



P V Q

GROUNDING
&
METAPHYSICAL
EXPLANATION

WORK-IN-PROGRESS GROUP
SEMESTER 2, 2022–23

Work-in-Progress Group

Introduction

This is a work-in-progress group for philosophers interested in issues of grounding and metaphysical explanation. It is run by [Will Moorfoot](#) and [James Ross](#), of the University of Southampton. Will works on contingentist formulations of ground physicalism. James works on the relationship between grounding and causation.

Sessions will start at 1 pm (UK time) and be held on Microsoft Teams. See the [Termcard](#) for our current schedule and list of abstracts. Each session will last for approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes and consist of a 45-minute presentation followed by questions and discussion. An invite and handout (if available) will be sent out prior to the session. Like in [semester 1](#), there will be six presentations across the semester.

This group is particularly aimed at academics and postgraduate researchers. However, please do still contact us if you are interested in joining and do not meet these criteria (our contact details are below).

Presenting

You can register to join the group [here](#).

If you are interested in presenting, please send an abstract of no more than 500 words to [Will Moorfoot](#) (W.A.Moorfoot@soton.ac.uk) and [James Ross](#) (J.C.Ross@soton.ac.uk). Papers should be suitable for a 45-minute presentation (e.g., about 5000 words). Please give an indication of when you would be happy to present. Note, however, that our schedule for semester 2 is full.

We are happy to interpret the theme of grounding and metaphysical explanation broadly. However, we particularly welcome work in the following areas.

- Pure work on the metaphysics or logic of grounding and metaphysical explanation.
- Applications of grounding and metaphysical explanation to areas such as ethics, philosophy of mind, wider issues in metaphysics, philosophy of science, social ontology, and philosophy of mathematics.
- More historically-minded approaches.

Termcard

Wednesday 15th February

Tim Button

University College London

SPACE: A CASE STUDY IN THE (F)UTILITY OF GROUNDING

There are (at least) two good ways to think about space. On the *points-first* approach, space is made up of extensionless points; we obtain an (extended) region by collecting together a bunch of points; so the points ground the regions. On the *regions-first* approach space is made up of (extended) regions; we obtain an (extensionless) point by considering the ideal limit of a nested sequence of regions; so the regions ground the points. The points-first and the regions-first approach are exactly as good as each other. Specifically: they are categorically equivalent. Indeed, it's hard to see any difference between the two approaches, except as regards their claims about what grounds what. This suggests we should be dismissive of the grounding claims in this case; and probably elsewhere too.

Wednesday 1st March

Donnchadh O'Conaill

Université de Fribourg

GROUNDING AND THE UNITY OF FACTS

Grounding is often characterized as a relation between facts. In thinking of grounding in this way, we should take the ontology of facts seriously. To do so we can draw on work on facts in another branch of contemporary metaphysics, which focuses on the problem of unity (explaining why the constituents of a given fact are unified to form that fact).

I shall examine a specific proposal regarding this problem, that at least some facts are unified by other facts. I then suggest that the facts which unify another fact are its grounds and that for a fact to be grounded is for its constituents to be unified by other facts. I show how thinking of grounding as unifying helps to clarify in what sense grounding is a generative relation which is apt to underwrite certain metaphysical explanations.

Wednesday 15th March

Ralf Bader

Université de Fribourg

GROUNDING AND THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

The Euthyphro Dilemma is frequently used to illustrate metaphysical grounding. The biconditional “something is pious iff it is loved by the gods” can be read in two ways: 1. something is pious because it is loved by the gods, and 2. something is loved by the gods because it is pious. This paper argues that neither because-claim can plausibly be understood in terms of grounding and that important lessons can be learnt for reductionism from this fact.

Wednesday 29th March

Chris Oldfield

University of Cambridge

COMPOSITION PRECEDES GROUND

In recent years, contemporary philosophers and analytical metaphysicians have turned away from the ideology of mereological composition, and proceeded in terms of non-mereological grounding relations. Whether the relata of grounding relations are supposed to be “facts” or “things”, I show that it is a mistake to think that the turn to grounds represents a turn away from composition, because in each case, composition has a kind of priority.

In his 2010 essay, “Monism: Priority of the Whole”, Jonathan Schaffer introduced what he considered to be “the question of fundamental mereology” (QFM): which is the question of what are the basic actual concrete objects. This is the question of what is the ground of the mereological hierarchy of whole and part?

