Intro to Ground

Ted Sider
Ground seminar

1. The idea of ground

> This essay is a plea for ideological toleration. Philosophers are right to be fussy about the words they use, especially in metaphysics where bad vocabulary has been a source of grief down through the ages. But they can sometimes be too fussy, dismissing as 'unintelligible' or 'obscure' certain forms of language that are perfectly meaningful by ordinary standards and which may be of some real use.
>
> So it is, I suggest, with certain idioms of metaphysical determination and dependence. 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. These idioms 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)

More-or-less equivalent phrases (where F_1 and F_2 are facts):

- F_1 *depends upon* F_2

- F_2 is *grounded in* F_1

- F_1 holds *in virtue of* P_2

- F_1 *makes* F_2 obtain

- F_2 obtains *because* F_1 obtains

2. Relata

Perhaps propositions, or sentences, or even no relata at all.

3. Examples

- "The fact that the ball is red and round obtains in virtue of the fact that it is red and the fact that it is round" (Fine, 2012, p. 37)

- "the particle is accelerating in virtue of increasing its velocity over time" (Fine, 2012, p. 39)

- "The dispositions of a thing are always grounded in its categorical features" (according to some) (Rosen, 2010, p. 110)

- "How do nonmoral properties give rise to moral ones, or normative ones more generally? How are the modal facts built out of the nonmodal ones?" Bennett (2013, chapter 1, p. 1)

- "[the debate] over the mind is not a dispute over whether mind or matter exists, but rather over whether mind is based in matter. The debate…over substantival space is not a dispute over whether there is space, but rather over whether space is grounded in its occupants. And, finally, [the debate] over monism is not a dispute over whether wholes or parts exist, but rather over which is prior. (Schaffer, 2009, p. 363)

4. Grounding and explanation

…a distinctive kind of metaphysical explanation, in which explanans and explanandum are connected, not through some sort of causal mechanism, but through some constitutive form of determination… Fine (2012, p. 37)

5. Necessitation, directionality

Ground implies necessitation If p grounds q then necessarily, if p is true then q is true

…there would appear to be something more than a modal connection [in cases of grounding]. For the modal connection can hold without the connection signified by 'in virtue of' or 'because'. It is necessary, for example, that if it is snowing then $2+2=4$ (simply because it is necessary that $2+2=4$), but the fact that $2+2=4$ does not obtain in virtue of the

fact that it is snowing; and it is necessary that if the ball is red and round then it is red but the fact that the ball is red does not obtain in virtue of its being red and round. In addition to the modal connection, there would also appear to be an explanatory or determinative connection—a movement, so to speak, from antecedent to consequent; and what is most distinctive about the in-virtue-of claims is this element of movement or determination. Fine (2012, p. 38)

6. Essence

Modal definition of essence It's essential to x that x is F iff it's necessarily true that (if x exists, then) x is F

But it's not part of the essence of Socrates that he be a member of {Socrates}.

7. Connection to the practice of metaphysics

7.1 Ground figures in the content of metaphysical claims

E.g. one might take materialism, the view that "reality is ultimately material" to be the view that all facts are either physical or are grounded in physical facts.

Another example: formulating metaphysical claims when certain key concepts have "deflationary" senses (Fine, 2001; Dreier, 2004). E.g., formulating "factualism" about ethics.

The distinction, first pass Factualism: there are ethical facts, and ethical statements have truth values. Nonfactualism: these claims aren't true.

The distinction, in Fine's terms Factualism: ethical facts are grounded in facts that hold in reality. Nonfactualism: that's not true.

Another example: articulating platonism about propositions, in the face of a deflationary sense in which propositions exist (Schiffer, 2003).

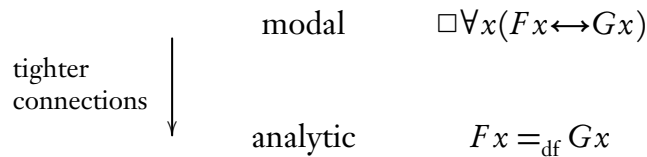### 7.2 Ground is relevant to the defense of metaphysical claims

