

# Grounding and Degrees of Being

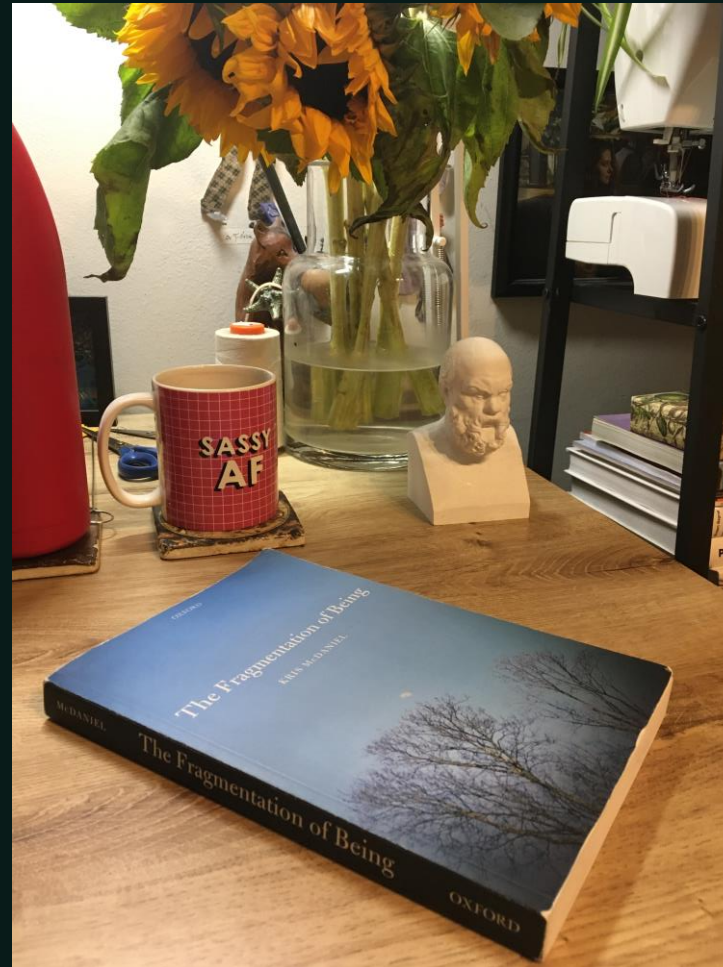


JAMES CLARK ROSS



# *The Fragmentation of Being* by Kris McDaniel

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# The plan

Introduction

Grounding

Degrees of being

An incomplete metaphysic





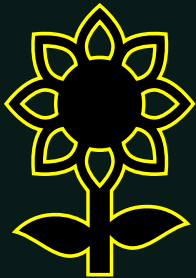
Introduction

My project



# Causal explanation ~ Metaphysical explanation

## CAUSATION



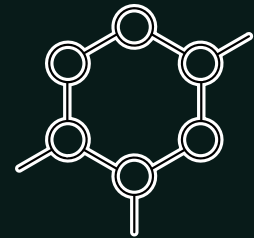
A

B

C



## GROUNDING



A

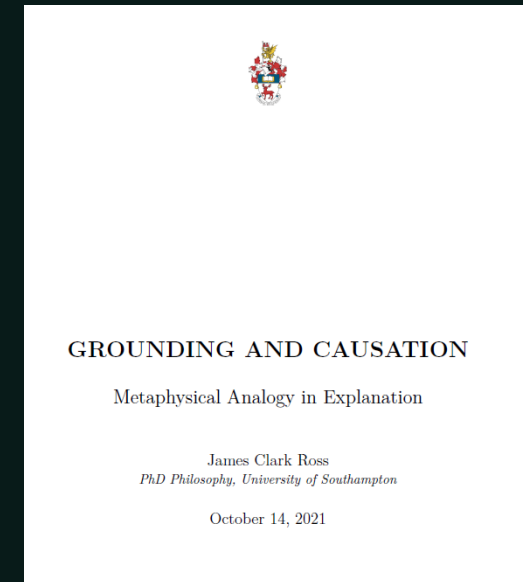
B

C

# Two world-structuring relations

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- Causation is a ‘horizontal’ relation (diachronic); grounding is a ‘vertical’ relation (synchronic).
- Linear, nonrepeating chains of events/entities.
- Each systematically imposes order on reality.
  - ❑ *Antecedence: Cause --> Effect*
  - ❑ *Primacy: More fundamental --> Less fundamental*



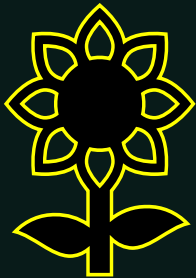
# Shared logic and concepts

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- Grounding and causation bear **logical and conceptual similarities** in explanation.
- Orthodox conception of **logic** of the ground:
  - ❑ *Transitivity*
  - ❑ *Asymmetry* ( $\neq$  *Irreflexivity*)
  - ❑ *Irreflexivity* ( $\Rightarrow$  *Asymmetry*, assuming *transitivity*)
- **Concepts:** ‘because’, ‘in virtue of’, explanatory, generative, productive, etc.

