

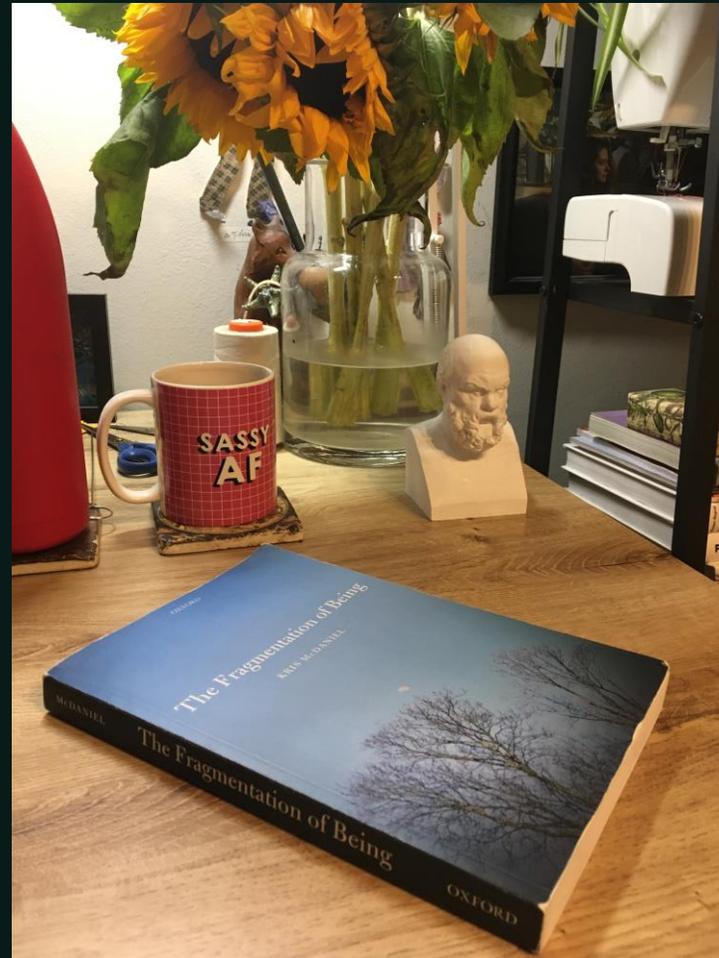
Grounding and Degrees of Being



JAMES CLARK ROSS



The Fragmentation of Being by Kris McDaniel



The plan

Introduction

Grounding

Degrees of being

An incomplete metaphysic



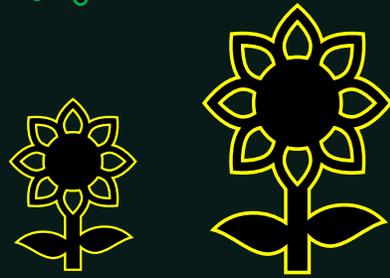


Introduction

My project

Causal explanation ~ Metaphysical explanation

CAUSATION



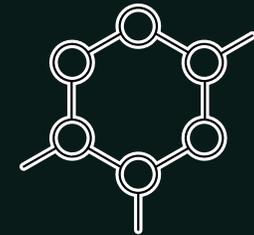
A

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GROUNDING



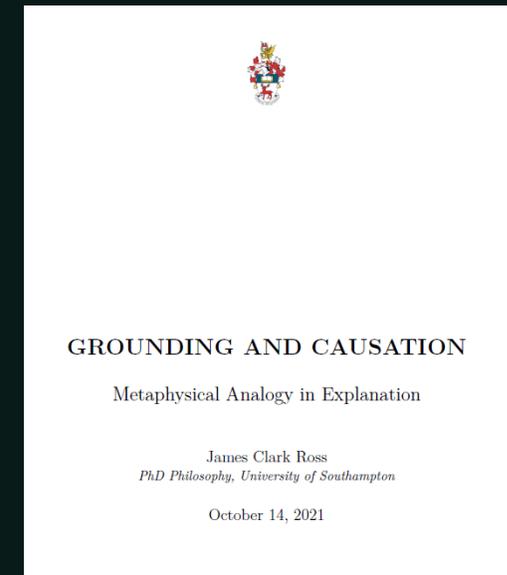
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Two world-structuring relations

- 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*

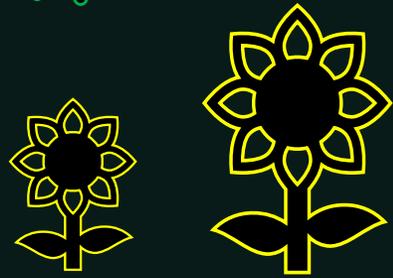


Shared logic and concepts

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

Back to the example

CAUSATION



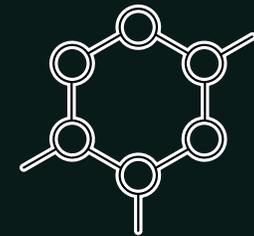
A

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GROUNDING



A

B

C

Unity or mere resemblance?

- 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.’.

