

# BOOK REVIEW

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## Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality

Edited by FABRICE CORREIA and BENJAMIN SCHNIEDER

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. viii + 312 pp. £55.00

Recent literature has seen a flurry of renewed interest in the nature, varieties and broad philosophical applications of *metaphysical grounding* and its interactions with other explanatory notions in metaphysics. This edited collection – the first of its kind – brings together previously unpublished essays by some of the most prominent and talented philosophers working on these topics. I strongly recommend it: several contributions (particularly by Fine, Daly, Schaffer and Koslicki) have already reached ‘essential reading’ status, whereas the remainder are rich with insights that press recent literature further in ways that deserve careful study.

Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder’s ‘Grounding: An Opinionated Introduction’ consists of a selective historical introduction (focusing on Plato’s ‘*Euthyphro* contrast’, the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the rationalist tradition and Bolzano’s rich, prescient work), a substantial topical survey (focusing on the regimentation of grounding statements, the logic of grounding, its relationships to explanation, essence, ontological dependence, reduction and truthmaking) and a summary of the remaining contributions. This is an excellent text for those dipping their toe into this field; seasoned veterans will find it useful as well.

Kit Fine’s ‘Guide to Ground’, selected by *The Philosophers Annual* as one of the 10 best articles published in 2012, is a major work. Stepping beyond the framework outlined in his seminal ‘The Question of Realism’ (2001), it contains insightful discussions of the kinds of grounding and their roles in philosophical theorizing, their logical interactions with quantification, lambda abstraction and the truth-functional connectives and criticism of recent trends connecting grounding in various ways to essence and truthmaking. It also contains a brief but useful overview of his ‘factualist semantics’: a version of situation semantics central to Fine’s recent groundbreaking work on counterfactuals, intuitionistic logic, partial content and the determinable/determinate distinction (among other topics).

Chris Daly’s ‘Scepticism About Grounding’ guides us through various sceptical reactions to those who take ‘ground’ and closed related vocabulary (like ‘fundamental’) as reductively unanalysable. Daly claims that the most promising sceptical strategy is to claim that this vocabulary is *unintelligible* (rather than merely explanatorily vacuous, epistemically opaque or replaceable with more anodyne notions). After arguing that appeals to one’s ‘philosophic conscience’ need not require any general unintelligibility test in order to be dialectically effective, Daly argues that the content of ‘ground’ cannot be adequately communicated by specifying its logical properties,

tracing its essential connections or exemplifying it with paradigmatic cases or in theoretical applications.

Paul Audi's 'A Clarification and Defense of the Notion of Grounding' serves as both a rebuttal to sceptics such as Daly and Hofweber (2009), and an outline of his positive views (see Audi 2012). Audi argues that a relation of 'non-causal determination' must be posited in order to underwrite the correctness of certain non-causal explanations, and that notions of explanation as they are familiarly understood help to pin down the content of grounding statements. He then defends the claim that grounding relations require essential connections between the properties they involve, compares 'worldly' versus 'conceptual' conceptions of the facts that grounding relates, argues that a fact neither 'reduces to' nor is 'nothing over and above' its grounds (and *vice versa*) and briefly sketches how claims about grounding could be subject to empirical (dis)confirmation.

Jonathan Schaffer's 'Grounding, Transitivity, and Contrastivity' presents putative counterexamples to the common assumption that partial grounding is transitive. To pick one: even if the fact that the set  $S = \{a, b, c\}$  has  $c$  as a member helps to ground that  $S$  has exactly *three* members, which in turn helps to ground that it has *finitely many*, Schaffer argues that  $S$ 's having  $c$  as a member would not thereby help to ground that it has *finitely many*: ' $S$  would be finite either way, with or without  $c$  as a member' (128). Schaffer's examples have faced strong criticism,<sup>1</sup> but his resolution of them – treating partial grounding as a quaternary relation between a fact and its putative partial ground, plus a pair of contextually supplied *non-obtaining alternatives* to these two facts – is interesting in its own right, bridging the discussions of grounding with the extensive literature modelling contrastive focus in causal explanation with structural equation models.

Michael Della Rocca's 'Violations of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (in Leibniz and Spinoza)' draws out a tension between the PSR, Leibniz's denial of ungrounded relations and his commitment to an ungrounded causal relationship between God and finite substances and between a substance and its states. Della Rocca's discussion of some Spinozistic solutions – which brings in (i) substance monism and (ii) the thesis that existence can come in degrees, both of which have re-emerged as hot topics over the past decade – will be of interest to both historians and contemporary metaphysicians.

