

Lesser Entities

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Motivations for a theory of lesser entities:

- On the journey from ontological commitment to truthmaking, grounding, and fundamentality, Quine's "middle-sized dry goods" have been left behind.
- Selective / exclusive realism about the fundamental is in a certain way self-undermining: what demarcates the fundamental can not itself be as fundamental as that which it demarcates (Sider's axiom of 'Purity').
- There's no alternative: the 'free lunch' doctrine is unsatisfactory, and despite heroic efforts, potentially co-usable notions such as degrees or ways of being remain elusive.

A fine starting point

Fine (2001: 3) distinguishes two notions of metaphysical reality:

what is factual : "...metaphysical reality is to be identified with what is "objective" or "factual". The antirealist, on this conception, denies that there are any facts "out there" in virtue of which the propositions of a given domain might be true. The propositions of the domain are not in the "business" of stating such facts; they serve merely to indicate our engagement with the world without stating, in objective fashion, how the world is. As familiar examples of such a position, we have expressivism in ethics, according to which ethical judgements are mere expressions of attitude; formalism in mathematics, according to which mathematical statements are mere moves within a system of formal rules; and instrumentalism in science, according to which scientific theories are mere devices for the prediction and control of our environment."

what is fundamental : "...metaphysical reality is to be identified with what is "irreducible" or "fundamental". On this view, reality is constituted by certain irreducible or fundamental facts; and in denying reality to a given domain, the antirealist is claiming that its facts are all reducible to facts of some other sort. Thus the ethical naturalist will claim that every ethical fact is reducible to naturalistic facts, the logicist that every mathematical fact is reducible to facts of logic, and the phenomenalist that every fact about the external world is reducible to facts about our sense-data."

I think this is exactly right: there is an important distinction between the two notions and they are two-way independent. In ethics, for example, you may be an expressivist without being a naturalist or you may be a naturalist without being an expressivist.

For our purposes, the two notions may be distinguished by the relations expressivists and physicalists claim to hold between the domains of moral and psychological, and psychological and physical facts respectively:

physicalism : the mental is nothing over and above the physical, the world is fundamentally physical, attributions of mental predicates have physical truthmakers;

expressivism : moral language is not descriptive, not in the business of stating facts; to attribute wrongness to an action is to express disapproval of it.

In my view, the two claims have to be sharply distinguished, to understand one of them on the model of the other is to misunderstand them. It is a mistake to think that physicalism is committed to some claims about moral vocabulary or about what attributions of mental properties are 'about', and it is also a mistake to think that the perspectival character of moral thinking that motivates the expressivist has implications about the nature of values. The two positions sketched rather correspond to various brands of reductionism and relativism:

reductionism / eliminativism : psychological language is definable in terms of the physical; saying that Sam is in pain is attributing to him a certain brain-state; mental generalisations are not law-like, they do not carve nature at its joints;

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subject relativism / buck-passing : what makes a certain act wrong is that we (or: idealised subjects) do (or: should) disapprove of it; moral properties supervene on psychological properties.

At least *prima facie*, the two distinctions thus cross-cut:

	factual	non-factual
unreal	psychology	morality
real	physics	

Horizontal grounding?

Contrary to Fine, I think that there are two relations corresponding to the two notions of metaphysical reality:

constitution : If something is constituted by something else, it is a *manifestation* of the latter, an *aspect* of it, perhaps an *abstraction* of it. It is natural to take manifestations of other things to be “less objective” than them, “less substantial”, and it is a natural thought that these entities of a “lesser sort” do not *really* exist, that our ontological commitment is only to what they are constituted by, especially if “metaphysical reality is to be identified with what is “objective” or “factual”” (Fine 2001: 3). Constituted entities ‘borrow’ their objectivity, to the extent that they are objective, from what they are constituted by. This does not, however, make any one of them any less or more fundamental than the other: because the layers of reality are an objective matter, any thing is as fundamental as its manifestations.

grounding : If something is grounded in something else, it is *nothing over and above* its ground, in the sense that acknowledging the existence of the ground pays the “ontological prize” for the grounded entities too; accepting them in an ontological inventory that includes the grounds does not make it less parsimonious. Even if we restrict our notion of metaphysical reality to “what is “irreducible” or “fundamental”” (Fine 2001: 3), saying that some entities are determined by others *presupposes*, rather than does away with, the claim that they exist.