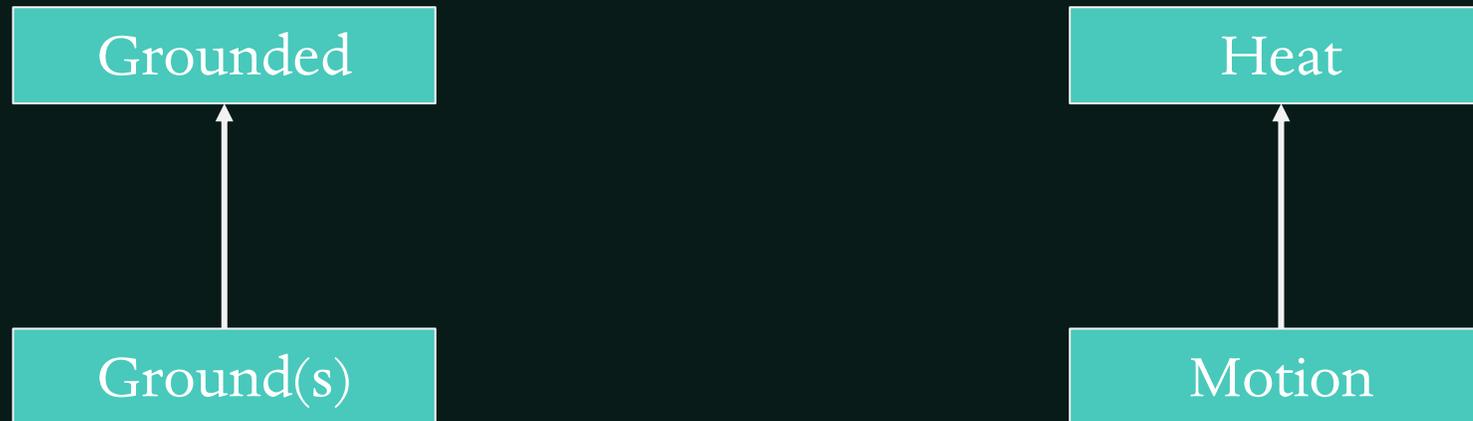


Grounding

Primacy

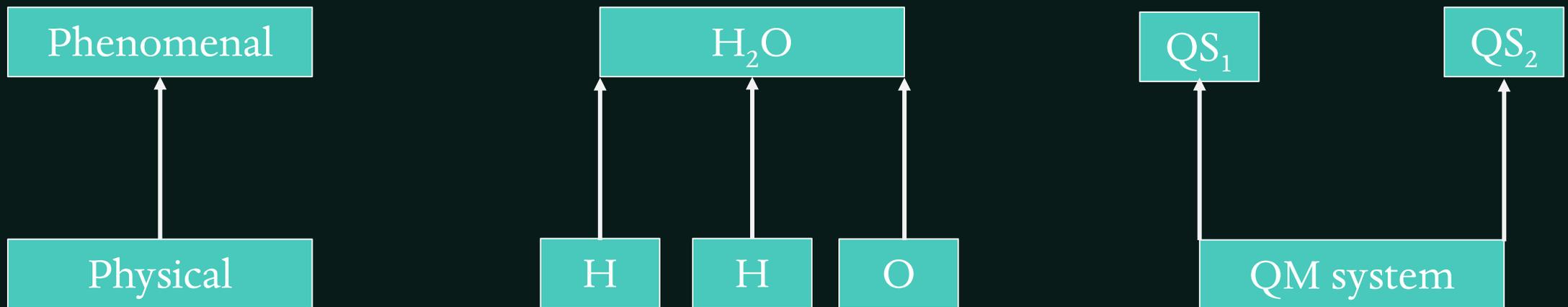
Entities

- 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

- 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

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).



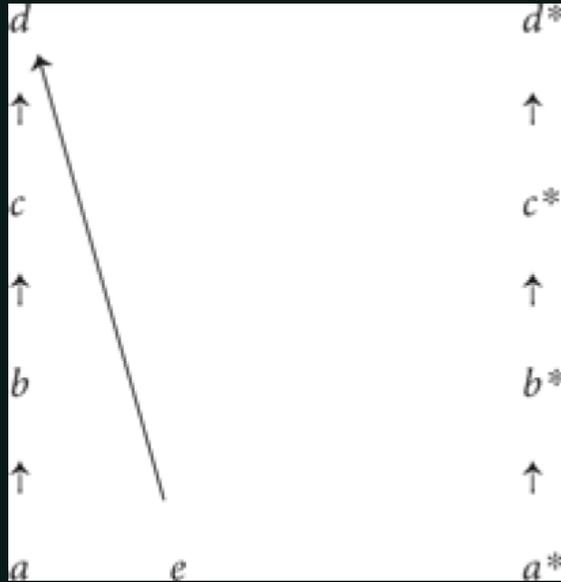
Problem 2: Not strong enough

- 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'





Degrees of being

Orders of existence

Ontological pluralism

- 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

- 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

'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.

