

WILSON AGAINST GROUND

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Ground seminar

1. ground versus Ground

Wilson is fine with grounding, and against Grounding:

The relation of Grounding, understood as being the target of the idioms of dependence, is supposed to be distinct from other relations, including modal/correlational relations, causal relations, and—importantly—the metaphysically specific relations (e.g., type and token identity, functional realization, the part-whole relation, and the determinable-determinate relation) often in play in the target contexts, which I’ll sometimes refer to as (small-‘g’) ‘grounding’ relations. (Wilson, 2013, p. 1)

2. Emergence

The stated job of Ground is to characterize “metaphysical structure”, but even if we help ourselves to Ground, we *still* don’t have enough to characterize metaphysical structure in connection with emergence:

Consider again the case of robustly emergent mental states, according to which mental states are fundamental but depend, perhaps with metaphysical necessity, on physical states. Since robustly emergent mental states are fundamental, they are not Grounded in physical states. But according to the robust emergentist, emergent mental states are nonetheless dependent on physical states. Exactly how is a matter of further commitments, but there is nothing to prevent this dependence from being of the metaphysical variety, even if robustly emergent states do not completely metaphysically depend on physical goings-on. The holding of this sort of interesting relation would, presumably, be an important fact about the structure of reality, but it is one that cannot be characterized by appeal to Grounding alone, for Grounding—at least as presented as making sense of “in virtue of” idioms and the like—conflates fundamentality and absence of dependence. Grounding, on its own, cannot distinguish between dependent and independent fundamental goings-on, and so is unable to characterize or illuminate metaphysical structure. (Wilson, 2013, p. 7)

3. The problem of metaphysical underdetermination

...philosophers almost never make general grounding claims without having some specific grounding relation(s) in mind” (Wilson, 2013, p. 10)

The concern is that if philosophers always accept some specific view about how A Grounds B , then their additional claim that A Grounds B won't have any distinctive theoretical role to play. Ground is epiphenomenal.

4. ground versus Ground again

Talking about specific relations (which may casually be categorized as grounding relations) is unproblematic for Wilson. Putting heavy weight on the notion of 'a grounding relation' is not, since it's in the same boat as the notion of Grounding. Indeed, one can arguably define Grounding in terms of it:

Definition of Ground A Grounds $B =_{df}$ A bears some grounding relation to B

5. Open question of Ground in cases of grounding

Claim: Grounding is needed to supply the direction of dependence in cases of particular grounding relations. E.g. is a monist like Schaffer right?

Wilson's reply: i) we should understand the dispute between Schaffer and pluralists as being about whether wholes or parts are *fundamental*, and ii) fundamentality should *not* be understood as being unGrounded, but rather should be taken as primitive.

Which entities are in the fundamental base is primitive; this primitive specification then fixes the direction of priority (assuming there is one, as there may not be in cases of self- or mutual grounding) associated with a given specific small-g grounding relation as applied to entities in the base...

Let me say this again. On the positive, theoretically neutral approach, which entities are fundamental is ultimately a primitive matter...the direction of priority operative in applications of the specific metaphysical relations is fixed by this primitive specification. (Wilson, 2013, p. 18)

The quotation suggests:

Definition of priority x is prior to y iff i) x bears some grounding relation to y , and ii) x is in the “active position” of that grounding relation when so doing, where the active position of a relation is that position of the relation occupied by some fundamental entity

But this makes essential use of (an undirectional notion of) ‘a grounding relation’.

6. The need for ground

Ground is useful for:

1. Stating sweeping metaphysical doctrines like physicalism (which are neutral on *how* the grounding works)
2. Such sweeping doctrines are important epistemically, even if they’re in a sense superficial metaphysically
3. Stating constraints on the notion of fundamentality (such as “The fundamental facts ground all other facts”) which play a crucial role in the epistemology of fundamentality

...it follows from some entities’ being fundamental at a world that these entities, individually or together, provide a ground—*nota bene*: in one or other specific “small-g” fashion, not by reference to a distinctive relation of Grounding—for all the other goings-on at the world. (Wilson, 2013, p. 18)

References

Wilson, Jessica (2013). “No Work for a Theory of Grounding.” MS. Available at <http://individual.utoronto.ca/jmwilson/NWfaTG.doc>.