To the two metaphysical structuring relations, correspond two versions of Moore’s open-question argument:

why $A \rightsquigarrow B$? : why should feature A give rise to feature B ? in virtue of what is it that something that is A also is B ? (compare Lewis’ question to Armstrong: in virtue of what does $N(F, G)$ give rise to $\forall x(Fx \rightarrow Gx)$?) To say that B is constituted by A is part of an answer to this question.

why $\forall x(x \rightsquigarrow A \rightarrow x \rightsquigarrow B)$? : why should what makes something A *ipso facto* make it B ? (compare Euthyphro’s question: why should what makes the Gods love him also make him pious?) In virtue of what is B ‘nothing over and above’ A ? To say that B is grounded in A is part of an answer to this question.

The main difference between constitution and grounding may be characterised metaphorically by their ‘direction’. Grounding is a vertical relation, as it were, structuring reality and non-reality in different layers, that are more or less fundamental. The physicalist says that psychological facts are grounded in physical facts, but may still believe that they are real: it is just that he does not believe they are fundamental, something else is sufficient for their existence. Constitution, however, is a horizontal relation, and connects to essence: what is constituted is not self-standing, in need of something else. It is not for this reason any less existent than what it is a manifestation of. Something else is necessary for its objectivity, but this does not entail that there is something else that is sufficient for its existence.

This distinction not only allows for forms of reductionism which are not eliminativist, but also for the category of the ‘unreal’ (i.e. non-objective, non-factual) and irreducible, which allows for disagreement about ‘subjective’ qualities and objects which is not *really* about their objective and factual bases.

Why Fine does not have two structuring relations

Even though Fine (2001) carefully distinguishes the two notions of reality, he holds that questions of factuality reduce to questions of fundamentality, because he assumes that the disagreement between a factualist and a non-factualist about some proposition concerns the factuality of some constituent of that proposition – a notion that is defined in terms of the factuality of all the propositions in which the constituent (a particular or property) has ‘primary employment’. It seems to me that there is *another* notion of fundamentality of ‘constituents’ that is not derivative from the status of propositions in which they occur. It is in terms of this other notion, it seems to me, that the physicalist about the mental (contrary to the expressivist about the moral) frames his thesis. On this – not Fine’s – understanding, of “fundamental”, Fine’s principle (g) is false:

[W]henver a constituent occurs in a true basic factual proposition and also occurs essentially in some true factual proposition, then any ground for the latter must contain the constituent. (Fine 2001: 18)

Fine justifies this principle in terms of his notion of “fundamentality” as follows:

If a given constituent C occurs in a true basic factual proposition then it must be a fundamental element of reality. But if some true factual proposition contains C essentially, it must be true in virtue of some feature of C . But given that C is a fundamental element of reality, this feature of C cannot be grounded in something that did not involve C . (Fine 2001: 21)

I disagree with the second sentence of this quote: It does not follow from a proposition’s being factual that it wears its truthmaker on its sleeve, as it were. “Socrates exemplifies redness”, for example, may well be true, factual, and contain “exemplifies” essentially.¹ But it does not follow, on my understanding of fundamentality, that “Socrates exemplifies redness” cannot be grounded in “Socrates is red”.²

Distinguishing the two notions, and the two correlative notions of metaphysical explanation, I thus disagree with Fine (2001: 22) that “in providing the ground for a given proposition, one is explaining, in the most metaphysically satisfying manner, what it is that makes it true”. The question of truthmakers is a question of determination, of what *determines* the truth-value of the truth-bearer in question. If a makes it true that p , and if p grounds q , then a will also make it true that q – but this is not to say that the statement that p grounds q *already* settles the question what truthmaker “ q ” has, or indeed the question whether it has any truthmaker (if true).