J. Robert G. Williams's 'Requirements on Reality' sets out to reconcile radically minimal ontologies (e.g. the nominalist's and the mereological nihilist's) with 'Moorean' truths they seem to contradict by distinguishing between the *apparent* ontological commitments of a truth like 'There are an even number of chairs in the room' and what is required to exist *in reality* for it to be true. Although this strategy is commonplace, Williams's framework is a unique alternative both to standard 'representational' implementations (since it is designed to be an 'autonomous' story about what truth requires of reality, not about the target discourse's underlying syntax or semantics) and to the 'stratified metaphysics' of grounding enthusiasts (which insists on the full-blown reality of commonsense ontology while maintaining its derivativeness).<sup>2</sup>

1 See Litland (2013) and Raven (2013).

2 See Williams (2010).

Kathrin Koslicki's 'Varieties of Ontological Dependence' is a penetrating study of accounts of ontological dependence which employ Fine's neo-Aristotelian notion of a thing's essence. Along with illuminating discussions of the constituent/consequential essence distinction and the essence/real definition distinction, Koslicki argues that such accounts are insufficiently fine-grained to distinguish various *ways* in which a thing might be ontologically dependent, in particular by way of *constituency* (i.e. when constituents of a thing's essence are also constituents in the thing itself, as with a set and its members) and by way of *abstraction* (i.e. when a thing 'corresponds' to an isolated feature of a second thing the first is essentially connected to, as with a hole and its material host).

E.J. Lowe's 'Asymmetrical Dependence in Individuation' develops an argument against any kind of 'structuralist' ontology that maintains that for every entity,  $x$ , of a certain kind  $K$ , every other entity that is a  $K$  serves as one of its 'individuators' – the entities that together *make*  $x$  which  $K$  it is. Such a scenario, according to Lowe, is 'viciously circular [...] unless it is *already* determined which  $K$  one of them is, this  $K$  cannot fix the identity of [any] other' (228–9). A potential problem with Lowe's argument is that he assumes that this kind of 'identity dependence' is to be understood in terms of an asymmetric explanatory relation such as grounding, which Fine explicitly argues against in his contribution. Moreover, Fine and others have elsewhere developed accounts of identity dependence that allows for things of a kind to be 'simultaneously defined' (1995, §III).<sup>3</sup>

Jody Azzouni's 'Simple Metaphysics' and 'Ontological Dependence', like Williams's contribution, attempts to reconcile an austere ontology bereft of numbers, fictional characters, holes, events and such with a non-revisionary take on Moorean truths that seem indispensably committed to their existence. After arguing that noun phrases and quantifiers have ontologically non-committal uses in ordinary language, Azzouni argues that things like Mickey Mouse do not meet the 'independence criterion' for existence: the truth of statements about him are non-causally explicable in terms of how *other* objects are, while the indispensability of expressions that appear to refer to, describe and quantify depends merely on features of our psychological and linguistic processes.

David Liggins's 'Truth-makers and Dependence' purports to bring both good news and bad news for truthmaker theory: for Liggins, the thesis that for at least some true non-existential proposition, there is a thing whose existence non-causally explains why it is true. The good news, according to Liggins, is that one can overcome Schnieder's (2006) challenge to truthmaker theory – which relies on the premise that concepts employed in the explanans of the relevant kind of non-causal explanation must be less complex than those employed by the explanandum – by arguing that not all non-causal explanations satisfy this conceptual constraint. But the bad news is that frameworks that treat the relevant kind of non-causal explanation as a relation between facts, or as expressible with a sentential operator (options discussed in some detail in Correia and Schnieder's introduction), can accommodate the dependence of truth on reality with more systematicity than, and without the troublesome ontology of, the truthmaker theorist.

3 See Wolff (2012) and McKenzie (forthcoming) for illuminating discussion of this issue in the context of debates over structuralist accounts of fundamental physics.

Stephen Barker's 'Expressivism About Making and Truth-making' develops a provocative account of the cognitive activities that give rise to non-causal 'makes true' and 'makes the case' discourse: one that is expressivist in character, yet allows for this discourse to be truth-apt, about the objective world and conceptually primitive. According to Barker, when one states that  $[q]$ ,  $[r]$ , etc. make  $[p]$  the case (where ' $[p]$ ' refers to the fact that  $p$ ), one expresses a commitment to a certain kind of *derivation* of the statement ' $p$ ': (i) one involving only introduction rules (albeit with the exception of elimination rules applied within the scope of a subderivation that proceeds by *reductio*) and (ii) one that makes essential use of ' $q$ ', ' $r$ ', etc. Barker's proposal suggests interesting and underexplored connections with active work in the philosophy of science on how explanatory discourse involves taking attitudes towards bits of information – 'causal recipes'; as Gasking (1955) calls them – that are potentially relevant to manipulation, intervention and control.

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