

POSTMODAL METAPHYSICS

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Structuralism seminar

1. Conceptual tools in metaphysics

“Tools of metaphysics”: concepts for framing metaphysical issues. They structure metaphysical discourse.

Problem	Era	Tools	Example issue
Mind-body	50s–60s	conceptual	Analysis of mental concepts
Mind-body	70–90s	modal	Mind-body supervenience
Mind-body	now	postmodal	Are mental properties fundamental?
Personal identity	50s–60s	conceptual	Strawson, concept of personhood
Personal identity	70–90s	modal	Possible to survive teletransporter?
Personal identity	now	postmodal	Fine, grounds for personal identity

The preferred tools...

- ...change over time
- ...affect the formulation of philosophical questions
- ...affect the methodology for answering philosophical questions

2. Conceptual analysis

3. Ontology

One way to view Quine’s “On What There Is” is as advocating for ontological tools, specifically, those of first-order predicate logic.

Questions stated in those terms are better in various ways (maybe: clearer, or more tractable, or more objective, etc.)

Led to distinctive methodology: paraphrase, and integration with scientific theory:

Our acceptance of an ontology is, I think, similar in principle to our acceptance of a scientific theory, say a system of physics: we adopt, at least insofar as we are reasonable, the simplest conceptual scheme into which the disordered fragments of raw experience can be fitted and arranged. Our ontology is determined once we have fixed upon the over-all conceptual scheme which is to accommodate science in the broadest sense; and the considerations which determine a reasonable construction of any part of that conceptual scheme, e.g. the biological or the physical part, are not different in kind from the considerations which determine a reasonable construction of the whole. (Quine, 1948, pp. 35–36)

4. Modality

Central modal concepts:

“It is *necessarily* the case that” (or “necessarily”, or “ \square ”)

“It is *possibly* the case that” (or “possibly”, or “ \diamond ”)

Examples:

Necessarily, if x remembers doing what y did then $x = y$

Possibly, someone in physical state P is not in pain

\square and \diamond are “duals”:

Necessarily- A iff: it’s not the case that it’s possible that not- A

$$(\square A \leftrightarrow \sim \diamond \sim A)$$

Possibly- A iff: it’s not the case that it’s necessary that not- A

$$(\diamond A \leftrightarrow \sim \square \sim A)$$

Possible worlds: a complete and possible scenario—a completely specific way things could be. Related to possibility and necessity thus:

Possibly- A iff: in at least one possible world, A

Necessarily- A iff: in all possible worlds, A

There are different “strengths” of possibility (and thus of necessity and possible worlds): logical possibility, nomic possibility, etc.

Metaphysical possibility, necessity, and possible worlds have been employed as a key philosophical tool, especially in the 70s–90s. Examples:

- Standard form of The Claim: $\Box\forall x\dots$ (or $\Box\forall x\Box\dots$).
- Supervenience
- Kripke-to-Chalmers arc of the mind-body problem
- Investigation into questions raised by the modal framework: *de re* modality: actualism, necessitism, modal paradoxes, etc.
- Questions about the nature of necessity itself (though actually, these weren’t stated using modal tools!)

5. Postmodal concepts

Theme: a purely modal approach is too “crude”, and is unable to raise certain important “hyperintensional” questions. To raise them, we need new conceptual tools that can’t be defined modally.

6. Lewis’s natural properties

“Abundant” properties: sets of possible objects. “Sparse properties”: properties that are *natural*:

Sharing of [the perfectly natural properties] makes for qualitative similarity, they carve at the joints, they are intrinsic, they are highly specific, the sets of their instances are *ipso facto* not entirely miscellaneous, there are only just enough of them to characterise things completely and without redundancy.

Physics has its short list of ‘fundamental physical properties’: the charges and masses of particles, also their so-called ‘spins’ and ‘colours’ and ‘flavours’, and maybe a few more that have yet to be discovered... What physics has undertaken... is an inventory of the [perfectly natural properties] of this-worldly things. (Lewis, 1986, p. 60).

For as I bear [the distinction between natural and nonnatural properties] in mind considering various topics in philosophy, I notice time and again that it offers solutions to my problems. (Lewis, 1983, p. 343)

What “problems” does naturalness help with?

- similarity
- characterizing materialism
- reference magnetism
- goal of (realistic) physics: discovering the most fundamental properties

7. Fundamental concepts

“Fundamental concepts” (a generalization of naturalness): the concepts that “carve at the joints”, the most basic building blocks of reality, which give the world’s distinguished structure (Sider, 2011)

- Not just properties or relations (e.g., maybe \forall or \square)
- Fundamentality isn’t really a matter of concepts (Sider, 2011, section 6.3)
- Fundamental concepts vs fundamental truths/facts

8. Fine on essence

Modal definition of essence: it’s essential to x that x is F iff x is necessarily F (or: it’s necessary that if x exists then x is F)

Fine’s counterexamples: Socrates is necessarily such that he is a member of {Socrates}, but it isn’t essential to Socrates that he be an element of {Socrates}. Socrates is necessarily such that $2 + 2 = 4$, but the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$ isn’t part of Socrates’s essence—part of *what it is* to be Socrates.

Fine’s regimentation:

$\square_{x_1, x_2, \dots} A$ (“ A holds in virtue of the natures of entities x_1, x_2, \dots ”)

The modal criterion “let us down”, says Fine, because modality is “insensitive to source”.

