

Fundamentality and the Metaphysics of Objects and Properties

Schedule & Information

Location: Universidad de Santiago – CEPEC Building (Room: Cowork 2; <https://g.co/kgs/3c8E3ET>)

Wednesday 2nd of October

- 14:00 -15:20 Javier Cumpa (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) & Carlo Rossi (Universidad de Santiago): Permissivism and the debate about universals
- 15:20-15:40 Coffee break
- 15:40 - 17:00 José Tomás Alvarado (Universidad Católica): Metaphysical Work for Aristotelians
- 17:00 -18:20 Carlo Rossi (Universidad de Santiago) & Javier Cumpa (Universidad Complutense de Madrid): Grounding, Ontological Dependence, and Aristotelian Universals

Thursday 3rd of October

- 10:00 - 11:20 Raúl Saucedo (University of Colorado-Boulder): The Higher-Order Grounds of Reality
- 11:20 - 11:40 Coffee break
- 11:40 - 13:00 Angelo Briones (Universidad de Concepción): A mereological problem for structured wholes: Transitivity implies identity
- 13:00 - 14:20 Lunch
- 14:20 - 15:40 Alex Moran (Université de Fribourg): Fundamental properties of derivative things
- 15:40 - 16:00 Coffee break
- 16:00 - 17:20 Otavio Bueno (University of Miami): Dispensing with Fundamentality, Preserving Ordinary Objects

Friday 4th of October

- 10:00 - 11:20 Gastón Robert (Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez): Grounding the (Phenomenal and Aggregative) Reality of the Physical World: The Leibnizian View.
- 11:20 - 11:40 Coffee break
- 11:40 - 13:00 Sebastián Briceño (Universidad de Santiago): Indefinitism, Pluralism, and the Principle of Sufficient Reason

List of talks with abstracts

Javier Cumpa & Carlo Rossi - Permissivism and the debate about universals

Permissivism is a view about ontological questions which holds that such questions for the most part can all be trivially answered. Understood in this way, Permissivism seems to be entailed, or at least motivate, an important number of ontological and metaontological views, ranging from Mereological Universalism and Material Plenitude to ontologies which draw prominently on some notion of fundamentality, and Deflationism. By and large, permissivist-inspired arguments have had as their ontological target material objects, but little to none is found within the ontological debate about properties. Our aim in this paper is to address this omission by providing a thorough assessment of one notable effort in this direction succinctly formulated by Jonathan Schaffer (2009, 2009a). Together with offering extended reconstructions of Schaffer's permissivist inferences, we argue that such inferences do not secure their intended conclusions. We also explore alternative ways in which the said inferences can be amended, although in each case with a restricted scope.

José Tomás Alvarado - Metaphysical Work for Aristotelians

Several recent works have pointed out that Aristotelian universals suffer from a problem of coherence (cf. Alvarado, 2020, §§ 53-59, 189-200; Costa, 2021; Raven, 2022; Costa & Giordani, 2024). A conception of universals is said to be "Aristotelian" if it requires them to satisfy a Principle of Instantiation, i. e., that it is necessary for every universal to be instantiated in an object or objects. A conception is said to be "Platonic" if it is not Aristotelian. Universals are supposed to ground the qualitative character of objects, so that, for example, object *a* is a cube because *a* instantiates a universal of cubeness and the fact that *a* instantiates cubeness is grounded (at least, partially) in the universal of cubeness. At the same time, nevertheless, the Aristotelian postulates that universals are grounded in their instantiations. For example, the universal of cubeness exists because it is instantiated at least in one object, say *a*. But it has been generally accepted that grounding is a strict order, irreflexive, asymmetric and transitive. It seems to be incoherent that cubeness grounds the fact that *a* instantiates cubeness and, at the same time, the fact that *a* instantiates cubeness grounds cubeness.

Defenders of Aristotelianism have proposed different ways to block this circle of grounding (cf. Imaguire, 2021; Giordani & Tremolanti, 2022). I will focus in this work on one of the strategies endorsed by Aristotelians that has to do with one of the

directions of grounding between universals and facts of instantiation. Platonists have argued that one should reject the characteristically Aristotelian contention that universals are grounded in facts of instantiation. The strategy examined here maintains, on the contrary, that facts of instantiation should not be conceived as dependent or (partially) grounded in universals but as a special kind of relational fact that brings into existence or “creates” one of its relata. The fact that, for example, a instantiates cubeness is not something that is grounded in the universal cubeness but is itself the fact that makes cubeness to exist in the first place. In this work, I will argue that:

(i) Universals that are not grounding (partially) facts of instantiation are universals that make no contribution for the metaphysical explanation of the community of nature of a plurality of objects (one over many) or the variety of natures of an object (many over one). Universals with no theoretical work to do are universals for which we have no reason to accept.

(ii) Other theoretical roles usually attributed to universals –the grounding of resemblances, causal powers and natural laws– are nullified if universals do not ground (at least, partially) the qualitative character of objects. Aristotelians cannot reject the grounding of facts of instantiation but retain the grounding of objective resemblances, or causal powers, as some have attempted (cf. Dixon, 2018).

