Attacks on Ground, continued...

Metaphysics Seminar, March 2nd, 2016

Preview: Last class, we mainly discussed Wilson's reasons for thinking Big G Grounding does no work on its own to illuminate metaphysical problems. Today, let's discuss why it looks like Big G gounding isn't useful even if we couple it with the little gs. Then we'll compare Wilson's criticisms with a few that Koslicki raises. Koslicki maintains (like Wilson) that it's implausible to think there is a single grounding relation. Instead, similar to Wilson, we should take there to be many kinds of grounding relations. Koslicki discusses whether we can count the little g grounding relations as falling under the umbrella of Big G grounding. She doesn't think Grounding has the power to unify relations in that way.

1 The uselessness of Grounding in conjunction with the little gs

1.1 Useful to have a coarse-grained G-notion in addition to the finer-grained g-notions?

Wilson considers some suggestions:

- **Suggestion:** We can use Grounding to characterize the physicalism/non-physicalism debate.
- **Suggestion:** Our use of "in virtue of"/"Grounding" in various discussions provides evidence that there's a single notion of Grounding. Response: It is not parsimonious to posit Grounding. Additionally, this doesn't provide a reason to take Grounding as *metaphysically* primitive.)
- **Suggestion:** We are epistemically motivated by these "nothing over and above" intuitions. Response: Again, this doesn't provide a reason to take grounding to be *metaphysically* primitive.
- **Suggestion:** Do we need Grounding to fix the direction of priority? Little gs "may not in general be sufficient to establish a relationship of ground. So, for example, given that every X is a proper part of some Y, nothing follows about whether it is the parts or the wholes that are metaphysically dependent (558)

  Response: We don't need Grounding to fix the direction of priority, we can appeal to fundamentality without appealing to Grounding. This is pretty easy in cases where X depends on Y and Y is fundamental while X is not.

  But how do we characterize the fundamental on this approach? Not as the ungrounded! But that's okay, Wilson thinks. We shouldn't be characterizing the fundamental as the ungrounded anyway.

  Wilson says:

  > We...have two reasons to resist a characterization of the fundamental as the un-Grounded: first, such a characterization inappropriately characterizes basic entities in negative and, more importantly, in non-basic terms; second, such a characterization is inappropriately theoretically loaded. In place of a negative non-basic, theoretically loaded characterization, we should rather characterize the fundamental in positive basic, metaphysically neutral terms. Here I am inclined to follow Fine and 'reject the idea that the absolute notion of fundamental reality is in need of a relational underpinning', rather taking reality and its intrinsic structure to be primitive: 'it is this positive idea of the intrinsic structure of reality, rather than the comparative idea of reduction, that should be taken to inform the relevant conception of what is fundamental or real.' Though I endorse Fine's view that the fundamental is primitive, I

> think we can say more about this notion; namely, that it follows from some goings-on's being fundamental at a world that these goings-on, individually or together, provide a ground–nota bene: in one or other specific 'small-g' fashion, not by reference to a distinctive relation of Grounding–for all the other goings-on at the world. Which entities are in the fundamental base is primitive; this primitive specification then fixes the direction of priority." (561)

Question: Are we happy with this? What about redundant fundamental entities?

- **Suggestion:** Do we need Grounding in cases where nothing is perfectly fundamental, but there are still priority relations? Response: No, we'll still be working with an idea of the fundamental in the background...
- **Suggestion:** Do we need Grounding as a "general unifier" of the little gs? Wilson thinks we do not. First, why think that just because the little gs have certain features in common, it follows that there is a primitive Grounding relation? Second, what exactly are the features uniting the little gs as varieties of Grounding? Are they structural features, like irreflexivity, asymmetry and transitivity? If so, then so what, lots of relations that share these features! Moreover, are we so certain that all the little gs share these features (consider the set-membership relation...)

2 Koslicki on Grounding

Like Wilson, Koslicki also takes grounding to be too coarse-grained to illuminate debates in metaphysics. She also thinks it is implausible that there exists a *single* grounding relation. Moreover, continuing with the last point of Wilson, Koslicki explores whether grounding can play any unifying role.