I show that Peter van Inwagen’s “special composition question” (SCQ) is more basic, general and fundamental than Schaffer’s, because the binary relation of basic dependence in QFM is *defined* in prejudicially singularist terms of Schaffer’s presumption of unrestricted *proper parthood*.

In his 2012 essay, “The Pure Logic of Ground”, Kit Fine suggested that facts about the *identity* of Socrates ground facts about the *equality* of Socrates. By introducing many plurally sorted logical distinctions between the identity and composition of Socrates and the *equality* and constitution of Socrates, I show that for Fine’s pure logic of ground to apply as Fine intends, we cannot do without some first and second order language for composition.

In conclusion I hope to have shown by example, the priority of composition, and reflect on the dialectical significance of Schaffer’s discussion of “the mereological existence gap” and “the mereological nature gap” arising from the conceivability of nihilist answers to SCQ in his influential 2017 essay, “The Ground Between the Gaps”.

Wednesday 26th April

Samuele Chilovi

University of California, Los Angeles

ANCHORING, GROUNDING, AND EXPLANATORY LAWS

Epstein presents a powerful and influential argument for the introduction of a novel relation of metaphysical determination he calls “anchoring” and, correlatively, against identifying anchoring with metaphysical grounding. The argument aims to establish this conclusion by showing that anchoring and grounding have different properties: anchoring “exports” whereas grounding does not, as it is “world-bound”. As a consequence, they have different extensions at different worlds, and so must be different relations, since they relate different things. In this paper, I provide a novel diagnosis of where the argument goes wrong. Contrary to common lore, I argue that anchoring may be a form of grounding even if all the argument’s premises are true. What Epstein’s argument does provide, however, is a compelling reason for thinking that social rules play no role in the metaphysical explanation of particular social facts.

Wednesday 10th May

Luca Gasparinetti, Niccolò Nanni, and Simone Salzano

University of Italian Switzerland

GROUNDING SPACETIME

It has been recently argued that “explanatory gaps are everywhere”. In the philosophy of spacetime, several philosophers are struggling with deep metaphysical problems, including the so-called “hard problem of spacetime”: how can we account for the “metaphysical explanatory gap” between the emergent spacetime, and the non-spatiotemporal structure postulated by quantum theories of gravity?

One way to shed light on this problem consists in finding a precise meaning to the notion of “emergence”. Philosophers of physics have thus far treated it as a placeholder for a relation whose nature has yet to be established. There have been several attempts to make sense of emergence by means of the familiar notions included in the metaphysicians’ toolbox, e.g., functional realization or mereological composition. Despite these efforts, the metaphysical gap remains unbridged. Though an account of spacetime emergence which relies on the idea of functional realization seems to be a promising one, we will follow Le Bihan, Baron, and argue that stating only that “spacetime is as spacetime does” is not enough to fully recover spacetime. After all, as Schaffer acutely points out, standard functional realization seems to lack the modal robustness necessary to prevent the emergence of spacetime from being a mere “cosmic coincidence”. Accordingly, we believe that the functional correlation is necessary but not sufficient to do this job. Something stronger is needed. We will therefore follow Schaffer’s recent proposal in the philosophy of mind and apply our own version of “ground functionalism” to the hard problem of spacetime. On our view the functional correlation between the non-spatiotemporal structures and the emergent spacetime is mediated by a metaphysical grounding principle which we call the “spacetime making principle”. We argue that the resulting novel view, *spacetime ground functionalism*, conserves the main insights of standard functionalism and provides it with the modal robustness needed to overcome the “cosmic coincidence” objection.

The talk is structured as follows. In the first part, we will look at the debate on spacetime emergence. In doing so, we will encounter evidence that there exists an “explanatory gap” lurking between the non-spatiotemporal structure postulated by theories of quantum gravity and the emergent spacetime. Then, we will argue that the presence of an explanatory gap is a symptom of an underlying metaphysical gap. In the second part, we will explore the possibility to close metaphysical gaps by postulating metaphysical grounding principles. We will look at pioneering work by Schaffer, who has applied this intuition to the infamous explanatory gap in philosophy of mind. More specifically, we will offer a critical assessment of Schaffer’s ground functionalism and look at its distinctive features. In the third part, we will apply a variant of ground functionalism to the “hard problem of spacetime”. In developing our view, we will look at the main competitors and argue that ground functionalism is a viable way to overcome many of their shortcomings. Lastly, we will offer replies to some possible objections.