# Back to the example

## CAUSATION



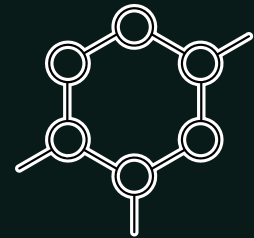
A

B

C



## GROUNDING



A

B

C



# Unity or mere resemblance?

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- From the literature:

- ❑ Fine (2012, p. 50): ‘Ground, if you like, stands to **philosophy** as cause stands to **science**.’
- ❑ Schaffer (2012, p. 122): ‘just as causation links the world across **time**, grounding links the world across **levels**.’
- ❑ Bennett (2017): Both relations are part of the ‘building’ **family**.
- ❑ A. Wilson (2018, p. 723): ‘grounding *just is* a **type** of causation [...] [W]henever *A* grounds *B*, *A* is a (metaphysical) cause of *B* and *B* is a (metaphysical) effect of *A*. Grounding is a **way of** causing.’.



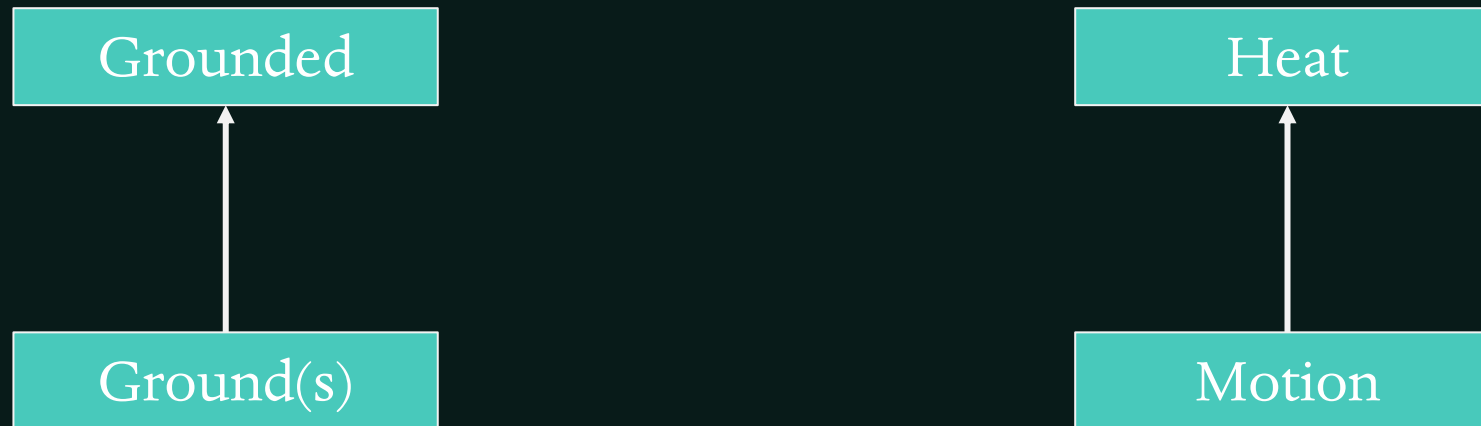
Grounding

Primacy

# Entities

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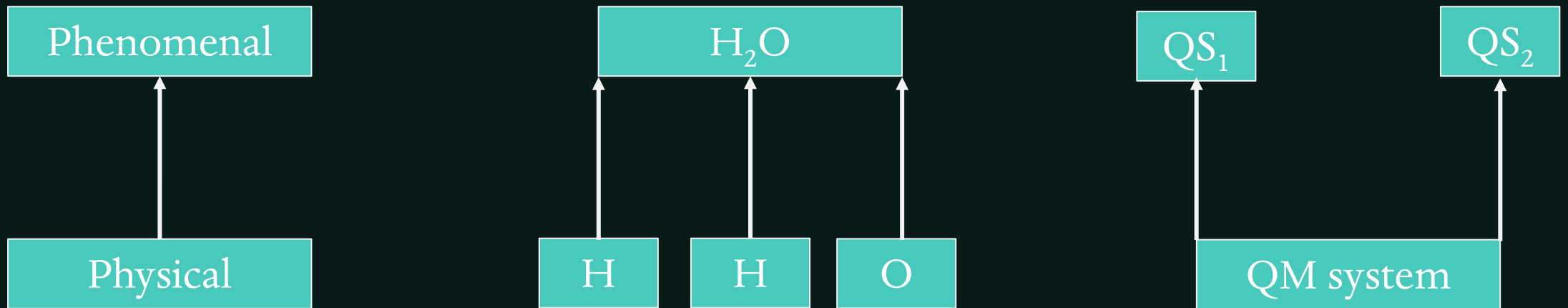
- Grounding connects facts or **entities** (properties, states of affairs, events, and even facts).
- We assume reality's **hierarchical structure**, whereby grounding connects the **levels**.





# ‘Thick’ grounding

- Someone like Schaffer (2017a) believes grounding fills explanatory gaps **everywhere**.
- The gaps are related by their **opacity**. But does a whole family of grounding relations (monistic/pluralistic) bridge the gaps? Is this account theoretically illuminating?
- Schaffer (2017b) makes use of **metaphysical laws and principles** (substantive).



