How to be a Monist about Ground: A Guide for Pluralists[1]

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Is there one univocal or generic notion of ground? Monists answer yes, while pluralists answer no. Pluralists argue that monism cannot meet plausible constraints on an adequate theory of ground. My aim in this paper is to articulate a monist theory of ground that can satisfy the pluralist constraints in a way that leaves the pluralists with no reasons not to endorse the monist picture of ground. I do this by adopting a tripartite conception of ground and then showing that it has the resources to vindicate monism while satisfying the pluralist constraints on a theory of ground.

1. Introduction

Is there one univocal or generic notion of ground? Pluralists say no. They believe that there is more than one fundamentally distinct kind of ground.[1] By contrast, monists say yes.

I will argue for grounding monism. But unlike Berker (2018b) and Rosen (2017) who argue for monism by way of counterexample, I give an account of monism that accommodates pluralist motivations. The monist view I will articulate rests on adopting an increasingly popular conception of grounding explanation where such explanations have three parts: (1) the grounds, (2) the laws, and (3) the grounded. I accommodate the pluralist motivations by endorsing a pluralism about the laws involved in grounding explanations,

1. For example, Bader (2017), M. A. Cameron (2014), Fine (2012), Koslicki (2015), Litland (2018a), Richardson (2018), and J. M. Wilson (2014) have all expressed *pluralist* sympathies, albeit they do not agree in their pluralist accounts.

rather than pluralism about grounding itself. Such a conception of ground allows us to remain proper grounding monists while incorporating the strengths that pluralists have argued are unavailable to grounding monists.

This paper is divided into three main parts. First, I motivate the significance of the debate between monists and pluralists by showing what is at stake in settling which view is correct. If pluralism is true, a great deal of contemporary philosophy is confused as a result of its insensitivity to an important range of unrecognized ambiguities. Second, I consider three different arguments for grounding pluralism, each of which issues a plausible constraint on an adequate theory of ground which grounding monism apparently fails to satisfy. It is difficult to see how any coherent theory of ground could satisfy all three of the pluralist constraints. The challenge then is to articulate any such theory. Finally, I present a monist theory of ground that privileges the role of laws in the theory of ground and show how it can satisfy the three pluralist constraints. The upshot is that monists can articulate a version of their view that pluralists, by their own lights, should regard as an adequate theory of ground.

2. Grounding

Grounding is standardly taken to be a kind of non-causal explanation.[2] Causation is the determination relation that holds between events, going from the earlier to the later, grounding is the determination relation[3] that holds between facts, going from the more fundamental to the less fundamental.[4] The facts that do the explaining are called the grounds, and the facts that are explained are called the grounded. Grounding claims are routinely stated using the following idioms: *A because B*, or *B in virtue of A*, or *A makes it the case that B*.

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2. For a more developed introduction to grounding, see Audi (2012), deRosset (2013), Fine (2012), Raven (2015), Rosen (2010), Schaffer (2009), and Trogdon (2013a).

3. Here I talk in terms of a grounding relation. I could just as easily talk in terms of a grounding operation. Since nothing will hang on this, I will permit myself to talk in whichever way has the greatest stylistic felicity. For a discussion on the distinction, see Fine (2012, pp. 46–47).

4. For more on the analogy between grounding and causation see Schaffer (2015) and A. Wilson (2017). For an argument that the similarities between causation and grounding are merely superficial, see Bernstein (2016).

Grounding has become central in contemporary metaphysics, but its reach continues to extend to other areas of philosophy, including the philosophy of mind, ethics (and metaethics), epistemology, and aesthetics. We can see this by observing the pervasive use of the idioms of ground in contemporary philosophy. Here are some illustrative examples of grounding claims made in a variety of philosophical sub-disciplines[5] with my emphasis added.

1. (Epistemology) "(Veridical Phenomenalism P) If your perceptual experience representing that p puts you in a position to know that p, then it does so *because* its phenomenology is veridical" (Chudnoff 2013, p. 174).

2. (Ethics) "Causing pointless suffering isn't the same as being wrong. But if some act causes pointless suffering, this fact may *make* this act wrong by *making* it have the different property of being wrong. Moral theories should try to describe the properties or facts that, in this sense, can *make* acts wrong" (Parfit 2011, p. 368).

3. (Philosophy of Mind) "If consciousness arises from the physical, *in virtue of what* sort of physical properties does it arise? Presumably these will be properties that brains can instantiate, but it is not obvious just which properties are the right ones. [...] A natural suggestion is that consciousness arises *in virtue of* the *functional organization* of the brain" (Chalmers 1996, p. 247).

Not only is first-order philosophy being done using the framework of ground, but many have made the meta-philosophical claim that we should adopt the framework of ground when doing philosophy. Here are some examples:

1. (Metaethics) "Thus I see first-order moral philosophy as fundamentally in the business of proposing (and assessing, and establishing) various grounding claims" (Berker 2018a, p. 743).

