

# Fundamentality in Philosophy

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## ***From Actual to Possible Objects, Qiong Wu (Boston University)***

In *Writing the Book of the World*, Sider (2011) develops a non-fundamental account of modality, which is later termed by Amie Thomasson (forthcoming) as “classificatory conventionalism”. Unlike the traditional modal conventionalist (e.g. Sidelle, 2009) who is looking for modal truths from linguistic conventions, Sider is looking for modal truths from the objective world. It is the objective world that makes modal truths true. But unlike the traditional modal realists (e.g. Lewis, 1986) who claims that possibilities and necessities somehow exist in the objective world, Sider thinks that the distinction between necessity and contingency does not “carve nature at the joints”. Necessary truths are necessary because we take them to be so given certain contexts and conventions.

I will argue that Sider’s account fails to establish the non-fundamental status of modality by failing to fully reduce modal truths to fundamental non-modal truths. The reduction project is crucial to the non-fundamental account of modality in the sense that it denies the existence of fundamental modal truths. In the first part of the paper, I will lay out Sider’s account of how to reduce modal truths to non-modal truths. In the second part, I will argue that his account faces a dilemma in reducing some modal truths such as metaphysical truths and a posteriori necessities based on the consideration of possible objects.. Finally, I will discuss a possible way to escape the dilemma and argue that it faces several problems that cannot be easily reconciled with Sider’s account of modality.

It should be noted that my criticism, if succeeds, does not challenge non-fundamentality of modality per se. What is called for, instead, is a more sophisticated account to spell out the non-fundamentality involved in the issue.

***Easy ontology and categorical quantification, Benjamin Marschall (University of Cambridge)***

In defending her deflationary, easy approach to ontology, Amie Thomasson relies on a controversial thesis about quantifiers: According to her, categorical quantification over things of a specific kind *F* is prior to bare quantification over objects in general. This priority thesis has been met with skepticism, since Thomasson is not very explicit about how categorical quantification could be fundamental. In my paper, I will show that we can make sense of her position by applying Thomasson's sortal solution to the qua problem to the semantics of quantification: If sortals are needed to secure referents for names, they should be required for assigning objects to variables as well. On this interpretation, that categorical quantification is fundamental means that sortals are essential for variable assignments, and hence every element in the domain of quantification falls under a sortal. I then show that this construal indeed delivers the deflationary result Thomasson needs.

***Fundamentality in deep disagreements, Victoria Lavererio (University of Vienna)***

The study of disagreements is currently one of the prominent topics in epistemology, and it is fair to say that every kind of disagreement teaches something new about our epistemic predicament. Although Fogelin introduced both the notion and the problem of deep disagreements in 1985, epistemologists have only very recently started to take notice. I start this presentation by characterizing what deep disagreements are in a theoretically neutral way, including three desiderata I believe any theory of deep disagreements should be able to meet. Then, I introduce what I take to be the most prevalent kind of views of the phenomenon in epistemology, the Fundamental Model. Finally, I point to certain challenges a theory based in epistemic fundamental differences faces when trying to meet the desiderata mentioned. My goal is modest; I want to draw a rudimentary metaepistemological landscape, in which theories of deep disagreements can be evaluated. Furthermore, I want to point to some shortcomings that views based on fundamental differences face in order to motivate a moderate skepticism towards such a model.

***Stocker's Schizophrenia, alienation, and a solution, Huzeyfe Demirtas (Syracuse University)***

Stocker (1976) argues that modern ethical theories cause a disharmony between one's motivation and justifying reasons for action. Since harmony is mark of a good life, living lives guided by these ethical theories will lead to living not-so-good, fragmented lives. The disharmony will be too costly also because it will alienate us from values like love and friendship. Stocker's paper continues to generate a wide literature of responses. I will firstly proceed to present the problem and give a new interpretation of it. There are two kinds of responses in the literature: one, Stocker's arguments don't apply to a particular moral theory; and two, the kind of disharmony Stocker identifies isn't intolerably disruptive. I will present the responses to Stocker's challenge, and argue that none of them succeeds. I will also dig a bit further and want to capture the heart of the problem, and identify the conditions a solution has to take into account. Then I will present my solution. I will argue that we have good reasons to think that morality is neither the only, nor the authoritative source of justification for action. In my view, we could be motivated to act out of personal values like love and friendship, and be justified by these values—even if it is sometimes morally wrong to so act. In addition, I will argue that an action could be overdetermined—done out of more than one consideration at once. Once these points are acknowledged, we will have large enough room for the realization of values like love and friendship, and won't suffer the kind of disharmony Stocker identifies.