# ‘Thin’ grounding

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- Ground is **not part of reality**: we do not know the structures metaphysical explanation tracks.
- **Deflationism**: In ‘constitutive explanation’ (Dasgupta 2017), we pick out **conceptual and counterfactual priorities** and **issues of intellectual interest** (same for causation).
- **Irrealism**: Mind-dependence (of ME) ‘infects’ mind-independence (of G). G still **useful** and **intelligible** (Thompson 2016, 2018).
- **Primitive**: ideologically, modally, scrutably, metaphysically, **methodologically, intellectually** (McDaniel ibid., Dasgupta ibid.).

# Problem 1: Not special enough

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Many other ‘small-g’ relations (constitution, composition, realisation, part-whole, etc.) do the work of grounding. There is no ‘big-G’ family (J. Wilson 2014).

There is arguably a broader and stronger analogy in ‘building’ (Bennett 2017).

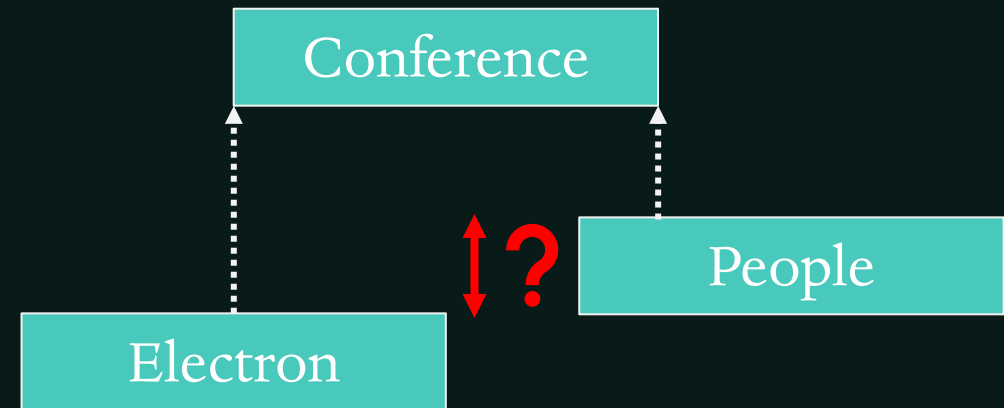




# Problem 2: Not strong enough

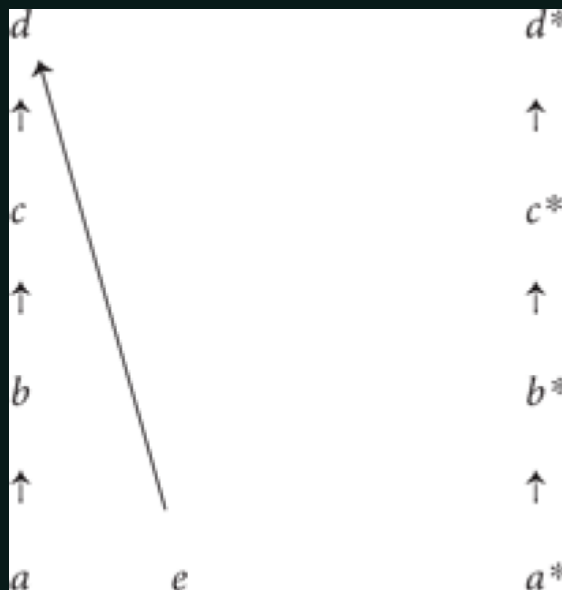
- I am interested in **relative fundamentality**: expressing that some things are more fundamental than other things in relations—substance and abstracta (neo-Aristotelianism).
- But there is no straightforward way to limn reality's levels through grounding. Its 'more fundamental than' relation offers **sufficient** but **not necessary conditions** (Bennett 2017).