9. More on coarse-grainedness

Problems with stating physicalism as the view that all facts supervene on the physical:

- God's existence, or the existence of numbers, wouldn't violate physicalism.
- Given the "Spinozistic" view that all truths are necessary, physicalism would become trivially true.
- (Compare also the Euthyphro problem)

10. Ground

We say that one class of facts *depends upon* or is *grounded in* another. We say that a thing possesses one property *in virtue of* possessing another, or that one proposition *makes* another true. (Rosen, 2010, p. 109)

... in addition to scientific or causal explanation, there may be a distinctive kind of metaphysical explanation, in which explanans and explanandum are connected, not through some sort of causal mechanism, but through some form of constitutive determination. (Fine, 2012, p. 1)

These idioms ['ground', 'in-virtue-of', etc.] are common, as we shall see, but they are not part of anyone's official vocabulary. The general tendency is to admit them for heuristic purposes, where the aim is to point the reader's nose in the direction of some philosophical thesis, but then to suppress them in favor of other, allegedly more hygienic formulations when the time comes to say exactly what we mean. The thought is apparently widespread that while these ubiquitous idioms are sometimes convenient, they are ultimately too 'unclear', or too 'confused', or perhaps simply too exotic to figure in our first-class philosophical vocabulary. (Rosen, 2010, p. 109)

Typical examples of claims by fans of grounding:

A modal statement of naturalism in ethics, as the view that (purely) moral facts supervene on nonmoral facts, is inadequate since even nonnaturalists think that. Naturalism must be understood as the view that moral facts are grounded in the nonmoral facts.

The fact that a set exists is grounded in the fact that its members exist. But not the other way around, even though it's necessarily true that if a set exists then its members do.

The fact that P grounds the fact that $P \wedge P$, but not the other way around, even though it's necessarily true that P iff $P \wedge P$.

11. Groundology

(See, e.g., Fine (2012))

11.1 Regimentation and relata

Predicate view: grounding is a relation between facts, or propositions, or sentences; thus the locution ' \Rightarrow ' for making grounding claims is a predicate:

$$S \Rightarrow G$$

(where ' S ' and ' G ' are names of facts or propositions or sentences).

Operator view: grounding doesn't relate any entities at all; " \Rightarrow " is a sentence operator:

$$\text{Snow is white} \Rightarrow \text{Snow is white or grass is blue}$$

("Snow is white or grass is blue because snow is white")

It's normally assumed that ground takes multiple arguments on the left:

$$F_1, F_2 \dots \Rightarrow G$$

This says that $F_1, F_2 \dots$ together collectively ground G .

11.2 Entity-grounding

Schaffer (2009): grounding relates objects of any sort, including particular entities.

$x_1 \dots x_n$ entity-ground y iff the *existence of* (or: the existence and nature of) $x_1 \dots x_n$ brings about the existence of (or: the existence and nature of) y .

Defining entity-grounding in terms of \Rightarrow :

$x_1 \dots$ entity-ground y iff: x_1, \dots exist $\Rightarrow y$ exists

Defining \Rightarrow in terms of entity-grounding, using worldly facts:

$A_1 \dots \Rightarrow B$ iff: $[A_1], \dots$ entity-ground $[B]$

(“ $[A]$ ” is the worldly fact that A —an entity that exists if and only if A .)

It’s difficult to articulate the following view in terms of entity-grounding: “Facts aren’t not rock bottom. E.g., the fact that snow is white exists because snow is white.” E.g., this doesn’t do it:

[Snow is white] entity-grounds [[the fact that snow is white] exists]

But given non-entity grounding and the operator view, it’s straightforward:

Snow is white \Rightarrow [Snow is white] exists

Thus the entity-grounding approach seems committed to facts having a central place in fundamental metaphysics. Which is perhaps unsurprising, since centrality of facts normally goes hand-in-hand with entity-centric metaphysics, which in turn requires facts to play a robust role.

11.3 Full and partial ground

$F_1, F_2 \dots \Rightarrow G$: *full* ground; $F_1, F_2 \dots$ account for G all on their own

$F_1 \rightsquigarrow G$: *partial* ground; F partly accounts for G

A natural definition of partial in terms of full ground:

$F \rightsquigarrow G =_{\text{df}}$ there exist $F_1, F_2 \dots$ such that $F, F_1, F_2 \dots \Rightarrow G$

11.4 Principles governing ground

$$\frac{A \rightsquigarrow B \quad B \rightsquigarrow C}{A \rightsquigarrow C} \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{transitivity} \\ (\rightsquigarrow) \end{array}$$

$$\frac{A \Rightarrow B \quad B \Rightarrow C}{A \Rightarrow C} \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{transitivity} \\ (\Rightarrow) \end{array}$$

not: $A \rightsquigarrow A$ irreflexivity

\rightsquigarrow is “well-founded”

$$\frac{A \rightsquigarrow B \quad A \Rightarrow B}{A \wedge B} \quad \text{Factivity}$$

$$\frac{A \Rightarrow B}{\Box(A \rightarrow B)} \quad \text{Entailment}$$

$$\frac{A \wedge B}{A, B \Rightarrow A \wedge B} \quad \text{Conjunction}$$

$$\frac{A}{A \Rightarrow A \vee B} \quad \text{Disjunction}$$

$$\frac{A[n]}{A[n] \Rightarrow \exists x A[x]} \quad \text{Existentials}$$

11.5 Fundamentality

11.6 Wilson (2014), and the status of ground

We don’t just say “the mental grounds the physical” and leave it at that. That’s not a view! You need to go on and say *how* the mental grounds the physical.

Hence it is that naturalists almost never rest with the schematically expressed locutions of metaphysical dependence, but rather go on to stake out different positions concerning how, exactly, the normative or other goings-on metaphysically depend on the naturalistic ones.

“Little-g grounding relations” (which are fine) versus “big-G grounding”, which isn’t.

Against fundamental facts of grounding:

Purity No fundamental fact involves any nonfundamental concepts

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