

## Graduate Colloquium 4/8

### 1. Preliminary – Grounding vs. Supervenience

*Supervenience*: reflexive, non-symmetric, monotonic. (transitive). Provides mere *modal correlation*.

*Grounding*: irreflexive, asymmetric, non-monotonic. (transitive). Provides *order* and *structure* to the world.

### 2. Some Examples

*Ex. A.* Plato's *Euthyphro* argument.

*Ex. B.* Socrates grounds the singleton {Socrates}, but the singleton plays no role in grounding Socrates.

*Ex. C.* The debate throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in normative ethics: consequentialism vs. deontology. Is the Good prior to the Right, or the Right prior to the Good? This is fundamentally a debate about *ontological priority*, *what grounds what*, and so cannot be captured using any other dependence relations/modal notions.

### 3. The Status of the Grounding Relation, R, Itself

Is the grounding relation fundamental, grounded, or neither? (It can't be neither, because then the world would be 'flat' – featureless. There would be no atoms, molecules, people, cars, or stars, etc.) Our general question, "Is property *P*, or relation *R*, fundamental?" is ambiguous between:

(a) whether there is anything in virtue of which the property or relation *exists?*, and

(b) whether there is anything in virtue of which it *is instantiated on particular occasions?*

Question (a) corresponds to the claim that the property or relation itself is fundamental, and question (b) corresponds to the claim that particular facts involving R or instantiating R are fundamental.

### 4. The General Solution: "Superinternality to the rescue!"

"A superinternal relation is one such that the intrinsic nature of only *one* of the relata — or, better, one side of the relation — guarantees not only that the relation holds, but also that the other relatum(a) exists and has the intrinsic nature it does" (K. Bennett, "By Our Bootstraps" p. 32).

#### 4.1 Application, in reverse order

(b) The fact regress – as harmless as truth-regress. Infinite but unproblematic.

(a) The regress of relations. The 'superinternality' thesis defuses this regress by, essentially, deflating all the relations involved such that they "barely exist."

### 5. The Solution Fails (& My Own View)

(b) The truth-regress *is* harmless (agreed), but it is also not *explanatory*. In contrast, grounding is meant not only to give structure but to *explain* that structure.

(a) If we admit entities as our relata, as I think we should, then the superinternality thesis fails – for there are no substantial, property bearing objects at the "ground"-base level to possess the *intrinsic* features needed to secure the "upwards-unfolding" of things, as Bennett puts it. There are only fluctuating fields, which are *structural*, not *substantial*, and hence have no intrinsic, non-relational properties.

NB. I do not deny that at the macroscopic level of ordinary objects something like a superinternality thesis might work. Nor do I deny that *fundamentalia* obtain at this "higher" level – after all, I maintain that the grounding relation is fundamental. Still, Bennett and I both agree that many (most?) fundamental entities are microphysical, at least on the shared picture presented here.

One plausible way to respond to my concerns about superinternality would be, I believe, to go *Monistic*. If there is only *one* fundamental entity upon which all else is derivative (a la Schaffer), then one needn't worry about the nature of microphysical entities.