Horizontal ‘grounding’: the problem of extrinsic essences

Possibly, the conflation of grounding and constitution (and the related conflation of determination and of dependence) is motivated by the failure to distinguish between intrinsicity and relationality, i.e. between the questions whether a given property of something is intrinsic or extrinsic to this thing and whether it is a relational or a non-relational property of it. Distinguishing the two question will, I hope, make room for **intrinsic relational** properties of grounded, and thus determined things that are nevertheless fully real, i.e. Aristotelian substances; **extrinsic non-relational** properties of constituted, and thus dependent things that nevertheless have their own being, as it were, and are not reducible to anything else.

Intrinsicity

The ‘scare quotes’ approach: Intrinsic properties of a

1. are / account for / ground ‘how a is by itself’, are exemplified by a ‘in virtue of the way it is in itself’;
2. make for genuine similarity, are ‘non-disjunctive’, have ‘non-gerrymandered’ extensions;
3. are shared by a and its duplicates / replicas / perfect copies.

Theoretical roles: Intrinsic properties

1. are qualitative natures of combinatorial units;
2. make for real, as opposed to Cambridge change;
3. do not entail, nor are entailed by the existence of any other things wholly distinct from their bearers.

Definition 1 (Lewis₁-intrinsicness). F is intrinsic iff for all x and y , if x and y have the same natural properties, then Fx iff Fy (Lewis 1983: 26).³

Definition 2 (Lewis₂-intrinsicness). A property F is intrinsic iff for all x and y , if x and y have the same pure, non-disjunctive and non-co-disjunctive properties independent of loneliness and of accompaniment, then Fx iff Fy (Lewis & Langton 1998).⁴

¹Fine (2001: 18) defines the notion of essential containment of a constituent as follows: “Say that a proposition *essentially* contains a given constituent if its replacement by some other constituent induces a shift in truth-value.” Even if “Socrates exemplifies redness” is true, “Socrates hates redness” may still be false.

²A related criticism, using the same example, has been made by Paul Horwich (2007: 8). Fine (2007: 18) replies that the ‘holistic’ elimination procedures of which this is a special case only apply to non-factual constituents and so apply *because* these are non-factual. But this simply begs the question against someone who thinks that pleonastic entities may be essential constituents of factual discourse.

³Lewis (1986: 60) tentatively suggested that the natural properties could be characterised as a minimal supervenience base for any properties whatsoever.

There are at least four main problems with the Lewis/Langton account:

1. haecceitistic properties (the exemplification of which implies the existence of particular individuals) are not independent of accompaniment (Dunn (1990: 186), Sider (1996: 4), Humberstone (1996: 240) and Yablo (1999: 487)): they are had in only one world if particulars are world-bound.
2. properties involving relations across possible world (*having a duplicate in the world in which one exists* and *being a duplicate of Kofi Annan's*) are independent of accompaniment and non-disjunctive and are falsely classified as intrinsic.
3. disjunctive properties: *being such that there is a cube* is independent of accompaniment and falsely classified as intrinsic (Marshall & Parsons 2001: 3) if it is non-disjunctive, i.e. not much less natural than either *being a cube* or *being accompanied by a cube*. But Lewis & Langton (2001: 354) bite the bullet.
4. maximal properties (Sider 2001): A property F is *maximal* iff, roughly, large parts of an F are not themselves F . If *being a rock* is maximal, it has intrinsic duplicates which fail to be rocks because they are parts of rocks. So *being a rock* is extrinsic. As it is independent of accompaniment, however, Lewis has to claim that it is disjunctive, which does not seem very plausible. He is, however, prepared to bite the bullet (Lewis 2001: 382).

