# Lesser Entities

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## Motivation for a theory of lesser entities

Why we need a theory of, or at least a place for, lesser entities:

- On the journey from ontological commitment to truthmaking, grounding, and fundamentality, Austin'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 (cf. problems with Sider's axiom of 'Purity'). The inventory of just the real (or just the most real) is incomplete: it does not include enough elements to provide justification or to explain why it includes what it does.
- 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."

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.

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 a mistake to think that the perspectival character of moral thinking that motivates the expressivist has implications about the nature or fundamentality status of values. These two views rather correspond to (some version of) reductionist and relativist views:

**eliminativism** : psychological language is definable in terms of physical language; 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.
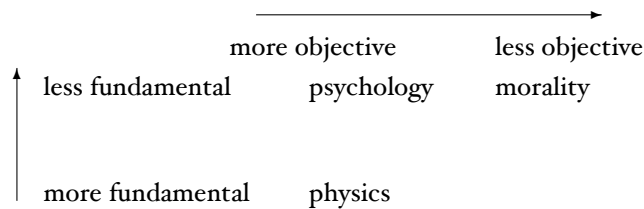
At least *prima facie*, the two distinctions thus cross-cut:

|        | factual    | non-factual |
|--------|------------|-------------|
| unreal | psychology | morality    |
| real   | physics    |             |

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 / not-eliminable:

- 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.
- Just relegating something to the non-factual does not by itself entail something about its fundamentality status.

To make room for lesser entities, I suggest modifying the Finean picture in two ways: by replacing the dichotomic 'factual'/'non-factual' by a notion of degrees of objectivity, and by accepting, and distinguishing two structuring relations in our metaphysics:

|                   | more objective | less objective |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| less fundamental  | psychology     | morality       |
|                   |                |                |
| more fundamental  | physics        |                |

## Two metaphysically structuring relations

Contrary to Fine, I think that there are two relations corresponding to the two notions of metaphysical reality, both of which may be invoked to metaphysically explain, in the fullest sense, something in terms of something else:

**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.

**determination** : If something is (as for its nature, or its existence) determined by something else, it is (in these respects) *nothing over and above* that other thing, in the sense that acknowledging the existence of the determiner pays the "ontological prize" for the determined entities too; accepting them in an ontological inventory that includes the determiner does not make it less parsimonious. If $a$ / $F$ / $a$'s being $F$ determines $b$ / $G$ / $b$'s being $G$ either qualitatively, essentially or existentially, the first relatum is *responsible* for the second being such-and-such, being the thing it is, being. It is so responsible because it *makes* it so. In this sense, we may say that particulars are determined by the universals they exemplify, boundaries are determined by what they are boundaries of, tropes are determined by their bearers. But this does not make them any less objective, or full-bloodied than what determines them; because objectivity transmits over determination (determination being an objective matter), the things determined are equally objective than what determines them.

The main difference between constitution and determination may be characterised metaphorically by their 'direction'. Determination 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 determined by 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: it is in need of something else to be what it is. It is not for this reason any less

existent than what it is a manifestation of. Something else is necessary for it to have the objectivity it has,[1] but this does not entail that there is something else that is sufficient for its existence.

Constitution – or "grounding", in my, though not Fine's – use of the term, on the other, may hold horizontally, among equally fundamental things.[2] The expressivist who believes that this baby's being tortured being morally wrong is grounded in what moral sentiments we should have with respect to it does not have to claim that our (obligatory) moral sentiments *determine* the wrongness of the torturing.[3] He is not even committed to claiming *that* torture is wrong. Grounding is metaphysically neutral in this sense.

Allowing for both determination (vertical grounding) and constitution (horizontal grounding) as metaphysical structuring relations, allows us to explain in what sense lesser entities are 'less substantial': they are constituted by others, and manifestations or aspects of the latter. This does not make them 'less real' or even non-existent. Perhaps Fine has changed his mind about the metaphysical neutrality of grounding. Even though he says in 2001 that "there is no need to suppose that a ground is some fact or entity in the world or that the notion of ground is inextricably connected with the concept of truth" (Fine 2001: 16) and allows for grounding relations both among the factual and among the non-factual (though not, as we will see below, between the non-factual and the factual), in later work he nevertheless *interprets* grounding claims in terms of truthmaking, claiming that $A_1, A_2, A_3, \ldots$ are a weak full ground for $C$ iff whenever $f_1$ verifies $A_1$, $f_2$ verifies $A_2$, $f_3$ verifies $A_3$, ...then $f_1 \dot{f_2} \dot{f_3} \dot{.} \dot{.}$ verifies $C$ (Fine 2012: 72).

