* **52** (1998), pp. 521–540.

Using the method of assembly-constructing social reality, the reist social philosopher can easily grasp (imagine) quite different social situations, many of which otherwise remain in shadow (indeed, they are often counter-intuitive).

II.

The second part of this essay is an attempt to apply our reistic social ontology and the method of assembly-constructing social reality it underpins to the practice of historical study in particular. The tenor of our approach is directed against Dilthey, Rickert and Collingwood's empathy conception of humanities in general, and of history in particular. Most importantly, while the concept of empathy is psychological (it presupposes identification with the feelings of the subjects of history), our reistic method is thoroughly objectivist.

In what follows, we shall demonstrate three realms of application of this approach: (i) genealogical studies; (ii) explanations in history; (iii) investigations of the "metaphysics" of social life.

6. Genealogical studies

One point of interest in investigating social reality is that while some of its planks (social objects) are to be repeatedly renewed, many of them at very high speed, others are old, even ancient.¹⁹ One important effect of the social world's functioning this way is the vision of this very moment, of this particular social individual, as composed of planks of rather different provenance and pedigree: some of them are quite new, while others are ages old, etc. As a matter of fact, the social individual whom we contemplate at this particular moment is a mottled patchwork of social objects. This means that elements of historically different social objects mingle together to form new individuals. Mixed that way, their history cannot be reconstructed with the naked eye. The effect is that social individuals often appear opaque: we must first investigate the genealogy of their elements, continually changing their place, size and order. Metaphorically

¹⁹ To use Otto Neurath's idiom, the "planks" of social life have different degrees of "stability". Cf. Otto Neurath, "Die Enzyklopädie als 'Modell' ", in: M. Stöltzner and T. Uebel (eds.), *Wiener Kreis*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2006, pp. 375–95; here pp. 382 ff.

speaking, correct genealogical analyses bring to light the “anatomy” of social individuals in a way similar to how the computer tomography brings to light the constitution of parts of our body that are hidden from the naked eye.²⁰

This way of functioning of social life is especially well illustrated in the history of technology: indeed, changes in the old or the birth of new, objects and instruments of technology are exemplarily abrupt. One example: The marking of forest trees was introduced in Germany in 1856 and has never changed since then. During the same time, however, many other practices in forestry have been transformed, some of them radically. In other words: the social individual of German forestry is composed of quite heterogeneous elements, and their genealogy is to be set up in a special reistic study.

That social life can be seen as resulting from such abrupt (and often contingent) and disproportional changes in the social objects and practices that compose social individuals is well documented in literature and other narrative arts. We would like to give as an example here the recent (2005) movie *Good Night, and Good Luck!* directed by George Clooney. The film presents the historical figure of the late CBS reporter Edward R. Murrow (who successfully fought Senator Eugene McCarthy in the early 1950's), as chainsmoking in the CBS studio. The obsessive accentuation of this, nowadays, absurd practice was purported to revive the atmosphere of times long gone by.

To summarize, we see these social constructions (individuals) as a series of ever-changing social objects that build up different sets. Some of them assert themselves, other vanish. The winning objects can be also ordered into two groups: (i) those which prevail for a short period of time only; (ii) a small group of real champions that dominate life for centuries or even millennia—examples are parts of Roman law; parts of Rome's sewerage system; etc.

²⁰ In the humanities, in the history of philosophy in particular, the method of genealogical analysis finds expression in the sub-discipline of conceptual history. Cf. Gunter Scholtz (ed.), *Die Interdisziplinarität der Begriffsgeschichte (Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte, Sonderband)*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2000; Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006.

7. Explanations in history

Besides their genealogical order, social objects have other levels of dependencies that can be discussed “in terms of antecedent, motive, means, conditions, influence, explanation, and the like”.²¹ These dependencies too can be seen as having assembly-structures—a point which allows us to use the resources of the social ontology we developed in §§ 1–4 to help us better understand the processes of human history. Indeed, history is primarily interested in *changes* of social reality—as a matter of fact, we have already shown that social reality consists of a universe of ever changing social objects.

It is safe to say that, generally, changes in social objects happen in two ways: evolutionary and revolutionary. We have already discussed the first type of change in § 5, which explains why are we now concentrating on revolutionary changes. These alter the social situation radically. They can be results of: (i) complex actions like big and decisive battles (of Waterloo, Gainsborough, Stalingrad, etc.); (ii) decisions taken by prominent figures in history like Napoleon or Churchill; (iii) radical ideological, economical, etc. shifts—for example, those that ruined the Roman Empire and caused its fall.²²

These changes too can be seen as taking place according to our “assembly-structures” ontological model.²³ Indeed, social structures have a clear hierarchy and are strictly ordered one over another. Furthermore, every change rearranges social objects into new constructions, also transforming objects’ roles and importance (their hierarchy) in the new constructions (individuals)—in fact, that is why the changes are so important in social life.