***Problems in a normative understanding of morality: A Wittgensteinian critique of Pleasants' basic moral certainties, Jordi Fairhurst (Universidad de las Islas Baleares)***

The present paper aims to study and critique the possibility of a normative understanding of morality. Specifically we will critique Pleasants' (2008, 2009, 2015) proposal of 'basic moral certainties' –as it embodies this normative understanding. Basic moral certainties play a foundational role in our moral practices: they cannot be meaningfully challenged since they constitute the basis that allows us to carry out other moral practices and judgments. Pleasants claims that the wrongness of killing an innocent individual is a clear-cut case of a basic moral certainty that cannot be meaningfully challenged or doubted. In order to argue against Pleasants' proposal we will introduce two counterexamples regarding euthanasia that draw from and exemplify the underlining rationale of Wittgenstein's proposal in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* ([1922] 2001) and "A Lecture on Ethics" (1965) –albeit, we will not argue in favor of

Wittgenstein's ethical proposal. Both counterexamples aim to demonstrate the inadequacy of Pleasants' proposal and conceiving the wrongness of killing innocent human being as a basic moral certainty.

***The fundamental features of visual epistemology, Li Li Tan (University of Cambridge)***

There is an extensive debate on whether the phenomenal character of visual experience can include more than just "low-level" features like shapes and colours. Many philosophers have argued that various "high-level" features can also be part of visual phenomenology. These include natural kind features (e.g. being a cat), action properties (e.g. being graspable), and causal properties (e.g. being the cause of the window breaking). That is, objects do not just visually appear to be coloured and shaped – they can also appear to be a cat, to be graspable, and so on. This paper presents a new challenge to the claim that visual phenomenology includes high-level features. Many of the strategies and examples offered by high-level theorists in defence of their view suggest that high-level features supervene on low-level features. I argue that if high-level features do supervene on lowlevel ones, then there is no difference that high-level features can make to visual phenomenology that low-level features do not already make. In other words, low-level features are the fundamental "building blocks" of visual phenomenology.

***Grounding truths without a grounding relation, Victor Tamburini (Institut Jean-Nicod)***

The notion of grounding has gained prominence in contemporary metaphysics. Grounding is supposed to serve as our most general notion of metaphysical dependence. It is presented as entering a distinctively metaphysical kind of explanation. The grounded - metaphysically dependent - entity is explained by the ground - more fundamental - entity. On the linguistic side, sentences that state what grounds what can be called grounding sentences. For a number of philosophers, grounding sentences should be interpreted as true in virtue of a relation of metaphysical dependence holding between facts. We will call this interpretation grounding realism. This paper proposes an alternative interpretation of grounding sentences. In section (I), a case that poses a challenge for grounding theorists is presented. In view of our diagnosis for this case, a new interpretation of grounding sentences is introduced in section (II). According to this

interpretation, grounding sentences are true in virtue of relations holding between constituents of facts, i.e. between objects and between properties. In section (III), we claim that our interpretation is compatible with two different construals of properties: properties as tropes and properties as universals. In our final section (IV), it is argued that the interpretation of grounding sentences in terms of relations between constituents of facts cannot be reduced to an interpretation in terms of a relation between facts

***A grounding-based measure of relative fundamentality, Jonas Werner (University of Hamburg)***

The aim of this paper is to provide a measure of relative fundamentality. I develop and defend an account of the metaphysical hierarchy that assigns to each truth a set of ordinals representing the levels on which it occurs. The account allows to compare any two truths with respect to their fundamentality and it uses immediate grounding as its sole primitive

***Ontological fundamentality, Joaquim Gianotti (University of Glasgow)***

Among other things, metaphysicians are in the business of providing an account of the fundamental constituents of reality. The success of such an enterprise demands a clarification of the notion of fundamentality. On certain views, fundamentality is a form of ontological independence. A merit of this conception is to capture in a unified way the desiderata for a satisfactory account of fundamentality. However, a conception of fundamentality as ontological independence is in tension with the possibility of fundamental and yet ontologically dependent entities. My aim is to show that the previous possibility do not jeopardize the plausibility of a conception of fundamentality as ontological independence.