The case of conjunctive facts is a good illustration: While Fine (2001: 15) says someone claiming that conjunctive facts are grounded in their conjuncts may be adopting "a metaphysically neutral stand on whether there really are conjunctive facts", he says one page later that "we are not inclined to think of the truth of a grounded proposition as a *further fact* over and above its grounds, even though it may be distinct from its grounds and even though it may itself be a real fact". So is the conjunctive fact a fact *over and above* the facts that are its conjuncts? Fine does not clearly say. He does say at least this:

> It is not implied that the explanandum just *is* the explanans (indeed, in the case 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, on 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 explanandum holds. [...] [footnote:] My remarks on this point in Fine ([2001], p. 16) have been over-interpreted by a number of authors. (Fine 2012: 39)

## Why Fine does not have two structuring relations

Even though Fine (2001) carefully distinguishes the questions of grounding and determination/fundamentality, 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'.

I think, however, 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]henever a constituent occurs in a true basic factual proposition and also occurs essentially in

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[1]This does not mean that "something else" has to be an object – cf. below on extrinsic, but non-relational essences.

[2]Fine does allow for one kind of "horizontal" grounding, which is sameness of ground-theoretic role. The pair of truths that John is married to Mary and that Mary is married to John, the pair of truths of the form "$\exists x F x$" and "$\exists y F y$" and the pair of truths of the form "$Fa$" and "$Fb$", where "$a$" and "$b$" are two directly referential names for the same object, are thus said to *weakly ground* each other: whatever is grounded with the help of the one is grounded with the help of the other. This sense of "horizontal" is not to be read ontologically, however:

> We might think of strict ground as moving us down inthe explanatory hierarchy. It always takes us to a lower level of explanation and, for this reason, a truth can never be strict ground for itself. Weak ground, on the other hand, may also move us sideways. It may take us to a truth at the same level as what is grounded, and, for this reason, we may always allow a given truth to be a weak ground for itself. (Fine 2012: 52)

Clearly, Fine is here thinking of an explanatory structure of degrees of primitiveness, not of an ontological layering of reality.

[3]One – controversial and partisan – way of distinguishing grounding (in Fine's sense) or constitution from determination is in terms of the contrast between the sentential "because" and the functor "because of". While the expressivist may be happy to hold that "torturing this baby is wrong because we should disapprove of it", he is not committed to "torturing this baby is wrong because of our disapproving of it" – his quest is about the status of the *truth* itself, not about its truthmaker.

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 it's truthmaker on its sleeve, as it were. "Socrates exemplifies redness", for example, may well be true, factual, and contain "exemplifies" essentially.[4] But it does not follow, on my understanding of fundamentality, that "Socrates exemplifies redness" cannot be grounded in " Socrates is red".[5]

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 that $p$ grounds that $q$, then $a$ will also make it true that $q$ – but this is not to say that the statement that of ground *already* settles the question what truthmaker "$q$" has, or indeed the question whether it has any truthmaker (is true).

Fine's notion of reduction presupposes that what is reduced is not real, but I do not see why we could not have reduction among the real as well. Fine (2001: 26) explicates his notion of reduction in terms of closeness to reality:

> ...a necessary condition for the proposition $P$ to reduce to the propositions $Q$, $R$, ...is for it to be grounded in those other propositions; and a necessary and sufficient condition for $Q$, $R$, ...to be closer to reality than $P$ in such is a case is that $P$ be unreal and each of $Q$, $R$, ...either be real or "en route" to what is real. But the latter is presumably just a matter of the proposition's being grounded in what is real. (Fine 2001: 26)

It seems to me that it is enough for $Q$ to be 'closer to reality' than $P$ that $Q$ is further down the route to what is real – and this certainly may be the case if $P$ is real, but less real than $Q$.

## Extrinsic entities

If constitution is not a relation of metaphysical sufficiency or 'making', what else is it? My proposal is that constituted entities are all and only those that have essential properties that are extrinsic to them.

This does not mean that these essential properties are relational, and thus that the constituted entities are ontologically dependent (in Fine's sense) or identity-dependent (in Lowe's sense) on the entities that constitute them. Some extrinsic properties, of course, are relational, but not all are.

Extrinsic entities are entities that have extrinsic properties essentially. An extrinsic property of $a$ is a property $a$ does not (need to) have when "considered in itself" (Humberstone 1996: 229), a property it does not have just in virtue of the way it is in itself. It still may have it in virtue of the way it is, and thus extrinsic properties may be essential. A famous example are Kripkean origin and constitution properties.

Being relational, by contrast, is the second-order property of being grounded in, and being individuated by, a metaphysically prior relation (Hochberg 1988: 196). Allowing the two distinctions to cross-cut allows to correctly classify a number of otherwise problematic properties: as relational, but intrinsic properties such as *having $a$ as a part*, the value of Diana's dress (Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000) call such values "extrinsic final values") and *being of a crime* of some punishment; as non-relational but extrinsic properties such as *not being accompanied by a unicorn*, *being all there is*, *being surprising* of an event.

Intrinsic relational properties may be properties of grounded, and determined things, that are nevertheless fully real and have (in this sense at least) a good claim to be Aristotelian substances. Extrinsic, but non-relational properties may be properties of constituted things that nevertheless have their own being, as it were, and are not reducible to anything else.

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[4]Fine (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.

[5]A 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.

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