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5. One might worry that these are only apparent uses of grounding idioms. I cannot engage these worries here, but I acknowledge that to firmly establish a case for the claim that they are genuine uses of grounding idioms, I would need to provide detailed textual analyses and arguments. For the kind of argument that one might make for this sort of claim, see Berker (2018b).

2. (Aesthetics) "Aesthetic grounding is what we need instead of aesthetic supervenience. The relation of grounding, increasingly popular in metaphysics, is also one that we can appeal to in order to understand the relationship between aesthetic and nonaesthetic properties" (Benovsky 2012, p. 166).

3. (Philosophy of Mind) "We should instead understand [physicalism] in terms of ground" (Dasgupta 2014, p. 558).

Given the increasing importance of grounding to contemporary philosophical discourse, whether grounding is a unified and generic notion or not deserves significant attention. While monists claim that there is a single unified notion of ground, pluralists demur. In one way or another, they hold that grounding is too course-grained a notion to be able to do the metaphysical work it is called upon to do. But if some form of pluralism is correct then there are important questions that require close attention.

For example, grounding is thought to be transitive. But if pluralism is correct, then what about cases where there are many distinct kinds of ground involved? Does transitivity hold across kinds of ground? What of asymmetry?[6] Does the work on the logic of *metaphysical* ground extend to the logic of some distinctly non-metaphysical kind of ground? Do different kinds of ground have different kinds of relata? Since our philosophical practice has largely assumed monism, then depending on how pluralists answer the above questions, it may be that the pluralist is committed to highly revisionary implications for much of contemporary philosophy.[7] This underwrites an interest in articulating a monist account of ground that the pluralists can have no reason to reject, given the constraints they claim adequate theories of ground must satisfy. The hope is that we can preserve the fruits of a few decades worth of hard philosophical labor without worrying that in some sense our guiding assumptions have been misguided in significant and deep ways.

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6. Selim Berker (2018b) discusses these issues at length.

7. Although monism has been the dominant view, some pluralists may take issue with what I have been saying here and point out that pluralism may solve certain philosophical problems and not simply raise them. For example, Bader (2017) and Enoch (2019) both posit grounding pluralism in order to preserve the autonomy of the normative.

3. The Pluralist Constraints

Gideon Rosen says, the notion of grounding is confused when "there are several distinct notions of grounding [. . .] and uncritical invocation of 'the' grounding idiom conflates them" (2010, p. 114). This is precisely what pluralists accuse monists of doing. Pluralists claim that there are substantive distinctions that are incompatible with monist accounts of ground. In this section, I present three distinct (and competing) pluralist views and their primary reasons for rejecting monism.

3.1. Ground and Essence

The first pluralist argument we consider originates with Kit Fine (2012, pp. 39–40, 77) and is developed by Jon Litland (2018a). According to Finean pluralism, there are (at least) three distinct kinds of ground: metaphysical, normative, and natural. For our purposes we shall restrict ourselves to the distinction between the metaphysical and the normative, which is enough to establish a pluralist view, but similar arguments can be offered for the distinction between metaphysical and natural ground.

According to Finean pluralism "metaphysical grounding is always mediated through the essence of the grounded" (Litland 2018a, p. 2). As Fine says, "any ground-theoretic connection can be generalized to one that flows from the nature of the items involved in the given fact" (Fine 2012, fn 26). One strong version of this claim says that if A grounds B, then there is something in the nature of B that explains why A grounds B. In this way, says Fine, the grounded fact, B, "points" to its grounds, A (p. 76). But Fine's pluralist argument can be made with a weaker mediation claim: if A grounds B, then there is something in the nature of B together with the nature of A that explains why A grounds B.

This leads to pluralism when we observe that such a view looks incompatible with moral non-naturalism. Non-naturalists hold that the normative facts cannot be reduced to the non-normative facts. So they will deny any such essentialist connection between any particular normative fact and the non-normative facts that ground it. For example, suppose that Nancy's act is right. According to the non-naturalist, it won't be the case that the non-normative facts that ground that Nancy's act is right are essential to that fact, nor will it be the case that her act being right is essential to the facts

that ground it. But, on the assumption that Nancy's act is right because of some non-normative facts, then we must distinguish between metaphysical and normative ground.

Here is Litland's presentation of the argument:

> [S]uppose, for the sake of argument, that hedonistic act-utilitarianism is true. In that case, if an act maximizes pleasure it is right; but not only is an act that maximizes pleasure right, it is right because it maximizes pleasure. Could this be the "because" of metaphysical grounding? Fine holds that metaphysical grounding is always mediated through the essence of the grounded. If the "because" was one of metaphysical grounding it would then be essential to the Right that any action that maximizes pleasure be right. On the non-reductive view in question, however, there is no essential connection between the Right and any naturalistic feature like maximizing pleasure. From this we conclude that normative grounding is distinct from metaphysical grounding. The difficulty in defining normative grounding in other terms (see e.g., Fine 2012, pp. 39–40) now provides some evidence for taking normative and metaphysical grounding to be fundamentally distinct. (2018, p. 2)

One might wonder if this argument only succeeds by the lights of the non-naturalists who endorse a non-reductivism about the normative. The answer is no. The claim is not that non-naturalism is true, but that one's theory of ground should not beg the question against the non-naturalist. The thought is that non-naturalism is at least an intelligible view, and if one's theory of ground forces one to insist that no such view can be entertained, so much the worse for the theory of ground.