- ❑ Different, nonterminating chains: how is distance 'calculated'?
- ❑ Determinable/determinate problem (e.g., mass).
- ❑ Many shared properties are not fundamental (e.g., 'being like').



# Steps from 'the bottom'

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Degrees of being

Orders of existence



# Ontological pluralism

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- There are **different ways of being** (hence ‘fragmentation’).
- Being is connected by way of **analogy** (medieval).
- What ‘being’ means exactly depends on our particular **theory**.
  - ❑ Aristotle: ‘Being is said in many ways’ mantra.
  - ❑ Aquinas: God and creatures.
  - ❑ Leibniz: Monads and ‘attenuated’ everything-else.
  - ❑ Meinong: *Existence* (time) and *subsistence* (timeless).
  - ❑ Heidegger: *Extistenz*, subsistence, readiness-to-hand, presentness-at-hand.
  - ❑ Ryle: Ridiculous to say that ‘exist’ is deployable for the number 2 and God.

# Semantics

- The locus of fundamentality is the **amount of reality**.
  - ❑ 'More real than' ~ 'More natural than' ~ 'More fundamental than'
  - ❑ 'Perfectly real' ~ 'Perfectly natural' ~ 'Fundamental' (ungrounded?)
- Advantage: We can **grade existence** by degrees of being in 'commensurable' way.
  - ❑ ~ Mass: An elephant is more massive than an ant; you exist more than Harry Potter.
  - ❑ More parsimonious a notion than naturalness and structure, into which being is built.
- Analogy is stronger in **unity** than mere disjunction.
  - ❑ Compare 'sharp' (wine, musical note, glass) and 'healthy' (food, heart, body, mind) to parthood.



# Quantification

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- There are generic (**polyadic**) quantifiers,  $\exists$ , and specific (**monadic**) quantifiers,  $\exists_x$ . The former quantifies over all the different domains: **quantifier variance**.
- ' $\exists_x$ ' denotes a particular **mode of being**.
- $\exists$  is **not a disjunction** of  $\exists_x$ ;  $\exists_x$  is **a restriction of  $\exists$** . Both are primitive but differ in naturalness.
- If  $\exists_x$  is a **perfectly natural** quantifier, objects in its domain **fundamentally exist**.



# Holes

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*'You mean it dried up?' Gluckuk inquired.*

*'No,' said the will-o'-the-wisp. 'Then there'd be a dried-up lake. But there isn't, where the lake used to be there's nothing—absolutely nothing.'*

*'A hole?' the rock chewer grunted.*

*'No, not a hole,' said the will-o'-the-wisp despairingly. 'A hole, after all, is something. This is nothing at all.'*