Most importantly, a change in the position of one object leads to changes in the overall system. An example: in a recent book, the claim has been made that a series of ten decisions made between May 1940 and December 1941 deter-

²¹ Cf. M. Howell and W. Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 129.

²² Two examples: Edward Gibbon argued (in 1776–88) that *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was caused by ideological changes, while Max Weber (in his *Römische Agrargeschichte*, 1891) pointed to the changes in rural economics as a possible reason.

²³ On ontological changes cf. N. Milkov, “Stereology”, in N. Callaos (ed.), *Proceedings of the 6th World Multiconference of Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics (SCI 2002/ISAS 2002)*, vol. XVIII, Orlando (Florida), 2002, pp. 518–23.

mined the course of World War II; all other events of the war can be substantially seen as their effects.²⁴

Traditionally, historical changes have been considered clear cases of “causal” connections, the efforts of historians being primarily concentrated on their explanation. In such cases, the task is to reveal which change (for example, which decision) was the fundamental one and which followed from it. As we have already argued elsewhere,²⁵ however, that there is no logic and also no causality in this realm. This conclusion explains why we are reluctant to speak about the laws of history. Instead, we feel that the task of history is to reveal which of the social objects (planks) in a social construction of the past, or of that specific form of life, are leading, or more fundamental, in the sense that the other objects are ontologically dependent on them, and to describe their structure. Furthermore, the historian sets out how change transformed the degree of importance of the objects in the new social individual. This is the task of describing the mechanism of historical processes.

8. The inward part of social life

The next step in enriching our social ontology is the assumption that people connect social objects with what we shall call specific “metaphysics”. This means that people “believe in” the social objects with which they are engaged. These are objects of their *intentionality*: the agents plan to carry out actions with the help of the objects; they connect great expectations or disappointments with them.²⁶ This form of practical attitude towards social objects sets up the inward part of social life, as opposed to its surface.

A typical example in this regard might be the daily metaphysics we develop: (i) in our inter-personal relationships—the affection we have for our loved ones, the hate for our enemies, etc.; (ii) in groups (political, sporting, etc.)

²⁴ Cf. Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions that Changed the World, 1940 – 1941*, London: Penguin Books, 2008.

²⁵ In support of this thesis cf. N. Milkov, “Mesocosmological Descriptions: An Essay in the Extensional Ontology of History”, *Essays in Philosophy* 7:2 (2006), pp. 1–19.

²⁶ Cf. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 (1st published 1861).

partialities, such as our affection for FC “Liverpool”, or for the American football club the “Pittsburgh Steelers”; etc.²⁷

We do not, however, just have attitudes (intentionality) toward social objects; we also *act* with them. In other words, on the basis of these objects, different practices and actions are developed. Furthermore, the practices often involve instruments, objects, and performances that cope successfully with the tasks of life.²⁸ In this sense, we are proud of them and, more importantly, we are at peace with them.²⁹ Practices in use at this or that particular moment and place determine people’s *way of life*.

Unfortunately, there is a considerable incongruence between social objects and ways of life. Indeed, in the course of time, social agents start to feel that social objects might be improved; and they actually improve them. For example, instead of reaping the harvest with a sickle they do it with a combine; or, instead of reaching their friends on foot, they do it by car.

The problem is that they now start to consider the old social object obsolete, or “disproved”. In consequence, it is abandoned and consigned to oblivion. Nobody marvels at its metaphysics; nobody enjoys working with it any more. Another problem is that social objects are often used by different generations, so that by their continued use, they often get so badly worn that the historian must first reconstruct them in the splendor of their initial form. Apparently, just like human beings, social objects can be disregarded, even ‘ganged up on’. Unfortunately, this disregard often makes history opaque: we regularly fail to understand it in its full complexity.

Truth to tell, what was disproved by introducing a new social object was simply the old object, or instrument—not the old object together with all the ac-

²⁷ Cf. N. Milkov, “The Cement of Social Alchemy: A Philosophical Analysis of Social Groups’ Identity”, *Contributions of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society* 4 (1996), pp. 234–40.

²⁸ Cf. Ernst Tugendhat, *Egozentrität und Mystik*, München: Beck, 2004.