Summing up: since grounding monism fails to be able to countenance the pre-theoretic intelligibility of certain longstanding views about what is grounded in what, we should not conflate all kinds of ground with metaphysical ground.

3.2. *Explanatory Adequacy*

By contrast with Fine's pluralism, which holds that there are (at least) three distinct notions of ground (i.e., metaphysical, normative, and natural),

Koslicki (2015) and J. M. Wilson (2014) argue for a more radical pluralism.[8] On their view, there are many *little g* grounding relations (e.g., type and token identity, functional realization, the classical mereological parthood relation, the causal composition relation, the set membership relation, the proper subset relation, the determinable–determinate relation[9]), but no unified and generic *big G* grounding relation. And philosophizing in terms of a single univocal big G notion of Grounding obscures a diversity of real metaphysical relations.

Wilson and Koslicki insist that any adequate theory of ground must be explanatorily exhaustive in the following way: a claim of ground is not complete unless we know both *what* grounds what and *how*. Monism fails because it tells us nothing about how the grounds ground what they ground. Jessica Wilson makes the point nicely by example:

> Now, suppose someone claims that the mental is Grounded in the physical. Am I in position to know whether I should agree with them? Not at all. [. . .] [T]he bare assertion of Grounding is compatible with both reductive and non-reductive versions of physicalism—indeed, perhaps even with anti-realist eliminativism about the mental. [. . .] Absent further information about the specific grounding relation(s) supposed to be at issue, I am stuck: I am not in position to assess, much less endorse, the claim that the mental is Grounded in—is metaphysically dependent on, nothing over and above—the physical.[10] (J. M. Wilson 2014, p. 549)

Wilson is saying that even if it is true that the mental is grounded in the physical, there is more that needs to be said that is relevant to how the physical grounds the mental. But monism ignores this as irrelevant to ground.

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8. For some responses to their radical pluralism, see Berker (2018b), R. P. Cameron (2016), Raven (2016), and Schaffer (2016).

9. This list comes from J. M. Wilson (2014, p. 553). Another list is given by Koslicki (2015, p. 340): "we are led to believe that a variety of distinct specific relations are at work in these alleged cases of grounding, such as the genus/species relation, the determinable/determinate relation, truthmaking, and so on."

10. It should be noted that Fine (2002) acknowledges as much and sees it as a feature of the view rather than a bug.

We can clarify the objection by way of analogy. Imagine a road from here to there. The grounds are the origin, here, and the grounded is the destination, there. Suppose I arrive at my destination. One can ask where I have come from (my origin) or they can ask how I came (my route). Likewise, when it comes to explanation, if I want an explanation of some fact, I can ask about what explains it, or I can ask how what explains it does so. Therefore, as Wilson and Koslicki suggest there are, broadly, two types of explanatory questions we can ask: what and how questions. Wilson and Koslicki charge the monist with offering no resources to address how questions.[11]

Grounding monism is well suited to answering *what* questions, but lacks the resources to answer *how* questions. And for this reason, Wilson and Koslicki conclude that monist grounding is, by itself, not adequate to the very metaphysical task it is purported to do so well, which is to underwrite metaphysical explanation.[12] Since the little-g grounding relations are required for supplementation, we should distinguish ground by appeal to the little-g grounding relations that are essential to giving an adequate explanatory theory.

Summing up, there are two broad types of explanatory questions we can ask of claims of ground: what and how questions. Any adequate theory of ground must have the resources to offer answers to questions of both kinds and grounding monism is ill positioned to offer any insight into how-questions.

3.3. *Different Questions, Different Answers*

The final argument for pluralism that we will consider comes from Kevin Richardson (2018). According to Richardson, there is a distinction between how-ground and why-ground. He argues for this by recasting a puzzle for the transitivity of ground raised by Schaffer (2012) as a puzzle for grounding monism. He begins with the plausible principle of transitivity for ground:

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11. This is in keeping with Schaffer's (2016) reading of Wilson.

12. There is a dispute about whether grounding is metaphysical explanation or whether it underwrites metaphysical explanation. Those that favor the former are unionists and those that favor the latter are separatists. Generally, I assume unionism, but it is sometimes helpful to talk in separatist ways. Nothing will turn on this dispute. And ultimately, I think you can take whichever is your preferred position and translate separatist idioms into unionist ones and vice versa.

Transitivity: if *A* partially grounds *B*, and *B* partially grounds *C*, then *A* partially grounds *C*.

Here is Schaffer's presentation of the counterexample to transitivity:

> Imagine a slightly imperfect sphere [O], with a minor dent. The thing has a precise maximally determinate shape which English has no ready word for, but which I will dub "shape S." The thing also falls under a determinable shape which English also has no ready word for, but which I will dub "more-or-less spherical," understood as covering a range of maximally determinate shapes centered around the perfectly spherical but permitting some minor deviations. (Schaffer 2012, p. 126)

This would give us the following grounding claims:

- Dent-to-shape: that *O* has dent *D* grounds that *O* has *S*.