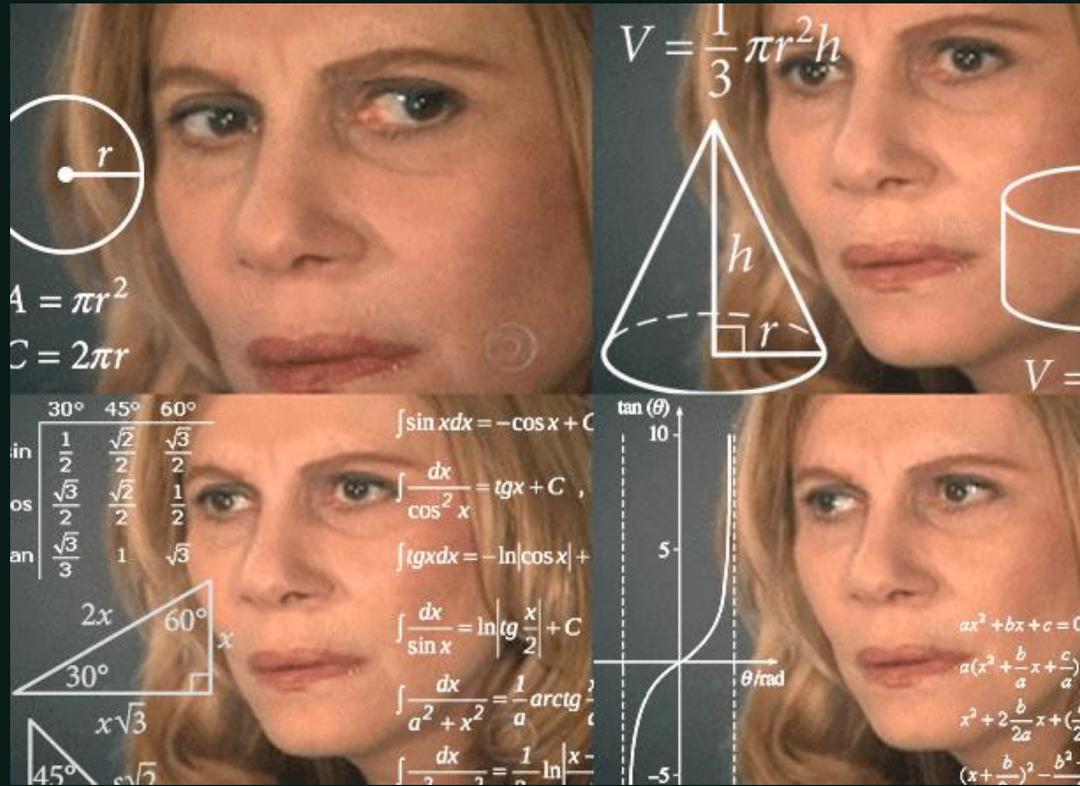
'No, not a hole,' said the will-o'-the-wisp despairingly. 'A hole, after all, is something. This is nothing at all.'



Lesser beings

- ‘**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

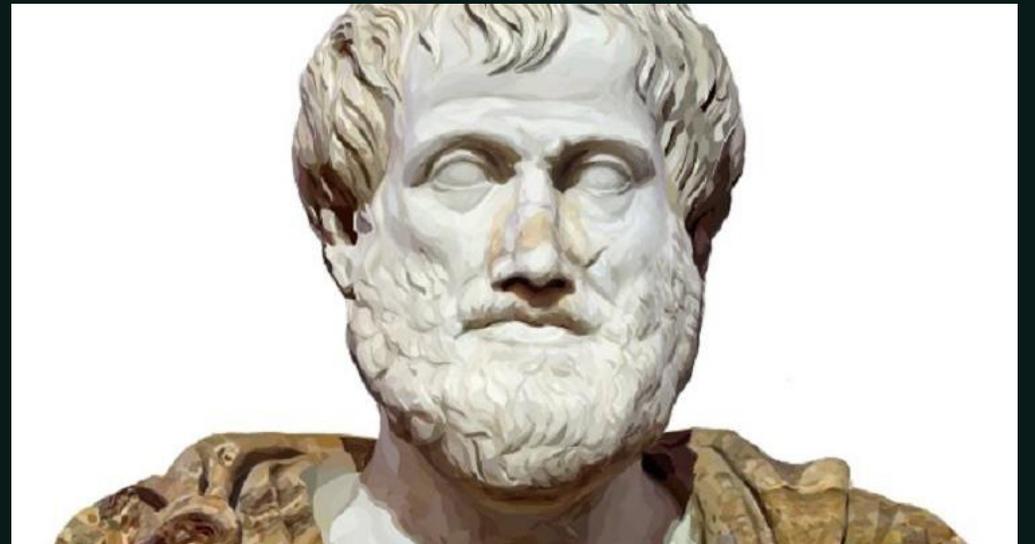
Other metaphysical
relations: apply within



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

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

- 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

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 =_{df} Nothing is more real than x

x is derivative =_{df} 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

- 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.

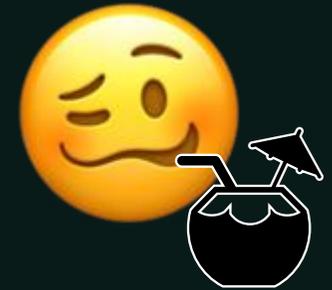
3: Degrees of being is prior

- **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

- **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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