Entity Grounding and Truthmaking

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Ground seminar

"*x* grounds *y*", where *x* and *y* are entities of any category. Examples (Schaffer, 2009, p. 375):

- Plato's Euthyphro dilemma   (facts—or propositions)
- an entity and its singleton   (individuals)
- an object and its holes   (individuals)
- natural features and moral features   (properties)
- truthmakers and truths   (individuals/propositions)

1. Defining entity grounding in terms of fact grounding

> [grounding is] the metaphysical notion on which one entity depends on another for its nature and existence… (Schaffer, 2010, p. 345)

x individual-grounds *y* $=_{df}$ *x*'s nature N_x and *y*'s nature N_y are such that *y* exists and has nature N_y because *x* exists and has nature N_x

f_1 feature-grounds f_2 $=_{df}$ any *x* that has both f_1 and f_2 has f_2 because it has f_1

x makes-true $\langle \phi \rangle$ $=_{df}$ ϕ, and ϕ because *x* exists

- The five cases seem to involve, respectively: fact-grounding, individual grounding, individual grounding, feature-grounding, and truth-making

- Given the definitions, we can account for all five with just fact-grounding

- Also, the cases don't *seem* to involve the same grounding relation. But maybe that's just when they're viewed through the lens of fact-grounding?

2. Collapsing positions

- "natural features ground moral features"—does it mean that moral features are *instantiated* because natural features are, or that moral features *exist because* natural features exist?

- "the proposition *p* grounds the proposition *p*∨*q*"—does it mean that *p*∨*q* is *true* because *p* is true, or that *p*∨*q* *exists* because *p* exists?

3. Concrete states of affairs

To solve the collapse problem, we could pick one "reading" of grounding claims:

Existential reading x Schaffer-grounds y if and only if y exists and has the nature it does because x exists and has the nature it does

…and then use certain entities—contingent states of affairs—to uncollapse the positions:

Definition ϕ Schaffer-because $\psi =_{\text{df}}$ the state of affairs that ψ Schaffer-grounds the state of affairs that ϕ

- Natural features may not Schaffer-ground moral features; but whenever an object instantiates a natural feature and a moral feature, the state of affairs that the object instantiates the natural feature Schaffer-grounds the state of affairs that the object instantiates the moral feature

- The proposition that snow is white may not ground the proposition that either snow is white or snow is purple; but the state of affairs that snow is white Schaffer-grounds the state of affairs that either snow is white or snow is purple.

3.1 Required assumptions about states of affairs

They exist.

They're fundamental. (In the sense of not being Schaffer-grounded in anything).

They can be logically complex.

They're unstructured. (Despite being contingent.) Disjuncts hold Schaffer-because of their instances (assume). So the state of affairs that Ted is a philosopher Schaffer-grounds the state of affairs that either Ted is a philosopher or Obama is president. Schaffer-grounding implies necessitation (assume); so necessarily, if the state of affairs that Ted is a philosopher exists then the state of affairs that either Ted is a philosopher or Obama is president exists. Possibly, Ted is a philosopher while Obama doesn't exist; so, possibly, the state of affairs that either Ted is a philosopher or Obama is president exists even though Obama doesn't exist.

4. Entity-grounding and explanation

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- • There exists a city

- •

- • There exist such-and-such particles in thus-and-so-states
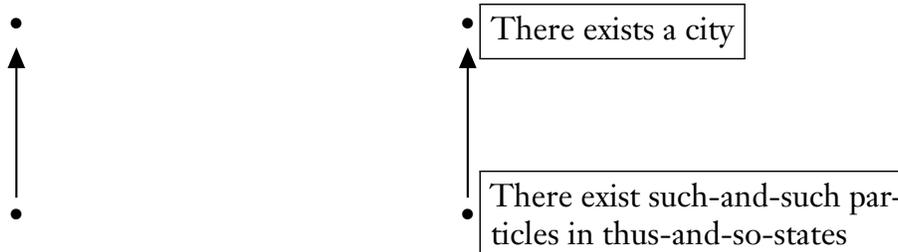
- **Moral:** Schaffer-grounding doesn't suffice on its own for metaphysical explanation; you also need the "thought-bubbles" on the states of affairs

- Schaffer-grounding may yet be part of metaphysical explanation.