- Shape-to-sphere: that *O* has shape *S* grounds that *O* is nearly spherical.

So, by transitivity,

- Dent-to-sphere: that *O* has dent *D* grounds that *O* is nearly spherical.

Dent-to-sphere appears puzzling. For, plausibly it is despite the dent in *O* that it is spherical, not because of the dent. This leads some to say that Dent-to-sphere is false, and that it thereby constitutes a counterexample to transitivity. This has been the standard way of understanding this puzzle. But Richardson suggests that there is actually a very different puzzle here. He says that

> . . . although transitivity is relevant . . . the rhetoric of "counterexample" tilts the discussion in a specific direction. By presenting these examples as counterexamples, we build in the assumption that we are referring to a single kind of grounding. (Richardson 2020, p. 4)

Instead, he thinks the puzzle is one of trying to understand why there are two strongly competing views: reject transitivity or not. According to Richardson, the standard way of understanding the case puts us onto the horns of a dilemma: either we have to reject a highly plausible principle,

or we have to endorse highly implausible cases of ground. Neither option seems great. The reason a dilemma arises in the first place, he argues, is because we are assuming monism about ground. Thus, this is not a puzzle for transitivity but a puzzle for monism.

Richardson's cleverly evades the dilemma altogether by distinguishing between two kinds of ground: how-ground and why-ground. The dent in *O* how-grounds that *O* is nearly spherical. That is, that *O* is dented tells us *how*, or in what way, *O* is nearly spherical. But it doesn't tell us *why O* is nearly spherical (rather than some other shape). And so, while it how-grounds that *O* is nearly spherical it doesn't why-ground that it is so. This allows us in the case of *O* to simultaneously endorse the transitivity of (how-)ground, while rejecting an implausible case of (why-)ground.

Summing up, if we assume grounding monism we are forced onto the horns of a dilemma: we either reject plausible principles of ground, or we endorse implausible grounding claims. Both are unacceptable. Not just any pluralism will do here. In order to the puzzle we must distinguish between how-ground and why-ground.

4. How to be a grounding monist

We now have three pluralist constraints on an adequate theory of ground:

i. The theory should account for the respective role and absence of a role for essence in metaphysical and moral cases of grounding without begging the question against substantive metaethical views.

ii. An adequate theory of explanation must be explanatorily exhaustive in the sense that it settles all substantive explanatory (i.e., what and how) questions.

iii. The theory should avoid Richardson's puzzle: it should provide a way of avoiding the dilemma between rejecting transitivity on the one hand and endorsing implausible grounding claims on the other.

The challenge is to articulate a theory of ground that can accommodate each of these constraints. This is a tall task, not least of all because standard monist accounts don't seem positioned to make the relevant kinds of distinctions needed while remaining properly monist (as we saw in the last

section). The only way forward for grounding monists is to develop a notion of ground that allows us to make distinctions where previously none could be made. In this section I take up the task of articulating such a view. Along the way I demonstrate how the view satisfies each of the above pluralist constraints while vindicating the monist ambitions of being fully unified and generic.

4.1. *Grounding Legalism*

It is widely held that there are laws of ground. (For example, Bader (2017), Fogal and Risberg (2020), Glazier (2016), Kment (2014), Litland (2017), Schaffer (2017a,b), and Wilsch (2015a, 2021) all discuss or endorse a robust role for laws of ground.) This raises a question about what role laws play in the theory of ground. For our purposes, let us adopt a conception of ground that has three parts: grounds, laws, grounded. This is familiar from Schaffer (2017b), who says that "Explanation has a tripartite structure of source, link, and result" (p. 3). (Other philosophers who have discussed tripartite views of grounding are Dasgupta (2014), deRosset (2013), Fine (1991), Glazier (2016), and Johnston (2006).) Let us call this view *grounding legalism*.There is much that we can say about such a view, but for present purposes it will suffice for us to observe three of its features.

First, grounding legalism holds that in every case of grounding, there will be a law that links the grounds to the grounded. This is, by itself, a rather weak claim, since it is compatible with there being only a single law of ground—immediate ground itself. But this is not the intended interpretation of the claim. On the intended interpretation of the claim, all cases of ground will involve some law of ground, but there are many distinct laws of ground. This is crucial for the monist account of ground I am proposing, since it will be the variety of laws that explains the apparent variety of ground.