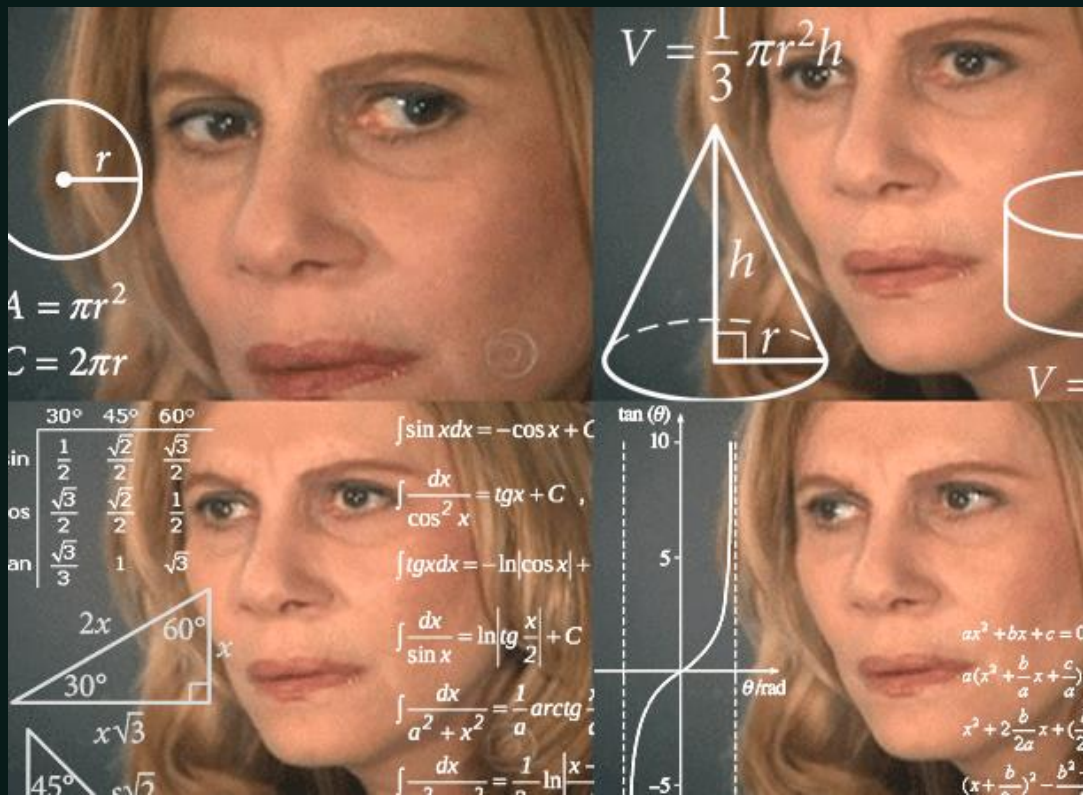
# Lesser beings

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- ‘Beings by courtesy’—shadows, holes, past objects, sets, fictional entities—are less real than other objects. Nonetheless, they are real.
- McDaniel speculates that they are in the domain of  $\exists$  but not  $\exists_x$  as a remainder, that is, they do not have a mode to exist fundamentally in.
- Perhaps this extends to relations (Aristotle), which ‘inhere in’ real objects but are not real in themselves—not for McDaniel: he thinks relations are real ...



# Criticism



- Are degrees of being really ‘commensurable’ in a meaningful way?
- McDaniel writes: ‘ $x$  exists to degree  $n$  just in case the most natural possible quantifier that ranges over  $x$  is natural to degree  $n$ ’.
- And: ‘an object’s degree of being is proportionate to the naturalness of its most natural mode of existence.’
- The intelligibility of a degree here is dubious, for it cannot be measured. Is it numerical? An intuition? A vibe!?



An incomplete metaphysic

Other metaphysical  
relations: apply within

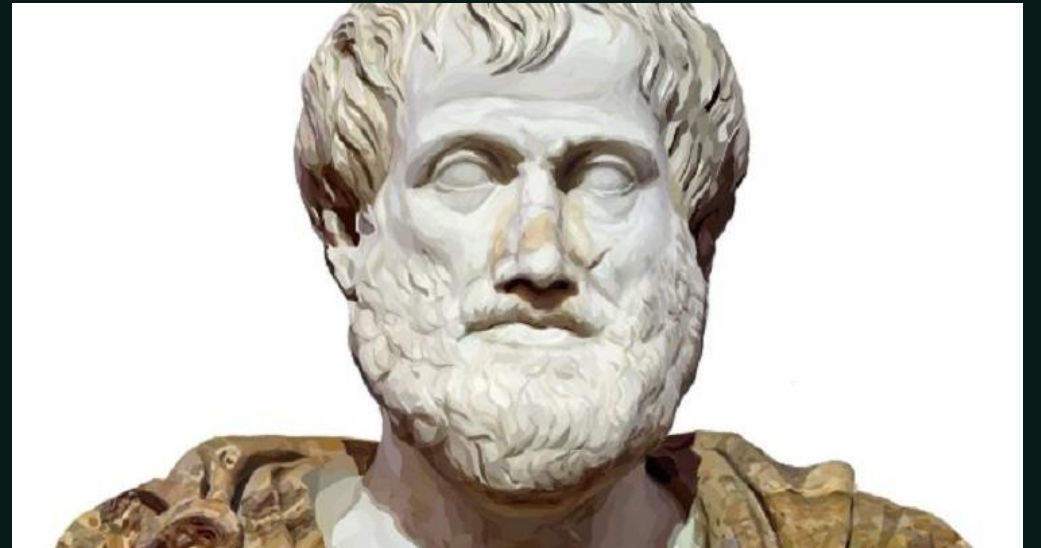




# Ground and being

**Ground** by itself—just ‘ $x$  is grounded in  $y$ ’—**isn’t sufficiently distinct.**

**Being** lacks relations between entities.  
Something (e.g., 2) may exist more than  
something else (e.g., Harry Potter) but  
that **doesn’t induce structure.**



# Troubled ground

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In virtue of what does grounding, as a structuring agent, **obtain** such that it is **responsible** for metaphysical heavy lifting?

