

Two Types of Grounding?

“Aristotle on Grounding, Definition, Explanation and Essence” workshop, Philipp Blum

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Zooming in

I know of only two ways of introducing talk of grounding: by a list of examples or by a distinction between “because” constructions. The first has an obvious drawback, relying on the assumption (since criticised) that the examples given have anything deep / interesting / philosophically productive in common. The second is better, but does not bring us much further. There is, certainly, a difference between:

(1) The neighbours are in because their lights are on.

and

(2) The lights are on because the neighbours are in.

and the latter, in comparison to the former, may be called the (or better: a) non-epistemic (kind / form / type of) “because”, but this does not yet show that there is a unified phenomenon here.

This uncertainty about there being a topic at all to discussions of grounding did not much matter in the early, exploratory days of the grounding industry. It matters much more for the later stages, where people take themselves to disagree on what grounding is and to have competing theories about it. Now it matters whether there is such a thing at all.

Perhaps an example helps.

What it is to be cool is to be considered cool, by the appropriate group of people in the right circumstances. To be cool, therefore, you have to get that kind of recognition from your peers, but this does not exhaust what is claimed: the nature of coolness may well go beyond what these people say or do. They may, after all, be wrong about you and your coolness may be hidden, even permanently, from the world.

You may call this “generalised identity”, but it is not identity of any kind: to be the morning star is precisely *not* to be the evening star and to be red is not to be of my favourite colour, even if my favourite colour is red. Not that we should therefrom conclude that, as people would put it, the “to ti en einai” operator would ‘create’ a hyperintensional context: what it is to be Socrates, after all, may well be what it is to be a rational animal, and you can certainly know Socrates without thinking he’s rational (or even thinking he’s not). That we should not think of claims about coolness as identity-statements does not mean that we should take them to be higher-order statements about facts, i.e. about what grounds supposedly unproblematic coolness facts. There are no facts about coolness, in any ontologically robust sense, and what is said when we say that she is cool just is not the kind of thing that would admit of either ‘conceptual’ nor ‘worldly’ grounding: it is not something to be explained, to anyone or to ourselves, but is just said, and true, and brutally so (metaphysically brute, of course, as it may of course be ‘grounded’, in some other sense, in the shirt she is wearing). That the fact that she is cool is a brute one does not make any less pressing the difficult task of saying

something illuminating about it, to develop a theory of coolness; quite to the contrary, it makes it a more worthwhile endeavour. That people are cool is a deep fact about the social world; if only philosophers knew what it takes to be cool, they would have a quite different life than the one they in fact have.

Grounding: production and foundation

Our inquiry into the nature of coolness may take many different forms, and different distinctions may prove useful. A first such distinction is between **grounding and determination**: what grounds your coolness is what makes you cool, and different things, we hope, may accomplish this feat. What your coolness is determined by, however, is what makes it, wholly or in part, that particular coolness that it is. What only partly grounds your coolness, does not make you cool – it may contribute to its being the case that you are made cool, but it also may not: perhaps your not cool, not even partly so, even when in the possession of a partial ground (a cool shirt, say). While being partly grounded is not a way of being grounded, being partly determined *is* a way of being determined. If your coolness is even partly determined by, and thus partly depends on, your haircut, for example, it will not survive your wrong choice of hair-dresser. Another dimension of contrast is thus with modal flexibility. Your coolness could have, and perhaps had along your long and distinguished career, multiple grounds: you can be cool at different times for different reasons. Its determinations, however, are sticky: if the coolness of both of us really is determined by our respective and very different haircuts, we are not sharing our coolness, though of course we may still be as cool as the other.

Another important distinction is between **essence and dependence**. You may depend on things to be what you are (cool, e.g., or a human), but this is not the same thing as to depend on them *tout court*. Coolness may be lost, even when my coolness, as long as I had it, was essentially mine; what I depend on to be me, for my nature or identity, what makes me the thing I am, is not all I need to exist (unless, of course, I am God, on a certain conception of this) and conversely I may fall short of what I really am and be a little less rational than what would be my nature.

Even when distinguished from determination, essence and dependence, however, grounding is still said in many ways. Two such ways, for today, are production and foundation.

Some things **produce** others, under certain circumstances, out of something:

P-1 The sparkle and the dynamite produce an explosion.

P-2 The builder and the bricks produce the house.

P-3 The noise and my sensibility to it produce a headache.

