

Schaffer and Raven on the Bedrock

Metaphysics Seminar, February 17, 2016

Preview: Raven considers the following three inconsistent propositions: (1) Necessarily, there is something fundamental. (2) It is possible that the world lacks foundations. And, (3) The fundamental just is the foundational. To get out of this tension, Raven believes that most people will want to deny 1 or 2; however, Raven thinks that we should deny 3. Raven takes his discussion to undercut (one of) Schaffer's arguments for monism in "Monism, the Priority of the Whole". There are other arguments for monism that Schaffer provides that aren't impacted by Raven's discussion. Let's look at those too, if we can.

1 Raven's Inconsistent Triad

- **Fundamentalism:** Necessarily, something is fundamental.
- **Abyssalism:** Possibly, nothing is foundational.
- **Foundationalism:** Necessarily, something is fundamental iff it is foundational.

Fundamentalism: Something is fundamental. Raven understands this as: there must be "ineliminables". An ineliminable is s.t. "reality cannot be completely described without it." (4) Why must there be ineliminables? "Suppose there were no ineliminables. Then, for any account of reality including an ineliminable, there would be another omitting it. But then 'being would be infinitely deferred, never achieved' in Schaffer's pity words."

Abyssalism: An abyss is a kind of "foundationless" world with limitless descent. There are different varieties of foundationlessness, according to Raven: mereological, existential, and eidictical. It seems like limitless descent along any of these dimensions is metaphysically possible.

Foundationalism: A foundational entity depends on nothing else. Non-foundationality seems to imply non-fundamentality: if something depends on something else, then that first thing is eliminable. And foundationality seems to imply fundamentality: since a foundation depends on nothing, it cannot be eliminated in favor of what it depends on.

2 Resolving the Puzzle by Rejecting Foundationalism

2.1 Anti-Foundationalism

In order to reject Foundationalism, Raven wants to make the notion of a "fundamental entity" and "ineliminability" more precise. He thinks that an entity is fundamental when it persists. An entity persists when some fact involving it is not grounded in facts not involving it, or if it recurs in the grounds.

We can clarify these ideas as follows:

- **Bounded:** an entity c is bounded in ϕ iff ϕ contains c and for some full ground Γ of ϕ , c is not a constituent of any fact or any partial ground of any fact in Γ .
- **Unbounded:** an entity c is unbounded in ϕ iff ϕ contains c but c is not bounded in ϕ .
- **Ineliminable:** c is ineliminable iff c is unbounded in some ϕ .
- **Eliminable:** c is eliminable iff c is bounded in every ϕ containing c .

An entity is fundamental when it is ineliminable in this sense.

This approach to fundamentality allows fundamentality without foundations. Two scenarios:

1. Diffused abyss: a property is fundamental but not foundational.
2. Pervaded abyss: an individual is fundamental but not foundational. “Consider a pervaded abyss in which a whole recurrently pervades the chain of grounds for having the parts it has. Thus, what grounds a whole’s having this part is that the whole has as parts the parts of this part, and that the whole has as parts the parts of the parts of this part, and so on.”

So we can resolve the puzzle by rejecting Foundationalism while leaving Fundamentalism and Abyssalism intact.

3 Applications to Monism

Raven thinks rejecting foundationalism undermines one of Schaffer’s arguments for Priority Monism.

- **Monism:** There is one fundamental entity: the cosmos.
- **Pluralism:** There are at least two fundamental entities, none of which are the cosmos.
- **A Gunky World:** one in which every object is a fusion of proper parts.

3.1 Schaffer’s modal argument.

- P1. Monism or pluralism is true. (p)
P2. If pluralism is true, then it is necessarily true. (p)
P3. Possibly, the world is gunky. (p)
P4. Necessarily, if pluralism is true and the world is gunky then nothing is foundational. (p)
P5. Pluralism is true. (for reductio)
P6. So, possibly nothing is foundational. (2-5)
P7. So, possibly nothing is fundamental. (from 6 and Foundationalism)
—8. Pluralism is false. (from 7 and Fundamentalism)
C. Monism is true.

Raven will reject the inference from 6 to 7.

3.2 Schaffer’s Tiling Constraint:

The Tiling Constraint maintains that the basic (fundamental) objects must “cover” the cosmos without overlapping. The tiling constraint requires that the principle “No Parthood” be satisfied:

No Parthood: No fundamental object is a proper part of any other fundamental object.

If we understand fundamental objects as ineliminable objects, then No Parthood is violated in the case of the Pervaded Abyss. Raven doesn’t think this is problematic.

What are the motivations for No Parthood?

Argument from economy: Without No Parthood, there could be redundant fundamental objects. Redundancy is bad; therefore, we should accept No Parthood. Fundamental objects should be minimally complete (where “a plurality of entities is complete if and only if duplicating all these entities, while preserving their fundamental relations, metaphysically suffices to duplicate the cosmos and its contents.” The fundamental objects are minimally complete when they are complete and no proper sub-plurality is complete.)

Raven thinks that the argument from economy isn’t forceful if we reject Foundationalism. He states:

“Reconsider the argument from economy. In a pervaded abyss, the chains of ground illustrated in FIGURE 2 establish the ineliminability of an arbitrary whole but not any of its parts. Analogous but different chains of ground are needed to establish their ineliminability. Generally, merely including a fundamental (qua ineliminable) whole in an account of reality neednt include its fundamental (qua ineliminable) parts. So including the latter is not redundant. But here we have an economical violation of NO PARTHOOD: while some fundamental (qua ineliminable) objects are indeed parts of other fundamental (qua ineliminable) objects, this is not offensively redundant since the ineliminability of the one does not imply the ineliminability of the other.”
(18)

Argument from Recombinability: Without No Parthood, there could be illicit modal constraints on the combinations of objects. Illicit modal constraints are bad: fundamental entities should be freely recombinable.¹ Therefore, we should accept No Parthood.

Raven also thinks that Pervaded Abyss provides a *motivated* counterexample to the principle of free recombination.

¹Schaffer describes his free recomb principle as follows: “the fundamental actual concrete objects should be freely recombinable, serving as independent units of being (building blocks, as it were). Thus each should be, in Humes words, ‘entirely loose and separate’ (Hume 2000, 58). Somewhat more precisely, a plurality of entities is freely recombinable if and only if any combination of ways that each entity can be individually is a way that the plurality can be collectively. If entities are metaphysically independent, then they should be modally unconstrained in combination. (40)