

Contingent Explanation

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Philosophy is concerned with *Euthyphro questions*; Euthyphro questions ask for a specific kind of explanation, they are requests to ϕ some x , where

- ϕ is some explanatory relation such as account for, make intelligible, analyse, make conceptual room for, provide for the possibility of,
- x is some very general phenomena of the world: (the nature of things belonging to) very general metaphysical categories [particulars, properties, substances, tropes, events, states of affairs, agents, God, space, time] and their (essential) relations, (the nature of) important classes of properties [modal, aesthetic, normative, moral, epistemic, mental, quantitative, , colours, vectors,] (the nature of) a broad range of mental and bodily states [belief, desire, knowledge, expectation, hope, emotions, feelings, sensation, perception]

The question of contingentism is the question whether some such explanations may be contingent, i.e. whether some given answer to a philosophical why-questions may be appropriate under some, but only some metaphysically possible circumstance. This has to be distinguished from two different, albeit related questions:

- the question whether the explanans is necessarily or only contingently true;
- the question whether the explanation given is partial.

Examples: properties.

- the mental is grounded in the physical
- the normative is grounded in the non-normative
- the dispositional is grounded in the non-dispositional
- the legal is grounded in the social
- the moral is grounded in the non-moral
- the semantic is grounded in the social
- determinable properties are grounded in the determinate properties

Examples: particulars.

- wholes are grounded in their parts
- sets are grounded in their members
- holes are grounded in their hosts

Contingent explanations by things

Theses or explanations?

- Humphrey might have won. $\iff \exists x(x \text{ is a counterpart of Humphrey} \wedge x \text{ wins})$
- $A \subset B$ $\iff A$ is a part of B
- a is white $\iff \exists x(x \text{ is a whiteness trope} \wedge x \text{ inheres in } a)$
- a exists $\iff a$ is present
- a knows that p $\iff a$ has the true justified belief that p
- a is free in doing ϕ $\iff a$ could have done otherwise than doing ϕ

Explanation by things:

- rationalising: Sam left Maria because of Sally.
- evidential: They must be at home because of the light.
- causal₁: They had an accident because of the worn-off break.
- causal₂: The Chinese population will shrink because of the one-child policy.
- theoretical: Tritium is unstable because of its extra electron.

- essential: Tropes are non-transferrable because of their nature.
- metaphysical: “Humfrey possibly wins” is true because of his (winning) counterpart.

The relata of the explanation relation

Circularity: “the view that there is nothing pathological about the idea of choosing either to analyse one concept in terms of another, or to analyse the second in terms of the first, is almost universally accepted among those who have thought about such matters” (? : 223). ? : 224–225 gives the following example:

- (1) x is a sibling₁ of y : \Leftrightarrow x has the same parents as y
- (2) x is a sister of y : \Leftrightarrow x is a sibling₁ of $y \wedge x$ is female
- (3) x is a brother of y : \Leftrightarrow x is a sibling₁ of $y \wedge x$ is male
- (4) x is a sibling₂ of y : \Leftrightarrow x is a sister of $y \vee x$ is a brother of y

Because because of because of

grounding	constitution	justification	obligation	reference
the fact that your face is symmetric grounds the fact that it is beautiful	some counterpart of Socrates being tall constitutes his being possibly tall	my seeing the cup as oval from here justifies my belief that it is round	my promise to ϕ obliges me to ϕ	causal chain C anchors “ a ” to a
the symmetry of the face makes it beautiful	the tallness of c' makes the tallness of c possible	the perception of g as oval makes the belief that it is round justified	my promise to ϕ makes my ϕ ing obligatory	causal chain C makes “ a ” refer to a
why is it beautiful?	why is it possible?	why is it justified?	why is it possible?	why does it refer to a ?
because it is symmetric	because $\exists w, c'(w \models Tc')$	because it appears oval	because I promised to ϕ	because C anchors it to a
because of its symmetry	because of the counterpart	because of my perception	because of my promise	because of the causal chain

In all five cases, the making in question is contingent. The case is clearest with justification: the absence of defeaters is not itself part of the reason to believe – it is a necessary condition, but not itself part of the justification. Similarly, the absence of colour mismatch is not itself part of the ontological basis of beauty: it is a necessary condition for the symmetry to ground the beauty, but it is not itself part of the ground. The absence of shortness in the counterpart is not part of what constitutes the possibility.