

Problèmes de Métaphysique : Cameron sur les tortues

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Main claims of the paper

The intuition that there are no infinite descending chains of ontological dependence implies that :

1. the fact that $F a$ is not ontological dependent on the fact that $\exists x(a; F)$ (by Bradley's regress);
2. if a mereologically complex object ontologically depends on its parts, then there is no gunk;
3. if mental events exist, then they do not (essentially?) ontologically depend on mental events.

The two arguments given for the intuition are unconvincing :

1. Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason : every contingent truth must have some metaphysical grounding. Being cannot be infinitely deferred, never achieved. BUT, RC says, this confuses ontological with temporal priority.
2. The less fundamental is less real than the more fundamental. BUT, RC says, "real" either means "fundamental", "mind-independent" or "existing" and in neither version goes the argument through.

But we are entitled to think the intuition is true, because (i) there are no arguments against it; (ii) explanation in metaphysics has to stop somewhere, (iii) accepting it allows for more unified explanations (in terms of the entities of the fundamental level) than not accepting it.

We are not entitled, however, to think the intuition is necessarily true, because the principle underlying (iii) is not necessarily true :

"...we have no reason to rule out such worlds [containing infinitely descending chains of ontological dependence] – at least, none that I can see. We have reason to think that our world is not like that..." (? : 13)

Problem is : these reasons are entirely a priori.

Cameron's three mistakes

1. RC does not, but should, distinguish between specific and generic dependence. a can be generically dependent on F s without there being an F on which it specifically depends.

The non-eliminativist realist about the mental claims that the mental is generically mind-dependent. Every mental state m depends generically on other mental states, without there being mental states on which it specifically depends. This is why he arrives at a weird formulation of realism as "minds are not essentially dependent on mental events, though they are essentially minds". Rather, realism about the mental is the claim that it is possible that there are only 1st order mental states.

2. The Leibniz/Schaffer worry does not confuse ontological with temporal priority. Rather, the worry is *how* God could create the sum if not by creating the parts. If it is not in virtue of creating the parts that he creates the whole, what else does he do?

3. RC does not, but should, distinguish between a relation and its instances. If there is a possible world where the relation of ontological dependence goes down in an infinite chain, then the *relation* is not well founded period.

RC's positive argument is no good, because (i) is not true, (ii) is question-begging and (iii) confuses 'there is a fundamental level, but we don't know' and 'this is the fundamental level' – only the latter actually *provides* better explanations.

Two senses of explanatory priority

“a is explanatorily prior to b” is ambiguous between :

1. ‘explanation by reconstruction’ : ‘given’ a, we can understand why b exists. Cf. : “...the anti-gunk worry is that composition could never have got off the ground.” (? : 6) This is the kind of explanation the ontological correlate is truthmaking : propositions about b are made true by facts ‘about’ a¹
2. ‘explanation by metaphysical analysis’ : the question what b REALLY is, is answered by facts about a. Cf. : knowledge is REALLY justified true belief. This is the kind of explanation the ontological correlate is ontological dependence.

Applications to truth and exemplification

Consider

(1) “p” is true.

(2) It is true that p.

(3) p.

and

(1’) a exemplifies F.

(2’) a has the property F.

(3’) F a

I claim

(a) (3) because (2), (2) because (1).

(b) (3’) because (2’), (2’) because (1’).

(c) (1) grounds (2), (2) grounds (3).

(d) (1’) grounds (2’), (2’) grounds (3’).

Références

Cameron, Ross P., 2008. “Turtles all the Way Down : Regress, Priority and Fundamentality”. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 58 : 1–14

¹?: 3 misrepresents Armstrong’s “regress of truths, but not of truthmakers” answer to Bradley’s regress : Armstrong is a truthmaker maximalist but accepts that there are truths without *minimal* truthmakers. Hence, he does not identify grounds with minimal truthmakers, but rather just with truthmakers. His answer to Bradley’s regress is not that he says that the exemplification relation is not fundamental, but rather rejecting the exemplification relation and taking states of affairs to be undecomposable.