P-4 Some events in my brain produce a thought.

P-5 Harvey Weinstein produces *Pulp Fiction*, an illegitimate child, and a scandal.

P-6 The smile on Maria's face was produced by her amusement at Sam's joke.

Typically, the circumstances are contingent; but even when they are not, and thus production invariably happens, we have to distinguish necessarily obtaining conditions from *null* conditions. In the latter case, when production is *null*-conditional, we have production of a special type: the producer is then spontaneously active, a **generator** of its product all by itself. Typically, that out of which something is produced is external to the producer: when it is not, we have not just production, but **emanation**: out of itself, with no external input, the producer produces its product.

A certain conception of grounding applies to the case where generation and emanation intersect: when the production is both a generation and an emanation, the existence of the producer is sufficient for the existence of the product, and the latter is explainable in terms of the former and the fact that the product is produced by the producer, all by itself, and out of itself.

The match is not perfect, however. Some mixtures are both generated by their ingredients and emanate from them, but it does not always seem to be the case that they are grounded in them, at least not fully grounded. Mixtures emanate from their ingredients because this is what the ingredients are

– the ingredients of this mixture. They are generated by their ingredients when these spontaneously mix, because the process of their mixing is not something additional to be added to the mixture and is not a way for the ingredients to be related to each other (for the ingredients no longer exist when the mixture does, except perhaps potentially). Are mixtures grounded in their ingredients? Not on a necessitarian picture of grounding: the existence of the mixture is not entailed by the existence of the ingredients. Even with contingent grounding, if there is such a thing, the answer is less than clear-cut: certainly, the mixture is something over and above its ingredients, it does not owe its existence to just them, they do not make it exist (but perhaps the mixer does, or their natural coming together, or something else).

Necessitarian grounding differs from self-sufficient and spontaneous production (i.e. production which is both generation and emanation) also with respect to its dependency on *ceteris absentibus* clauses: if “*p*” stands for the conjunction of all positive atomic facts (if there is such a thing), then the fact that there are no unicorns (or their absence) is both generated by and emanates from the fact that *p* – the atomic facts, all by themselves, generate this absence (by not including any positive atomic fact about unicorns), and the absence emanates from them, because the totality fact, whatever this is, is neither positive nor atomic. The absence of unicorns is not grounded in the positive facts, however, because it is something over and above them and is not explainable in terms of them. The positive facts alone do not exclude unicorns, only their totality fact does.

Both generation and emanation are relations that may hold between different things and between a thing and itself. The butterfly emanates from the caterpillar, but they are not identical. The fire generates the smoke, but it is not it. We also have cases of self-generation and self-emanation, however. The fresh apple generates the rotten apple, but they are one and the same. The steam emanates from the boiling water, but is not numerically distinct from it.

When restricted to facts, “make it the case” seems appropriate to express cases of production that are both generations and emanations: the fact that *p* makes it the case that (there is a fact that) $p \vee q$; the fact that *p* makes it the case that it is true that *p*; and so on. Even production which is both generation and emanation does not suffice for dependence: The step from *p* to $p \vee q$ does not require more truthmakers (those for *p* will still do), but it allows for more truthmaking possibilities – it does not depend on its ground from which it emanates.

Phenomena of production are sometimes aptly described in terms of priority, levels and fundamentality: the producer is prior to, at a lower level, more fundamental than the product, the product is posterior, emergent, derivative. This by itself, I think, does not give us a reason to believe that production is or entails or should be modelled by a strict partial order. Suppose Sam believes, as some neoplatonists Christians do, that the entire world is an emanation of the mind of God, out of which it was produced spontaneously and entirely, without external cause or ingredient. Is this, by itself, enough to ensure that Sam is not a pantheist, or might he be a panentheist instead? Clearly, more has to be said, and it will depend on these additional theory elements what (and possibly: who) is at stake.

Even when under circumstances and out of something, production is quite different from another relation which is also, in some sense of this word, ‘generative’. Some things **found** others, under certain circumstances, ‘underlie’ them as foundations, as something on which the founded thing is built:

F-1 The basement founds the building, it is its foundation.

F-2 The soil founds the plant, it nourishes it and the plant arises from it.

F-3 The Swiss National Science foundation funds, and founds, our research; our careers are built on it.

F-4 The fundament, e.g. Maria’s face, founds the moment, e.g. Maria’s smile.

F-5 Socrates’ snub is founded in his nose, his snubnosedness in his having the particular nose he has.