Second, laws qua laws *do not (even partly) ground*. Laws link rather than ground. Some readers will rightly observe that this is not very informative. What is linking? There are several ways forward (with relevant adjustments to whether we think of the grounds and the grounded as facts, propositions, sentences, etc.). We could follow Wilsch (2015a,b) and say that laws expressed by certain generalized conditionals, in which case laws would link by featuring the grounds in the antecedent of a conditional whose consequent was the grounded; or we could follow Glazier (2016) and say that

laws are variable binding sentence operators, in which case laws would link whenever the grounds and the grounded flank the law operator; or we could follow Schaffer (2017a,b) and say that laws are certain functions, in which case laws would link whenever they take the value of grounds and yield the value of the grounded; or perhaps something else. For our purposes, as long as we retain a commitment to a genuinely tripartite conception of ground, we can remain neutral on what exactly to make of linking. We can be permissive as long as we insist that linking is a distinctive role in our conception of ground. This is clearest when we consider Schaffer's view of laws as functions, since functions cannot serve as grounds (functions are neither facts nor propositions). Nevertheless, we need not be functionalists as long as we take care not to conflate linking and grounding.[13]

Third, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, grounding legalism holds that for Γ to *generically* ground ϕ is for there to be some law L such that the law exists and that L links Γ and ϕ. We can allow for there to be distinct "species" of laws of ground, such that any species X of laws will give rise to a corresponding notion of X-grounding in the following way: For Γ to (immediately) X-ground ϕ is for there to be a law L such that $X(L)$, $E(L)$, and L links Γ and ϕ, where X is treated as a higher-order species predicate and E is treated as an existence predicate. We can thus distinguish between different derivative notions of ground in terms of the generic notion of ground and the laws that are involved.

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13. Given that laws play a linking rather than grounding role, one might wonder whether laws just are conditions of ground such as enablers? If so, then one might wonder whether, like in the case of causation, the distinction between grounds and laws of ground is merely a pragmatic, and not a metaphysical one. (See, Lewis (1973), Mackie (1974, pp. 34–36), and Trogdon (2013b, p. 478)) Such a view of laws is not consistent with the notion of linking I am suggesting here. We might, instead, think of laws as links as being analogous to rules of inference. Inference rules are required for correct inference, but it would be incorrect to say that they serve as premises in the arguments that deploy them. Likewise, it would be incorrect to say that laws serve as grounds in the explanations that deploy them. (Compare Litland (2017, 2018b), where he claims that grounding explanations are a species of explanatory argument that are made up of basic *explanatory inferences*. On his view, we can think of laws as *rules* of explanatory inference.) Even if we think the distinction between grounds and conditions of ground is more than merely pragmatic, identifying laws with conditions of ground understates the significance of the role that laws play in grounding explanations, just as identifying rules of inference with background conditions for arguments understates the significance of their role in arguments. (Thanks for a referee for raising this issue.)

A picture can be helpful here. Imagine a machine that generates facts that are grounded in the facts it is fed.[14] We can think of the laws of ground as the mechanisms in the machine that operate on the inputs to generate the outputs. This nicely illustrates the structure of ground according to grounding legalism.

Like the grounding machine, grounding legalism holds that ground has three parts, one of which is a law. We can therefore use the grounding machine picture to illuminate one of the attractive features of grounding legalism: we can appeal to differences in which mechanisms (i.e., laws) are applied to the inputs to account for previously difficult to account for differences (and similarities) in the outputs thereby generated. First, in terms of differences, grounding legalism allows us to capture cases where the same fact is input into the machine, but because of differences in the mechanisms that are applied to that fact, the machine will generate different outputs. For example, given an input of P, if the law of conjunction is applied, it will generate $P \wedge P$. By contrast, if the law of disjunction is applied, the machine will generate $P \vee P$ instead (along with every disjunction of which P is a disjunct). Second, in terms of similarities, grounding legalism allows us to capture cases where what unifies two distinct facts is that they were generated by the same mechanism. For example, $P \wedge Q$ and $R \wedge S$ have a common form, attributable to the fact that they were both generated by way of the same mechanism: the law of conjunction.

It will be helpful to exhibit some illustrative examples of grounding legalism with its tripartite picture of grounds, laws, and grounded in mind. (The following examples are merely illustrative and are not commitments of the view.)

1. **Disjunctions:** the fact A (fully) grounds the fact $A \vee B$. This does not make explicit all the explanatorily relevant features of the grounding claim. There is also a law, call it *the law of disjunction*. Simplifying, the law specifies that whenever there is some fact ϕ, that fact will ground every particular disjunctive fact with ϕ as one its disjuncts.[15]

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14. Fine (2012) and Litland (2017) both have brief discussions on this "grounding machine".

15. One might wonder, given the law, which particular disjunctive fact a given particular fact will ground. And the answer, presumably is *all of them*. That is, for every particular fact, there will be some infinite number of particular facts that will be

2. **Promise Keeping:** The fact that S promised to do *X* (at least partially) grounds the fact that S ought to *X* (in the simple case). But again, this does not make explicit all the explanatorily relevant features of the grounding claim. There is also a law, call it *the principle of fidelity*. Simplifying, this law specifies that whenever one makes a promise to *ψ*, then one's making such a promise grounds a (*pro tanto*) duty to fulfill that promise.

3. **Physicalism:** The fact that *a* has the distribution of physical properties *P* fully grounds the fact that *a* has a mind. This is similar to the cases above. Simplifying, there is also a law, call it *the law of psychophysical harmony*. The law specifies that whenever an entity *x* has the distribution of physical properties *P*, then *x*'s having *P* grounds that *x* has a mind.

