

FINE'S GROUND AND REALITY

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Metaphysical Structure

1. Two dimensions of variation

I've been defending one sort of "realism about structure", but there are others, which take different notions as primitive: truthmaking, in virtue of/ground, etc. Such notions differ along two axes: comparative vs noncomparative; propositional vs subpropositional.

- 'natural': noncomparative, subpropositional
- 'structural': noncomparative, subpropositional
- 'more-natural-than': comparative, subpropositional
- Schaffer's 'ground': comparative, subpropositional
- Fine's 'ground': comparative, propositional
- Fine's 'real': noncomparative, propositional

2. Fine's notions: ground and reality

Fine (2001) introduces two notions: *reality* and *ground*. I want to consider the view that these are metaphysically basic. (Fine does *not* commit to this.)

ground " p_1, p_2, \dots grounds q ", or " ϕ because ψ_1, ψ_2, \dots ". When p grounds q then q holds *in virtue of* p 's holding; q 's holding is *nothing beyond* p 's holding.

reality " p is real", or "Really, ϕ ". A proposition is real if it describes reality as it is in itself, if it describes reality's intrinsic structure. If p is grounded in another proposition, that suggests but does not require that p is unreal.

factuality a factual proposition is one that is either real, or grounded in propositions that are real

3. First Finean view: grounding+reality

Objection: ‘ground’ violates purity. Put it in Finean terms:

1. if there exist cities because there exist ϕ s, then really: there exist cities because there exist ϕ s. (Finean analog of “ground is metaphysically basic”)
2. But no proposition about cities is real.

One could deny 1, but Melianism threatens. One could deny 2 and say that it’s only statements about cities *that do not involve ground* that are unreal. But why doesn’t the involvement of cityhood in propositions about ground pollute those propositions? (This is purity.)

The argument here has a larger moral: statements about the *relationship* between the fundamental and the nonfundamental are not fundamental. This threatens comparative accounts of structure (including truthmaking, modal conceptions, Lewisian relative naturalness, Dorr’s metaphysical analysis.)

4. Infinite descent

Point 1: my theory *is* committed to rejecting infinite ideological descent; but that should be rejected anyway (note that this does not preclude gunk.)

Point 2: an argument against grounding. On the one hand, one wants to say with Schaffer (Forthcoming) that there can be no infinite descents of ground: “Being would be infinitely deferred, never achieved.” On the other hand, it’s hard to reject them. Suppose also that distance is path-dependent; not a matter of a direct connection between points. Then, this line is 1m because of the lengths of its parts, and so on. Similarly, this line is continuous because it is made up of (continuously connected) continuous parts, and so on. Note:

- The argument doesn’t require infinite ideological descent
- And it doesn’t depend on gunky space (the facts about length and continuity are gunky, so to speak, even if the space is atomic)

5. Second Finean view: reality

I next want to consider dispensing with grounding, and speaking only of reality. Purity is no longer a problem (though we can no longer state completeness in terms of primitive ‘ground’.)

5.1 Explanation of fundamental truths

Propositional views (like the truth-in-reality view) cannot explain patterns in the fundamental sentences. Why is each member of the left group true, and each member of the right group false?:

e_1 is an electron	New York is a city
e_2 is an electron	Tokyo is a city
There exists an electron	There schmexists an electron
There exists a quark	There schmexists a quark

(where there schmexists an F iff the property of being an F is expressed by some predicate in some sentence of some book by Richard Feynman.)

5.2 Combinatorialism about fundamentality

Begin with the notion of a “Fundamental sentence”.

Fine: S is a fundamental sentence iff the proposition that S is real

Me: S is a fundamental sentence iff S is true and every primitive expression in S carves at the joints

Combinatorial principle of fundamentality If $S_1 \dots S_n$ are fundamental sentences, and S is any true sentence all of whose primitive expressions are drawn from $S_1 \dots S_n$, then S is a fundamental sentence as well.

My conception of “fundamental sentence” commits me to the combinatorial principle; Fine’s does not. This matters to, e.g., metaontology. Consider a very simple world with one electron, one proton, and nothing else except perhaps a fusion of the two. A certain kind of ontological deflationist wants to say:

- ‘There exists an electron’ is a fundamental sentence

- ‘It’s not the case that there exists something that is both an electron and a proton’ is a fundamental sentence
- ‘There exists something that is not a proton and not an electron’ is *not* a fundamental sentence (since whether it’s true depends on whether there exist mereological sums, which is not a substantive question)

But this combination is ruled out by combinatorialism.

References

Fine, Kit (2001). “The Question of Realism.” *Philosopher’s Imprint* 1: 1–30.

Schaffer, Jonathan (Forthcoming). “Monism: The Priority of the Whole.” *Philosophical Review* .