²⁹ Cf. S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. This point explains why sometimes even simple jobs are seen by the agents as adventures: we try to be better than others in accomplishing them, and to do them better than was done in the past. Cf. Gerd Spittler, *Founders of the Anthropology of Work*, Berlin: Lit, 2008.

tions that have been successfully accomplished with its help; all the beliefs and hopes attached to it in the whole context of its use; the feeling of successfully accomplished action; the joy we have in working with it; etc. In other words, *progressivism* fails to give an account of the connection of social objects with different ways of life.

In what follows in this section, we are going to suggest three ways of overcoming the progressivist fallacy, using our idiosyncratic approach to the social sciences:

(i) We can make use of some new developments in history, in particular, of the expanding discipline of *experimental archaeology*.³⁰ The objective of the latter is to reconstruct (to revive) former ways of life in a most authentic way: to “put on the shoes” of the old agents, *imitating* them.³¹ In a sense, this is a conservative program, the task of which is to revive past ways of life in their full form,—not through empathy, however, but through reconstructing its objects together with the practices that were carried out with their help.

(ii) From a more general perspective, we can try to identify a more or less constant (invariant) *human form of life* (as different from a “lion’s form of life”, etc.³²), which is the kernel of social life, or its inward side. It repeats itself practically unchanged—with *purposes, motives* and *habits* of the same form³³—in different ways of life. In the words of Hermann Lotze, the human form of life is the course of the world (*der Weltlauf*), “the same ever-green shoot from which colourful blossoms of history shoot up all the time in cycles”.³⁴

³⁰ Cf. James Mathieu (ed.), *Experimental Archaeology, Replicating Past Objects, Behaviors and Processes*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2002.

³¹ The “logic of imitation” was widely followed in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. In particular, the doll-models method for imitating car accidents used in a Paris court served him as an inspiration for his picture theory of language.

³² We deal with this concept under the influence of Wittgenstein. See on it Newton Garver, *This Complicated Form of Life*, Chicago: Open Court, 1994.

³³ These can be considered the universals of the human form of life.

³⁴ Hermann Lotze, *Microcosm*, vol. 2, 6. Auflage, 1923, Leipzig: Meiner (1st ed. 1858), p. 345.

Now, a specific task of our reistic social theory and the method based on it is to bring to light the universal movements of the human form of life, as expressed over the course of history in the attitude of humans to different, ever-changing social objects. Roughly, humans construct an endless series of social individuals, repairing and renewing them all the time, using quite different elements (planks) in so doing. One of the tasks of the reistic social philosopher is: (a) comparing the various planks (objects) and social individuals—old and new,—trying to set out how they were connected to the “tree of life” and also how they are connected to one specific element of the “tree” (for example, with our eternal desire for happiness); (b) comparing how we reach it in different stages of human history, etc.

(iii) Our method can also suggest how to direct our exploration when the task is searching for authentic social individuals. Examples: contemplating the “river of time”, we soon realize that we can play football without soccer-shoes—and that this is absolutely the same game as the one we play with soccer-shoes. We also see that it is possible to drive a car without seat-belts (as we did it in the 1960’s); or ride a motorcycle without a helmet, etc. In this way we seek to find out if this or that is an object essential for a social construction (individual) or is just its “ornament”. In other words, our objective is to bring to light the “substance” of the social construction (individual).

By way of concluding this section, we shall suggest another general model that can serve both for overcoming progressivism in the humanities and for a better understanding of past events. More especially, we assume that our approach can also help us to see social objects of the past, documented in memories, narratives, old movies, old pictures, etc. as complex objects which have two sides: one quite contemporary, up-to-date, and another old one which we, or the generations before us, resolutely abandoned some time ago. More importantly, the two sides of these past objects are directly connected (topologically) with one another: they stick tightly together, and that is precisely what makes old social objects completely transparent and so understandable to the observers of every new generation.

9. Epilogue

The ontology we presented in this paper is rather programmatic and so incomplete. This explains why our analysis is not comprehensive and poor in detail. For example, we have said practically nothing about social relations (we do not deny them but simply consider them secondary in respect to social objects), and hardly anything about social events (instead, we suggested analysis of changes and processes). Furthermore, our reistic social theory does not follow reism in the form in which its founding father, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, developed it. We simply used the general idea of reism in order to better articulate our own idiosyncratic social theory. Be that as it may, we hope that our approach can help us to better understand the multiplicity of social life, including its past forms in their full scope.

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