In these examples, I have ignored questions about the substantive form and content of the laws. For example, in my final example, I suggest that there might be *a law of psychophysical harmony*, but what is the form and content of such a law? This is an important question, and without saying something more, simply positing *a law of psychophysical harmony* does little to illuminate the explanation being sought for regarding minds. I omit saying more for two reasons. First, without settling the ontology of the laws of ground, it will be difficult to say more about their form and content. Second, I think that settling these sorts of questions will be highly controversial and should be done by those working specifically in the philosophy of mind (or the relevant philosophical sub-discipline). I ignore these details because I am interested in a more general question: By simply acknowledging a tripartite structure for ground, can we vindicate a monist conception of ground in light of the pluralist constraints? As we shall see, the answer is yes.

With grounding legalism in hand, we have a more fine-grained account of ground. We thus relocate the variety pluralists say holds for ground to the laws involved in ground. This undercuts the motivation for accepting

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disjunctively grounded in it. Of course, there are pragmatic salience conditions that make one or another particular disjunctive fact come to the foreground. This is not an ontologically neutral claim, since it suggests that we should not understand the laws as functions, but rather as relations. For functions will generate a unique output, given some input. Relations are not so restricted. Schaffer (2015, 2017a,b) and Wilsch (2021) are two examples of philosophers who have developed functionalist accounts of laws.

pluralism, since the monist can thereby satisfy all the pluralist constraints listed above. But since it is better to show this is true than simply to say it is, let us consider each datum in turn.

4.2. *The Essence Datum*

Recall:

   i. The theory should account for the respective role and absence of a role for essence in metaphysical and moral cases of grounding without begging the question against substantive metaethical views.

According to Finean pluralists metaphysical grounding is always mediated by the essences of either the grounds or the grounded. The Finean pluralist holds that while this is the case for metaphysical ground, it need not be the case for normative ground. We therefore need a distinction between metaphysical and normative ground.

The grounding legalist holds that every case of ground will involve a law of ground. They also allow for distinctions between species of ground, which allows us to define relative notions of ground in terms of the species of law involved. So the grounding legalists first step is to distinguish between different kinds of laws along the same lines as the Finean: metaphysical laws and normative laws.[16] Adapted to our tripartite view of grounding, Fine's account of metaphysical grounding would say that if Γ *metaphysically* grounds ϕ, then it is essential to ϕ that there be some metaphysical law M that specifies that whenever Γ is the case, then Γ grounds ϕ.[17] So far so good.

The grounding legalist's second step is to adapt Fine's claim that metaphysical ground is mediated by essence in the following way: where Γ grounds ϕ, we make the relevant metaphysical law L essential to ϕ.[18] Since the L will involve both Γ and ϕ, then it follows that Γ is (perhaps consequentially) essential to ϕ, in the case of metaphysical ground.[19] We then

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16. I choose these as the distinctions in part because these distinctions correspond to Fine's own distinctions in kinds of necessity. (See Fine (2005).)

17. See Dasgupta (2014) and Rosen (2010) for interpretations and developments of this sort of view.

18. We are working within a higher-order framework, and so we can allow for entities of various types to have essences.

19. For more on the distinction between consequential and constitutive ground, see Fine (1995, 2000).

simply deny that the law will be essential to the grounded fact in the case of normative ground.

Let's consider a paradigm case of metaphysical ground, by Fine's lights: A and B ground $A \wedge B$. In this case, there is only one relevant metaphysical law: call it *the law of conjunction*. In this case, the law of conjunction is essential to the conjunction $A \wedge B$. And since all particular instances of conjunction introduction fall under the law of conjunction, then A and B will both fall within the scope of the essence of $A \wedge B$. Contrast this with a normative case: suppose that Nancy's act is right. Since according to the non-naturalist, it won't be the case that the non-normative facts that ground that Nancy's act is right are essential to that fact, we can deny that the particular normative law that is involved in this case is essential to the fact that Nancy's act was right. This perfectly accommodates the non-naturalist's claim that we cannot read off of the essence of a given normative fact the facts that will ground it.[20]

One might wonder if we cannot simply deny that ground ever obtains in cases where the grounds are not essentially related to what they ground, as in the case of normative non-naturalism.[21] Such a move is always available, but is costly, for along with discounting views that are widely held in metaethics it will also discount widely held views in other areas of philosophy, such as non-reductive physicalism in the philosophy of mind. (For discussion, see Rosen (2010, pp. 130–133)). By contrast, grounding legalism has the virtue of being able to remain neutral on intramural disputes in philosophical subdomains. Moreover, denying that ground ever obtains in cases where the grounds are not essentially related to what they ground will not provide a general response to all three of the pluralist arguments we have considered. By contrast, as we shall see, grounding legalism can.