For the anti-realist faces an explanatory challenge. If he wishes to deny the reality of the mental, for example, then he must explain or explain away

the appearance of the mental. It is likewise incumbent upon the realist, if he wishes to argue against his opponent, to show that this explanatory challenge cannot be met.
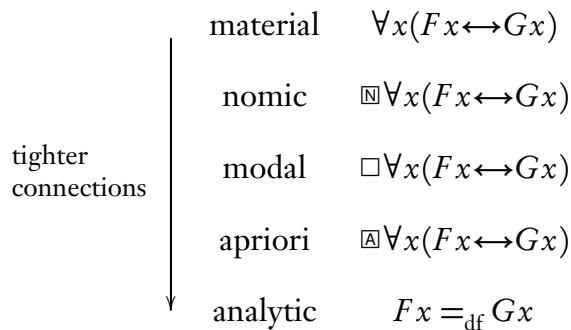
The question now is: how is this explanatory challenge to be construed? What is it to explain the appearance of a world with minds in terms of a mindless world or the appearance of a world with value in terms of a purely naturalistic world? My own view is that what is required is that we somehow *ground* all of the facts which appear to presuppose the reality of the mental or of value in terms of facts which do not presuppose their reality. Nothing less and nothing else will do. Fine (2012, p. 41)

8. The need for ground

A philosophical account of one concept in terms of another can relate the concepts using "connections" of various strengths. Simplest scheme:

$$\text{modal} \qquad \Box\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$$

tighter
connections

$$\text{analytic} \qquad Fx =_{\text{df}} Gx$$

A fuller scheme:

$$\text{material} \qquad \forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$$

$$\text{nomic} \qquad \boxed{\text{N}}\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$$

tighter
connections

$$\text{modal} \qquad \Box\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$$

$$\text{apriori} \qquad \boxed{\text{A}}\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$$

$$\text{analytic} \qquad Fx =_{\text{df}} Gx$$

Defenders of ground think even this scheme must be augmented:

tighter connections		
	material	$\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$
	nomic	$\boxed{N}\,\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$
	modal	$\Box\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$
	metaphysical	**??**
	apriori	$\boxed{A}\,\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$
	analytic	$Fx =_{\mathrm{df}} Gx$

It will not do, for example, to say that the physical is causally determinative of the mental, since that leaves open the possibility that the mental has a distinct reality over and above that of the physical. Nor will it do to require that there should be an analytic definition of the mental in terms of the physical, since that imposes far too great a burden on the anti-realist. Nor is it enough to require that the mental should modally supervene on the physical, since that still leaves open the possibility that the physical is itself ultimately to be understood in terms of the mental.

The history of analytic philosophy is littered with attempts to explain the special way in which one might attempt to "reduce" the reality of one thing to another. But I believe that it is only by embracing the concept of a ground as a metaphysical form of explanation in its own right that one can adequately explain how such a reduction should be understood. For we need a connection as strong as that of metaphysical necessity to exclude the possibility of a "gap" between the one thing and the other; and we need to impose a form of determination upon the modal connection if we are to have any general assurance that the reduction should go in one direction rather than another. Fine (2012, pp. 41–2)

Fine's assumptions:

Existence There are such things as metaphysical explanations

Necessitation is necessary In a metaphysical explanation, the explanans necessitates the explanandum

Necessitation not sufficient In some cases there is necessitation without metaphysical explanation

Analyticity and apriority not necessary In some cases there is metaphysical explanation without either analytic or apriori implication

In support of "Necessitation not sufficient", there are first examples:

- $2 + 2 = 4$ and *either snow is white or snow isn't white*; $P \wedge P$ and P.

- Spinoza; God's existence.

- Ethicists generally hold that the nonmoral necessitates the moral, even if they're not naturalists.

Second, there is the directionality issue that Fine emphasizes:

> "we need to impose a form of determination upon the modal connection if we are to have any general assurance that the reduction should go in one direction rather than another"

Attempted reply: P metaphysically explains Q iff P necessitates Q and Q doesn't necessitate P. But:
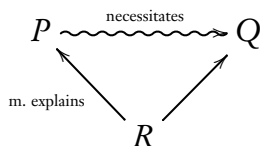
> It is for this reason that it is natural in such cases to say that the explanans or explanantia are *constitutive of* the explanandum, or that the explanandum's holding *consists in nothing more* than the obtaining of the explanans or explanantia. But these phrases have to be properly understood. It is not implied that the explanandum just *is* the explanans (indeed, in the case

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that there are a number of explanantia, it is clear that this requirement cannot be met). Nor need it be implied that the explanandum is unreal and must somehow give way to the explanantia. In certain cases, one might wish to draw these further conclusions. But all that is properly implied by the statement of (metaphysical) ground itself is that there is no stricter or fuller account of that in virtue of which the explandandum holds. If there is a gap between the grounds and what is grounded, then it is not an explanatory gap. Fine (2012, p. 39)

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