Lewis (2001: 387) proposes a less permissive criterion for 'bad disjunctions' (properties expressed by disjunctive predicates which are not intrinsic): a property is (badly) disjunctive iff it is equivalent to a disjunction such that each disjunct is more natural (not: much more natural) than the whole disjunction. He also makes a new attempt to characterise bad disjunctions directly, thereby cutting down his reliance on contentious judgements of comparative naturalness. The new definition runs as follows:

Definition 3 (Lewis₃-intrinsicness). *A property P is intrinsic iff (i) P is independent of accompaniment, (ii) P is at least as natural as $(P \wedge$ being accompanied), (iii) P is at least as natural as $(P \wedge$ being lonely), (iv) $\neg P$ is at least as natural as $(\neg P \wedge$ being accompanied), (v) $\neg P$ is at least as natural as $(P \wedge$ being lonely).*

More general problems:

1. *having an F -part* (for things with proper parts that exemplify F intrinsically) are intrinsic only if duplication of wholes requires duplication of their parts, which is debatable;⁵
2. *being a proper part of an F* (for things which are proper parts of things that exemplify F intrinsically) come out extrinsic, if we accept the supplementation principle;⁶
3. *having a as a part*: a' is a super-duplicate of a iff a and a' are duplicates and any part of a has a (similarly located and qualitatively indiscernible) part of a' as its counterpart (Humberstone 1996: 242). But this does not allow for counterpart relations heeding extrinsic similarities. Alternative (Bricker 1993: 274): in order for a part b' of b to be a (a, b) -duplicate of a part a' of a , b' does not only have to be a duplicate of a' , but also be related to other parts of b in a way similar to how a' is related to the other parts of a .
4. No extrinsic essential properties.

In all Lewis-definitions, "how a thing is by itself" is translated into "how a thing would be if it were lonely". This transition, however, is far from being mandatory: Another possible way to spell out the "by itself" clause, as Sider's examples show, is to count those features of a thing as intrinsic that are determined by what goes on inside its borders, i.e. on how its parts are and in what relations they stand. This point is well made by Humberstone:

"...the idea of an intrinsic property is the idea of a property a thing has in and of itself: but *considering* a thing *in itself* is not the same as *supposing* the thing to be *by itself*." (Humberstone 1996: 229)

Two concepts of loneliness:

⁴A property is pure iff its exemplification does not imply the existence of anything else than the thing exemplifying it. Something is accompanied iff it does not coexist with a contingent wholly distinct thing and it is lonely iff it coexists only with its proper parts (if it has any). A property is independent of loneliness (accompaniment) iff it is both possible that it is had and that it is lacked by a lonely (accompanied) thing. A property is *disjunctive* iff it can be expressed by a disjunctive predicate but is not natural and much less natural than either of its disjuncts. The pure, non-disjunctive and non-co-disjunctive properties independent of loneliness and accompaniment are called "basic intrinsic" by Lewis and Langton. Def. 2 says that a property is intrinsic iff it supervenes on basic intrinsic properties, or, equivalently, iff it never differs between duplicates (where two things are duplicates iff they have the same basic intrinsic properties).

⁵Consider a parallel case with essential properties. Suppose I have a heart and it is organic. It may be essential to me that I have a heart and essential to my heart that it is organic, but not essential that I have an *organic* heart – I could have an artificial heart (though, this would not be a counterpart of my actual heart). In this case, I will have counterparts that have hearts that are not counterparts of my heart.

⁶I.e. that, if a is a proper part of b , then they have a mereological difference (the common part of all things overlapping b but not overlapping a).

loneliness as independence : x is lonely in this sense iff it exists all by itself, i.e. if nothing other exists than its (proper and improper) parts;

loneliness as interiority : x is lonely in this sense iff all things outside it are abstracted away and the thing is considered ‘in isolation’.

Achille Varzi (1997: 42) distinguishes (topologically) “open” and “closed” entities, i.e. entities which include their boundaries and those that do not. Houses and rocks, if *being a house* and *being a rock* are maximal, are closed – the open counterparts of a house which are embedded in a larger house are not houses, for they lack (counterparts of) parts the original house had, namely its boundary. The boundary of the house, however, is not a part of the house, but it is part of the house considered in isolation.