4.3. *The Explanatory Adequacy Datum*

Recall:

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20. This does not commit the grounding legalist to denying the necessitation of ground. The grounding legalist can, herself, be neutral about this question. It is entirely open to her to accept that normative laws, for example, make normative ground contingent, while metaphysical laws make metaphysical ground necessary. But she also need not endorse such a claim. It depends on her specific view about the nature of the laws involved.

21. Thanks for a referee for raising this concern.

ii. An adequate theory of explanation must be explanatorily exhaustive in the sense that it settles all substantive explanatory (i.e., what and how) questions.

Once we understand the role that laws play in grounding explanations properly, we see that it is the laws themselves that answer the *"how"* of grounding. Something like this has already been observed by Kment (2014) and Schaffer (2016), although not in this context. Laws specify how the grounds are related to the grounded. In this way, grounding is not merely a black box, with no information about how it is that the inputs generate the outputs. Instead, the laws say how the inputs generate the outputs. If we ask what explains some fact then an adequate answer will furnish the grounds. But if we ask how the grounds explain some fact, then the laws will be needed to adequately answer the question.

Recall that the kind of pluralist we are considering in this section says that if we want to give a theory that is explanatorily exhaustive in the sense that it settles all substantive explanatory questions, then only a radical pluralism of the sort that J. M. Wilson (2014) and Koslicki (2015) posit would do. Why? Because if we only distinguish between a handful of distinct kinds of grounding, say between normative and metaphysical grounding, we merely postpone the further question of *how* some particular fact *metaphysically* grounds another. We thus leave open explanatory questions that the less radical pluralist theories are not situated to be able to answer. For specifying the kind of grounding at such a coarse-grained level will not adequately answer the "how" question of grounding. Thus, in order to satisfyingly answer this question, we have to radically multiply the number of *sui generis* grounding relations there are, and thereby strain the notion of a unified family called grounding. This is why both J. M. Wilson (2014) and Koslicki (2015) end up endorsing skepticism about grounding. They simply follow their objection to monism to its logical end.

By contrast, a tripartite conception of ground has the requisite flexibility and explanatory power to be able to accommodate the "how" of grounding, without giving up a univocal or generic notion of grounding. And it is open to those who endorse such a view to posit as many laws as are needed to adequately answer all the how questions. In this way we can eat our cake without giving up the option of having it too.

For example, J. M. Wilson (2014, pp. 545–546) raises a concern for

monism. Her concern is that ground-theorists say that monist ground is neutral about substantive metaphysical questions when they shouldn't be:

> Given that [big-G] Grounding is supposed to illuminate metaphysical dependence—in particular, to illuminate how things are—such neutrality is perplexing. After all, [e.g.,] naturalists do not care only about whether, for example, normative goings-on metaphysically depend on naturalistic goings-On

She thinks such talk obscures the variety of kinds of explanation. For example, she says,

> a naturalist might be [···] a 'role functionalist', maintaining that normative state types are characterized by functional or causal roles played by naturalistic state types. Or a naturalist might maintain that normative state types and/or tokens stand in something like the determinable/determinate relation to naturalistic goings-on.

The grounding legalist can make these distinctions without thereby disunifying their conception of ground. To see how, I will subscript "grounds" in the following grounding claims with the relevant species of laws:

> (Func) The natural facts fully ground$_{func-law}$ the normative.

> (Det/Det) The natural facts fully ground$_{det/det-law}$ the normative.

The difference between (Func) and (Det/Det) is in which laws are involved. Therefore, the (Func) theorist and the (Det/Det) theorist can agree that the natural facts (fully generically) ground the normative facts, but disagree about how this so (i.e., which laws are involved). In any case, whether you endorse (Func) or (Det/Det) or some other view, you are in a position to provide answers to both what and how questions. *What* grounds the normative? The natural facts. *How* do the natural facts do that? The answer will advert to whatever the relevant laws are. So, grounding legalism can satisfy the Wilson/Koslicki constraint.

Monists have not gone without response to the arguments made by J. M. Wilson (2014) and Koslicki (2015). For example, Berker (2018b), R. P. Cameron (2016), Raven (2016), and Schaffer (2015) have all raised substantive

objections to the arguments. I am sympathetic to these responses, but I think there are two points to make in the current context. First, even if we reject Wilson and Koslicki's arguments, this won't give us general response to all three of the pluralist arguments we have considered. By contrast, endorsing grounding legalism does give us a general response. Second, for those who are persuaded by Wilson and Koslicki, it is helpful to have something to say which can at once take their arguments seriously and provide a monist account of ground. Again, grounding legalism can do this.

4.4. *The Richardson Puzzle*

Recall:

iii. The theory should avoid Richardson's puzzle: it should provide a way of avoiding the dilemma between rejecting transitivity on the one hand and endorsing implausible grounding claims on the other.

Once we make the structural distinction between the role of grounds and the role of laws in grounding explanations, we can reinterpret what is going on with Richardson's puzzle. The puzzle arises when we omit information about the laws. By omitting information about the specific laws that are involved in the particular cases of ground, we thereby obscure the laws that are involved in the chained claim of ground. Let us illustrate this using our subscripting convention once again:

- Dent-to-shape: that O has dent D grounds$_{L_{how}}$ that O has S.