F-6 The amorality of this act is founded in its consequences.

The founding of something a by something else b may be full or partial: it is partial, if a also has a foundation different from b , and it is full if b is its only foundation. Socrates' snubnosedness is fully founded in his having a concave nose, i.e. in his nosedness and the shape of his nose, but only partially founded in his nosedness. The founding of something a by something else b may be transparent or opaque: it is transparent if a wears its being founded on b 'on its sleeve' as it were, and opaque if not. The foundation of x on y is transparent iff the very existence of x entails that it is founded on something like y , i.e. when x by itself determines the foundation it needs. Someone's bachelorhood, we may perhaps assume (excluding the pope, transgender cases and a lot more), is transparently founded in his being an adult unmarried male, whereas someone's knowledge, if at all, is certainly not transparently founded in her justified true belief.

Full foundation may be called "basing": what fully founds a thing is its **basis**, it that on which something is based. A basis or a full foundation provides all the elements needed for the founded thing to 'arise', though it will of course not always necessitate it (cf. below). It provides for the possibility, not the actuality of the founded thing: only in cases of production which is both generation and emanation do things 'grow out' of their basis.

Transparent founding may be called "**manifestation**", and the founded thing an "aspect" of its foundation. Sometimes, transparency comes about because the connection is conceptual: the (primary) concept of the founded thing already characterises it as founded in a certain way on something else. Maria's smile (the one only Maria can have) is such a manifestation: knowing it fully tells you everything about its foundation.

Founding that is both a basing and a manifestation gives rise to self-revealing aspects, aspects that manifest their basis and nothing else, that allow for a 'road back' to the thing they are founded in. Perhaps this is the notion closest to Husserl's use of "foundation" in the Third *Logical Investigation*, where he explicates a generic notion of F being founded upon G as it's being a law of essence that an F as such cannot exist except in a more comprehensive unity which connects it with a G .

Both full foundation and transparent foundation may hold between different things, and between a thing and itself. Full self-foundation is the mark of well-constructed foundations: they hold themselves up and do not need further propping to stand. Such self-foundation need not be transparent: something may be a foundation, even a full foundation, of itself, but only accidentally so; sometimes foundations may be, and even need to be, further founded by other foundations. Transparent self-foundation is the mark of the obvious cases of foundation: the truth that $p \wedge p$ is founded in the truth that p , and obviously so, by conjunction-elimination and conjunction-introduction. But neither full nor transparent foundation are reflexive: the building is not its foundation, even though it is both fully and transparently founded in it.

Foundation and production may occur together, of course. A certain disease, a biological condition of my body or a virus, may both found and produce the rash spreading over it: it underlies the rash because the rash is a symptom of it, and produces it – both causally and metaphysically, perhaps even spontaneously so and without further ingredients. Even when they coincide together, one of the generative relations may wear more of the trousers: Some foundations are also productions: the soil, including the seed, founds and also produces the plant. Some productions are also foundations: the scandal was not just produced by Weinstein's behaviour, but also founded on it.

Conceptually, being-built-out-of (production) and being-built-on (foundation) are two very different things: you can, of course, be built out of (produced by) something that is entirely in the past, but you cannot be built on and stand on something that is no longer there; you can be built on (founded in) something that cannot be itself be input to some building, because, for example, it is unchangeable or even immutable. There are other important differences: foundation, but not production can be backwards, logically and temporally. The amorality of a certain act may be founded in, due to, explainable in terms of its consequences, even if these are not even simultaneous, but perhaps much later than the act.

Even when something is both founded and produced, it may stand to different things in these two relations. Take the aesthetic properties of some painting, say its beauty. The beauty of the painting is founded on its visible features: because it is a painting (rather than e.g. a symphony), its beauty is there to be seen. It is, however, produced by many other things besides, inter alia the way it represents Jesus quite differently than is normally done in the Caravagesque tradition. That this is a one-franc piece is founded in its having the right material properties and its being accepted as currency, but it is produced by the national bank that had the legal title to issue it.

Sometimes, it seems to me, foundation and production may even hold between the same relata, but in converse directions. The intrinsic profile of my body is produced (and 'grounded'), in part, by the intrinsic profile of my hand, at least as long as my hand is part of me. Suppose that it is intrinsic to my right hand that it is alive. The intrinsic profile of my body then includes the property of having a living right hand, hence necessitates the fact that my hand is alive. Plausibly, foundation holds in the other direction, top-down, from my body to my hand: my hand is alive in virtue of being appropriately connected to my body, it is alive insofar as it is my hand, i.e. one of the hands of my body.