Koslicki reflects on some of the "quintessential" cases of grounding:

- a. Moral/Natural: The fact that an act is a telling of a lie grounds the fact that the act is morally wrong.
- b. Truthmaking: The truth of the proposition that snow is white is grounded in the existence of the state of affairs, snows being white.
- c. Logical Cases: The fact that the ball is red grounds the fact that the ball is red or round.
- d. Determinate/Determinable: The fact that the ball is crimson grounds the fact that the ball is red.
- e. Sets/Members: The singleton set containing Socrates is grounded in its sole member, Socrates.
- f. Holes/Hosts: The holes in a piece of Swiss cheese are grounded in the piece of Swiss cheese in which they reside.
- g. Abundant/Sparse Properties: The abundant property, grueness, is grounded in some combination of sparse properties.
- h. Genus/Species: The fact that A is a square is grounded in the fact that A is an equilateral rectangle.

Koslicki asks: What work has been done by subsuming these cases under the label of "ground"?

Koslicki thinks that while accounts of grounding (like those offered by Schaffer and Rosen) maintain that grounding is supposed to be a "unified phenomenon", it's difficult to see how it plays this unifying role.

> "The hypothesis that grounding is a unified phenomenon, as it is presented by Schaffer and Rosen, is open to several different interpretations. In its strongest form (the single-relation interpretation), the unity hypothesis states that there is only a single grounding relation and it is exemplified by all cases which allegedly present us with grounding connections. A somewhat weaker version of the unity hypothesis (the single-genus interpretation) allows for distinct specific grounding relations, but posits that these distinct specific grounding relations fall under a single

generic kind, viz. grounding. A yet weaker reading of the unity hypothesis (the mere resemblance interpretation) requires only that the distinct relations which go under the name grounding exhibit various objective similarities." (6)

Let's look at the first two ways of interpreting the unity hypothesis:

2.1 The Single-Relation Hypothesis

2.1.1 Why can't we have the "single relation" view of grounding?

Koslicki thinks it would not be able to accommodate both Species/Genus grounding and Determinate/Determinable grounding.

For species/genus grounding, we can provide a real definition of the species in terms of the genus + differentia: The fact that A is a square is grounded in the fact that A is an equilateral (and equiangular!) rectangle. This not the case for determinable/determinate grounding. Furthermore, the two cases differ with respect to prioritizing specificity.

Koslicki maintains, "the appropriate reaction to these two cases would seem to be to posit at least two distinct specific grounding relations, e.g. the genus/species relation and the determinable/determinate relation. Whether these two alleged specific grounding relations fall under a single more generic kind, viz. grounding, is left open by the information with which we are provided." (6)

2.1.2 Some other weird features that make treating grounding as a single relation implausible

Sometimes grounding is cross categorical, sometimes not.
Sometimes grounding can be overdetermined, sometimes not.

(Note: Koslicki wants the heterogeneity of grounding to speak to two different things: that grounding claims of the form A grounds B, alone, leave us in the dark about the specific features of the grounding claim in question. And 2. That grounding seems to have different characteristics upon different instantiations, which should lead us to deny that it's a single relation.)

2.1.3 A Restricted Single-Relation Hypothesis

Nevertheless, maybe there is a Restricted Single-Relation Hypothesis: The grounding relation featured in a,b, and d is the same. The grounding claims in a, b, and d all exhibit *essential connectedness*, you may think. "Essential Connectedness states that both grounding connections hold in virtue of the natures of the properties at issue." Thus, applying Essential Connectedness to (d), we learn that it lies in the natures of the properties, red and crimson, that instantiations of crimson ground instantiations of red.

Koslicki's objection: the moral-natural case is different from the truthmaking and determinate/determinable cases.

2.2 The Single Genus Hypothesis

Perhaps the a-g above are all *species* of grounding? But in that case, "we should expect to be able to state the essence of these two specific relations in the form of a real definition which mentions the genus to which they belong (viz. grounding) together with some differentiating feature which distinguishes the two specific relations from each other."

Question: Is there a way, other than by appealing to the species/genus distinction, to unify the relations featured in a-h as "grounding" relations? (Alnica)