- (Note that the remaining element—the assignment of the "thought-bubbles"—requires something like essence or fact-grounding.)

5. Distancing ground from explanation

A Schafferian response to the above:

1. give up on contingent states of affairs

2. distinguish ground from explanation

3. claim that although metaphysical explanation is underwritten by ground, the relationship between the two is complex (compare the relationship between cause and causal explanation)

Replies to the concerns:

- The response considered above to the collapse problem (which involved the definition of 'Schaffer-because') was based on the misguided assumption that a simple, algorithmic account of metaphysical explanation in terms of Schaffer-ground is needed.

- The worry that Schaffer-ground is unexplanatory is based on the mistaken identification of ground with explanation.

Some points:

- Without the contingent states of affairs, there won't be enough Schaffer-grounding facts to contribute to metaphysical explanations.

- Causation isn't *that* distant from causal explanation.

- Since the proposed view in effect takes metaphysical explanation as conceptually primitive, it's a version of Fine's view, with the added claim that the Fine-grounds of Fine-grounding involve, in part, at an intermediate level, a relation of Schaffer-grounding.

6. Truthmaking

Truthmaker principle For every true proposition p there exists some x such that x makes p true

7. Rodriguez-Pereyra's argument

1. All true propositions are true in virtue of reality

2. If 1 then all true propositions are true in virtue of entities

3. Therefore, all true propositions are true in virtue of entities

Argument for 1: "truth is not primitive".

Argument for 2: you might think to deny 2 by saying:

> …[the claim that] truth is grounded in and determined by reality is compatible with truth's being grounded in *how* things are, not in *whether* things are…. (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2005, p. 23)

But against this:

> Suppose the proposition that the rose is red is made true by how the rose is. But the rose is not only red: it is also light, soft, fragrant, long, thin, etc. This is how the rose is. But if being how it is is what makes the proposition that the rose is red true, being how it is, is also what makes the proposition that the rose is light true, the proposition that the rose is fragrant true, and so on. (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2005, p. 23)

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You might reply:

> It might be thought that one could say that the proposition that the rose is red is true because the rose instantiates the property of being red, while the proposition that the rose is light is true because the rose instantiates the property of being light. (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2005, p. 24)

But:

> But this only helps if for the rose to instantiate the property of *being red* is not for it to instantiate the property of *being light*. And this should not mean that there is an entity, the-rose-instantiating-*being-red*, distinct from another entity, the-rose-instantiating-*being-light*. For that means reifying how things are. And reifying how things are is admitting truthmakers.
>
> But if it does not mean that, what does it mean? (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2005, p. 24)

Against R-P's reply: his opponent's position is this:

> ⟨The rose is red⟩ is true because the rose is red
>
> Not: ⟨The rose is red⟩ is true because the rose is light

Why do we need two distinct entities, *the rose's being red* and *the rose's being light*? What's wrong with the opponent's position as stated?

Also, if one puts the opponent's position in terms of propositional grounding rather than the 'because' operator, one can say:

> ⟨The rose is red⟩ grounds ⟨⟨The rose is red⟩ is true⟩
>
> ⟨The rose is light⟩ does not ground ⟨⟨The rose is red⟩ is true⟩
>
> ⟨The rose is red⟩ ≠ ⟨The rose is light⟩

References

Rodriguez-Pereyra, Gonzalo (2005). "Why Truthmakers?" In Helen Beebee and Julian Dodd (eds.), *Truthmakers: The Contemporary Debate*, 17–31. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Schaffer, Jonathan (2009). "On What Grounds What." In David J. Chalmers, David Manley and Ryan Wasserman (eds.), *Metametaphysics*, 347–83. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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