- **Metaphysically / ideologically primitive?**
  - ❑ Brute features of reality / perfectly natural.
  - ❑ Each grounding relation is part of a grounding family / genus. How? What grounds grounding relations?
- **Methodologically primitive?**
  - ❑ Use is already conventional, logically sound, and coherent (Rosen 2010; Fine 2012, Audi 2012, Litland 2016). But too weak?
- We could claim the grounding relation is not an entity itself but, rather, a **relational predicate** of entities as a fundamental locution (Lowe 2004; Sider 2009).

# Lessons from being

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- Several metaphysically important grounding relations --> embrace **pluralism**?
  - ~Analogous to quantifier variance (**grounding variantism**).
  - Then take fact-grounding to be a **restriction of** entity-grounding?
- The **grounding pluralist** can appeal to the **analogous or determinable** properties to **unify grounding** ( $g_i, g_j, g_k \dots g_n \in G$ ). Stronger than disjunction.
- The grounding **monist** must use **other means** whilst maintaining strength.

# Working together

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Four options to relate grounding and being:

- Option 1: ‘ground’ and ‘being’ are notational variants.
- Option 2: Grounding is prior.
- Option 3: Being is prior.
- Option 4: Grounding and being do metaphysical work alongside one another and other metaphysical relations.



# 1: Identify grounding and degrees of being

- We could **equate 'grounds' to 'more real than'**. In grounding-speak:

$x$  is fundamental =<sub>df</sub> Nothing is more real than  $x$

$x$  is derivative =<sub>df</sub> Something is more real than  $x$

- But then **particular connections are lost**.

- ☐ What about all those useful grounding-specific features?

- ☐ For example, modes of being and concrete particulars are equally real.

- ☐ What is prior between a mode of redness and a red substance?

- ☐ What is prior between being an electron and an electron itself?

--> Devoid of ontological structure



## 2: Grounding is prior

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- Arguably, a **category mistake**. ‘is grounded in’ is a perfectly natural expression. Indeed, grounding is largely taken to be **ideologically primitive** in the literature: a *sui generis* ontological category is commonly implied (e.g., Schaffer: nothing grounds the grounding relation).
- ‘**Big-G**’ grounding could consist in **tropes** as relations and properties exemplified by objects.
- Or it could be a **universal** (e.g., grounded in instantiating objects or ‘small-g’ relations).
- Features of grounding are then ‘**ultimate properties**’ in terms of which **being can be defined**. How? I am not sure.

### 3: Degrees of being is prior

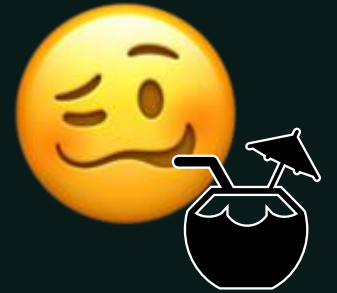
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- **Being** does the heavy **metaphysical lifting** for grounding.
  - ❑ Weak: Grounding is a **being by courtesy**. To **expand our armoury**, we should look to degrees of being or even naturalness to bolster the metaphysical floor **beneath grounding**.
  - ❑ Strong: Grounding is a **mode of being**.
  - ❑ Either way, grounding may still have an important role in metaphysics.
- But what would this even look like? **McDaniel falls short of offering specifics**.

## 4: A metaphysical cocktail

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- **Neither** does the necessary metaphysical work **alone**.
- One option: ' $x$  grounds  $y$  if and only if  $x$  is **more real than**  $y$  **and** either, for example, (i)  $x$  instantiates  $y$  **or** (ii)  $y$  is an event involving  $x$ '—**a conjunction with a disjunction**.
- Another option: Take both notions as basic. **Not parsimonious**.
- McDaniel takes '**more real than**' to be the **deepest relation** and appeals to various other connective relations, grounding or not grounding, to do more work.





# Thank you

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