Sometimes, perhaps always, questions of production and of founding are difficult, and often also philosophically tricky. We may suppose, e.g., that Maria's smile was miraculously painted over her face by her sense of amusement and hence produced by it. Suppose that she was rightly amused, in context, and that Sam's joke, in context, was objectively funny (if there is such a thing). Is the smile then also produced by the joke? Is the smile not just produced by, but also founded in her sense of amusement (as well as founded in her temperament, her bodily constitution, her sense of humour)? Such questions may depend on our theory of smiles: are they outer signs, manifestations, of inner conditions and states or are they (perhaps unconscious) actions or (perhaps uncontrollable) reflexes? The pure theories of production and of foundation will not decide such questions.

A number of important features of all relations discussed – of production, generation, emanation, foundation, basing and manifestation – should be noted.

All six relations hold between existents: the non-existent does not need to be and cannot be produced or founded. It cannot be generally the case that what is produced or founded has less reality than what produces or founds it, because both relations may hold between a thing and itself. In general, we certainly cannot say that what is produced or founded is 'nothing over and above' what produces or founds it. What foundation and production 'add' are very different things: production explains present existence by showing where it comes from, both logically and temporally and also in the order of dependence; foundation explains present existence by showing what it consists in, what its present preconditions are. There may be cases where no such things are added: cases where something is produced out of and by nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) and cases where something is founded upon nothing. In addition to self-production and self-foundation, we may allow for such zero-production (not *null*) and zero-foundation. Clearly, then the 'nothing but' and 'nothing over and above' locutions are inappropriate. As has been said *ad nauseam*, there are no free lunches to be had.

All six relations are contingent. Clearly, even if x has been produced by y , it is possible, at least in principle, that it be produced by some z , different from y . This holds even if the production was spontaneous (generation) and out of y itself (emanation), and if y exists. In the same way, x 's being founded upon y does not exclude the possibility that there be some z different from y that founds x (and that y exists), even when y already is a full foundation and thus a base. Not even transparent foundations allows for a "route back": when x is the manifestation of y , knowledge of x will give us some knowledge of y , but only of a general sort, as knowledge of things (relevantly) like x .

At least without further restrictions, all six relations are left-side monotonous: if y produces / generates / emanates / founds / bases or manifests x , everything containing y will do as well. Further elements may be redundant (though only in the case of basing are they guaranteed to be), but redun-

dancy does not undo what has already been achieved.¹ You do not make buildings crumble just by adding to their foundations, you do not undo your thought just by having more C-fibre firing going on concurrently.

What is more: At least logically, all six relations are also many-one. Nothing in the nature of the relations makes it impossible that something could be produced by, generated out of, emanating from, founded in, based upon or manifesting more than one thing, concurrently and separately. This has the important consequence that none of the relations discussed is a relation of dependence, even when it itself holds with necessity. As many have noted, the confusion of determination and dependence is endemic in the grounding literature. It seems that people just cannot help thinking that, if y is the ground of x , then x 'needs' y , 'relies' on y or is in some other way dependent on y . The discussion of multiple realizability should have taught us already fifty years ago how wrong this thought is, and that the fact that $p \vee q$ is fully grounded in either disjunct may remind us of this.²

It is a natural and attractive thought to explain the confusing of determination with dependence as a sub-type of the equally endemic confusing of sufficient with necessary conditions. If he does ϕ in order to ψ , then certainly, if he ψ s, he must have ϕ ed! Determination, on this picture, provides for sufficiency, dependence accounts for necessity. If we think of 'grounding' generally (production and foundation) on the model of providing sufficient conditions, then it is natural to look for the dual: what provides necessary conditions? the answer, it has seemed to many, is: essence.

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1. Certainly more controversially, the same seems to me true of explanation in general: if you have given an explanation (a sufficiently good, or acceptable one, in context or depending on the type of explanation), why should you undo what is achieved by just continuing to talk? I do know, however, that my intuition is not widely shared and I will not press this point further.

2. Co-production and co-foundation are not just logical possibilities, but theoretically interesting concepts: two shooting may co-produce one death, and be singularly sufficient for it, and two Siamese organisms can co-found a smile, and be singularly sufficient for it.