***Reduction, identity, and reference, Simon Thunder (University of Nottingham)***

Reductionists usually analyse ontological reduction as identity. What it is for some entity  $x$  to reduce to  $y$ , they say, is for  $x$  to simply be identical to  $y$ . At the very least, they claim that the identity of  $x$  and  $y$  is a necessary condition on  $x$  reducing to  $y$ . This analysis has the advantage of making sense of two corollaries of the claim that  $x$  reduces to  $y$ , namely that  $x$  and  $y$  both exist and that  $x$  is nothing over and above  $y$ . Nevertheless, I argue, on closer inspection this analysis is

objectionable. The root of the problem is that accepting it often requires reductionists to posit aggregates of lower-level entities to which to reduce the higher-level entity. The postulation of these aggregates is problematic for a variety of reasons. So I recommend that reductionists instead analyse reduction in terms of reference. Since plural reference, where one referring expression refers non-distributively to many entities, is possible, part of the new account will be that  $x$  reduces to the  $y$ s iff ' $x$ ' refers to the  $y$ s. This feature allows the reductionist to avoid positing aggregates, leaving her with an all-things-considered more plausible view.

***Aristotle on fundamental concepts, Konstanty Kuzma (LMU München)***

There are two prevalent sorts of interpretations of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. Those that embrace the unlikely fate of all virtues being seated in a mean and then try to tackle its consequences, and those that reduce the talk of a "mean" to mere word-play by regarding it as roughly synonymous with "virtuous". In my paper, I develop an alternative approach according to which the doctrine of the mean makes a conceptual point not in the sense of introducing a new word for a moral state we are already well-aware of (i.e. being virtuous), but by working out the way in which our conceptual apparatus itself couples virtues with related excesses. Thus I hope to bring not only consistency to Aristotle's doctrine, but draw genuine insight from it.

***A naturalistic account of metaphysical fundamentality, Abel M. Suñé (University of Barcelona, Logos Research Group)***

An uncontroversial desideratum for any proper theory of ontology is that it doesn't incorporate any redundant entities that inflate its ontology unnecessarily. James Ladyman and Don Ross (2007) have formulated a naturalistic theory of ontology submitted as a theory of existence that rules out all metaphysically relevant sorts of redundancy. This theory, inspired by Dennett's theory of Real Patterns (1991), is an important step in the field of naturalized metaphysics; however, the details of its formulation haven't received much attention. After introducing some relevant tools of algorithmic information theory, and the basics of Ladyman and Ross's theory, I argue that there is an important sort of redundancy relevant to metaphysics -pragmatic redundancy- which is, claims to the contrary notwithstanding, admitted by Ladyman and Ross's theory of ontology. I then show that while removal of pragmatic redundancy cannot be considered a tool to define

existence, it carves an important metametaphysical joint: its identification serves to track metaphysical fundamentality. With this in mind, I go on to suggest a possible way to formulate a naturalistic semi-formalised definition fundamentality based on the removal of pragmatic redundancy.

## **Keynote Abstracts**

### ***Wittgenstein and the Limits of Doubt, Michael Williams (John Hopkins University)***

Some influential philosophers take Wittgenstein, in *On Certainty*, to suggest a compelling response to radical skepticism. I agree that he does, but I think that his response is very different from what it is usually taken to be. According to the consensus view, Wittgenstein's fundamental insight is that there are propositions which 'lie apart from the route travelled by inquiry', thereby giving our practices of inquiry and epistemic assessment their characteristic forms and directions. Since these "riverbed" or "hinge" commitments constitute our epistemic 'frame of reference', they can be neither doubted nor epistemically justified. Accordingly, neither the skeptic's wholesale doubts nor the anti-skeptical epistemologist's project of wholesale vindication can get off the ground. I argue that this so-called "hinge epistemology" fails both as an answer to skepticism and as a reading of Wittgenstein. Following through on Wittgenstein's best ideas, I argue, suggests that skepticism can be answered by a kind of 'knowledge-first' epistemology. I explain how this works and indicate some of its implications.

### ***Is Consciousness Fundamental? Philip Goff (CEU)***

Are facts concerning human and animal consciousness among the fundamental facts? I will outline a philosophical case for the thesis that they are, and also provide a response to the empirical case which many philosophers have given to the contrary.