Turning the tables: A substance is something which has intrinsic properties – intrinsic properties are properties had by substances.⁷ a ’s *intrinsic nature* is the fusion of all those properties it has intrinsically. It is a (non-spatiotemporal) part of it; the intrinsic nature of a part is then ‘included’ in the intrinsic nature of the whole. We could even use inclusion of intrinsic natures to *define* what it means to say that y is part of x .

Definition 4. *A particular a is a substance iff it is a counterpart of a world.*

Any substance has intrinsic properties and thus an intrinsic nature:

Definition 5. *F is the intrinsic nature of a substance a iff it is the fusion of all universals that are part both of a and of all counterparts of a which are worlds.*

A substance is a maximal spatio-temporally interrelated whole; an intrinsic nature is a maximal nonspatiotemporal part of a substance.

Relationality

The ‘scare quotes’ approach: Non-relational properties of a

1. do not ‘essentially mention’ other things than a ;
2. do not ‘stem from’ metaphysically / conceptually / explanatorily prior relations a has;
3. are ‘genuinely monadic’;

Theoretical roles: Non-relational properties

1. are wholly qualitative: their nature is exhausted by how the things that have them are;
2. are non-haecceitistic: may be shared by distinct indiscernibles;
3. are pure, i.e. do not ‘essentially’ involve individuals.

Definition 6 (Implicational relationality). *P is impure iff $\exists R \exists y \forall x (Px \leftrightarrow Rxy)$.*

Problem (cf. Khamara (1988: 146) and Humberstone (1998: 218)): If we introduce the predicate “tinthree” by the following definition:

$$\forall x, y (x \text{ tinthrees } y \leftrightarrow (x \text{ is made of tin} \wedge y \text{ is the number } 3))$$

the property of being made of tin comes out as impure because, necessarily, something is made of tin iff it tinthrees 3. Let us, following Humberstone (1996)’s rephrasing of Dunn (1987) and Dunn (1990), call a property “Dunn-pure” iff it is, whenever it is truly predicated of a , a relevant property of that individual, i.e. a property such that the hypothesis that an arbitrary x is a relevantly implies that x has the property.

Definition 7 (Dunn purity). *A property P of a is Dunn-pure iff for all x , if x is a , then x is P .*

The class of Dunn-pure properties is closed under negation, conjunction, disjunction, (relevant) implication and even under relevant implication of arbitrary formulae (e.g. if a is relevantly F , then it is relevantly F and such that ϕ , because any formula ψ relevantly implies $\psi \vee \chi$ in \mathbf{R}) (Dunn 1987: 362–363).

Dunn (1990: 185) objected to Lewis’ account of intrinsic properties as those invariant under duplication that the property *being a duplicate of a* will come out intrinsic:

“...Lewis in conversation has responded to my complaint that *being a perfect duplicate of b* turns out to be an intrinsic property on his account. As best as I can recall his reply, he thinks that this is perfectly fine. Although the property is *identified* with reference to b , *in itself* it amounts to only an infinite conjunction of intrinsic properties of a , and hence is itself intrinsic.” (Dunn 1990: 203, n. 7)

⁷Cf. Langton (1998) but also Rosefeldt (2001).

Relational properties are properties that are individuated with reference to relations (Hochberg 1988: 196): to say that, generally and as a matter of logical truth, if $a = b$, then $\lambda x(aRx) = \lambda x(bRx)$, we need to quantify over relations.⁸

Cross-cutting

Examples of the relational intrinsic:

1. *having a as a part*
2. the value of Diana's dress
3. *being of a crime* of some punishment

Examples of the non-relational extrinsic:

1. *not being accompanied by a unicorn*
2. *being all there is*
3. *being surprising* of an event

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⁸The reason why loving-Superman and loving-Clark-Kent is one and the same property (and Lois Lane, as a matter of logic, exemplifies one iff she exemplifies the other), is that Superman is Clark Kent; therefore, the properties are not atomic, but derelativisations of the prior relation of loving.