- Shape-to-sphere: that O has shape S grounds$_{L_{why}}$ that O is nearly spherical.

So, by transitivity,

- Dent-to-sphere: that O has dent D grounds$_{L_{how}, L_{why}}$ that O is nearly spherical.

Richardson's dilemma was that either we have to reject transitivity or we have to endorse highly implausible cases of grounding. But, grounding monism need not decide between them. The grounding monist can endorse transitivity while providing a way of making the grounding claims plausible. The grounding legalist has an alternative explanation for what previously made the case seem so puzzling: a kind of conflation.

The conflation came from not acknowledging the distinct laws that might be involved in distinct claims of ground. So, where we do not distinguish between the laws, L_{how} and L_{why}, we are left to conflate the ways of ground involved.

If we allow for a tripartite understanding of ground, with a robust role for laws to play in grounding explanations, we can make more fine-grained distinctions without having to thereby make distinctions about kinds of ground. Such a view allows us to avoid Richardson's puzzle by reinterpreting what was apparently an implausible grounding claim in light of the role that the laws play in that very claim. Once we understood that the claim was, because of the laws, far richer and more complex, it was easy to see that the claim is much less implausible than before.

Of course, there are alternative monist responses to Richardson's puzzle. Schaffer (2012) himself offers a solution to the puzzle of transitivity by appeal to a contrastive account of ground that could be adapted to solve Richardson's puzzle. His proposal is that ground is not a relation between facts, but a relation between *differences*. He is able to thus provide a differential principle of transitivity:

> (Differential Transitivity) If the fact that ϕ rather than ϕ^* grounds the fact that ψ rather than ψ^*, and the fact that ψ rather than ψ^* grounds the fact that ρ rather than ρ^*, then the fact that ϕ rather than ϕ^* grounds the fact that ρ rather than ρ^* (Schaffer 2012, p. 132)

This looks like it provides a solution to Richardson's puzzle by providing a way of endorsing a principle of transitivity that doesn't result in requiring that we endorse implausible claims of ground. Schaffer's solution is to suggest that in the case of the dented sphere, there is a difference between O "having its precise shape S, and its having a slightly different (and more perfectly spherical) shape S^*" (136).

Although Schaffer's solution works, it has two drawbacks in the current context. First, as one referee put it, it solves the puzzle "at the cost of establishing some very extravagant metaphysics." Second, it doesn't provide a general response to all three of the pluralist arguments we have considered. Grounding legalism, by contrast, is far less revisionary than Schaffer's proposal, and can provide a general response to all three of the pluralist arguments.

4.5. Monism or pluralism?

In his work on the metaphysics of laws of nature, David Armstrong (1993) claims that the laws of nature are simply the causal relation *at a type rather than token level*. Applied to grounding, we would say that laws of ground are simply type level grounding relations, rather than token level grounding relations. Of course, such a view would imply a proliferation of distinct kinds of grounding relations. For if we admit of pluralism about laws of ground, and laws of ground are just ground at a type level, then for every distinct species of law there would be a corresponding and fundamentally distinct kind of grounding. The resulting picture would be a radical form of grounding pluralism.

This raises the question of whether instead of articulating a properly monist theory, I have simply articulated a new kind of pluralism. For one might wonder if the laws and grounding are themselves just the same relation under different guises.

The answer is no. For although I have distinguished a role for laws to play in ground, I have not suggested that laws replace ground. Laws link, and linking is not grounding. To think of laws as ground at the type level is to deny that ground has a genuinely tripartite structure. But, this is to endorse a view very different from grounding legalism. For grounding legalism endorses a three part conception of ground, with laws playing the distinctive linking role in the structure of ground.

5. Conclusion

We've considered three constraints on an adequate theory of ground. First, our theory of ground should account for essence mediated and non-essence mediated kinds of ground. Second, our explanations should tell us something about how the grounds ground what they ground. Third, our theory should avoid Richardson's puzzle that arises because of troubling cases of transitivity. Together, these constraints pressure us to understand ground as so deeply heterogeneous that it probably cannot play the role it needs to in order to underwrite much of the contemporary work that deploys the notion of ground. To avoid this, only a theory with the resources to make fine-grained distinctions will do. I have shown that grounding legalism is just such a view and can satisfy these constraints in a way that leaves the

pluralists with no reasons not to endorse the monist picture of ground.

Because it can satisfy all three of these constraints on the theory of ground, grounding legalism is doubly attractive. For although each of the pluralist theories we have considered can satisfy one or another of these constraints, none of them have proposed an account that can satisfy all three. The result is that pluralists face challenges on all sides: from monists (e.g., Berker (2018b) and Rosen (2017)) on the one hand *and* other pluralists on the other. By providing a monist theory of ground that satisfies each of the pluralists constraints on an adequate theory of ground, I have shown that grounding legalism should appeal not only to the monists but to the pluralists as well.

If I'm right, then philosophers have been correct to theorize in terms of a single unified notion of grounding with all of its attending theoretical benefits, and they should continue to do so.

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