Carlo Rossi & Javier Cumpa - Grounding, Ontological Dependence, and Aristotelian Universals

Intuitively, an immanentist or Aristotelian view about universal properties would be committed to the claim that universal properties depend on their instances for their existence. One way in which this intuitive claim has been made more precise is invoking the notion of grounding and, in particular, that of partial grounding. This in order to capture in a more perspicuous manner the dependence relation that obtains between universals and their instances. According to this formulation, the Aristotelian ought to be committed to the view that if a universal *U* exists, *U*'s existence is partially grounded in each of its instances. However, this view about universals has recently received a fair bit of criticism (Alvarado 2020; Costa 2021; Raven 2022; Costa and Giordani 2024) in virtue of alleged vicious circularities involving priority and ground that the view itself entails. Specifically, the circularities in question would involve, on the one hand, the said dependence relations that run from universals to their instances, and on the other, dependence relations that run from instances to the universals which they instantiate.

The general aim of this paper is to offer a defense on behalf of the immanentist or Aristotelian about universals particularly against Raven's (2022) and Costa and Giordani's (2024) improved versions of the objections previously leveled against Aristotelians. We think the task that Aristotelians should undertake here is twofold. On the one hand, they need to do better when it comes to motivate an alternative dependence framework in terms of which model the dependence web of relations that the Aristotelian envisages between universals, particulars, and state of affairs. Efforts in that direction have already been put forward by Lowe (2006: 34-7) and recently by Giordani and Tremolanti (2022) in direct reply to Costa (2022). On the other hand—and perhaps more importantly—the Aristotelian also needs to motivate, or more precisely, undermine, the thesis according to which it is valid to infer from existential

dependence claims that hold between universals and particulars (rigid and non-rigid alike) grounding claims that hold between both kinds of entities. Inferences of that nature are supported by what some have called in the recent literature correlation principles (Correia & Schneider 2012; Schneider 2020).

Raúl Saucedo - The Higher-Order Grounds of Reality

Building upon recent discussions about ontological priority and higher-order metaphysics, I give shape to the debate between a broadly Platonic and a broadly Aristotelian conception of reality. On the Platonic conception, first-order facts are grounded in higher-order facts; on the Aristotelian conception, higher-order facts are grounded in first-order facts. I explore the prospects of the Platonic conception, focusing on the higher-order grounds of first-order existence and identity.

Angelo Briones - A mereological problem for structured wholes: Transitivity implies identity

In this presentation, I argue that two different mereological theories for structured entities incur in the problem according to which the transitivity of proper parthood implies identity. The mereological theories are: Kathrin Koslicki's theory presented in her work *The Structure of Objects* and (ii) Edmund Husserl's theory of wholes and parts, exposed in his *Logical Investigations*. The main objective is to show that, in formal terms, any mereological analysis that accepts that transitivity implies identity is inconsistent.

Alex Moran - Fundamental properties of derivative things

It is widely held that a fact is fundamental if and only if it is ungrounded. (Indeed, many believe that *what it is* for a fact to be fundamental is for it to be ungrounded.) This natural idea, however, rules out a range of interesting views in mind, meta-ethics, metaphysics, and elsewhere, including property dualism and meta-ethical non-naturalism. This is because these views imply that derivative objects can have fundamental properties. Now if a derivative object has a fundamental property, the resulting fact is ungrounded. However, it is intuitively not fundamental, given that fundamental facts cannot have derivative objects as constituents. The paper suggests a revision to the orthodox account of that which makes a given fact fundamental, which nonetheless preserves the close link between fundamentality and grounding.

Otávio Bueno - Dispensing with Fundamentality, Preserving Ordinary Objects

In recent metaphysics, the notion of fundamentality has played a significant role, marking the importance of there being something fundamental in the world—that is, something that is ontologically independent from anything else. Current science, especially particle physics, on a particular metaphysical interpretation of it, is often alleged as providing such fundamentality. In contrast, ordinary objects, such as tables, chairs, mountains, lack any such fundamentality and are taken not to exist—in the sense that they are not fundamental, but, at best, are only suitable aggregates of fundamental things. In this paper, I argue against this view by pointing out that it reverses the proper ontological order. Nothing in contemporary science can play, even in principle, the role of fundamentality required by the metaphysician and there are

far better reasons to be committed to ordinary objects than to a metaphysics that challenges their existence.

Gastón Robert - Grounding the (Phenomenal and Aggregative) Reality of the Physical World: The Leibnizian View.”

When a philosopher asks, “what is philosophy?”, she is doing philosophy. By contrast, when a physicist asks, “what is physics?”, she is not doing physics: she is doing philosophy. A similar point holds for other fundamental questions the physicist may ask. One of these questions concerns the reality of the physical world itself. The physicist works with, and speaks of, physical ‘reality’. Yet, qua physicist, she needs not concern herself with metaphysical questions about its reality or ontological status: that’s a philosopher’s task. My aim in this talk is to present what I take to be one of the most salient attempts made by a(n) (historical) philosopher to ground the reality of matter: that of Leibniz. Leibniz does not feature prominently in contemporary discussions in the philosophy of physics. However, his concerns are still with us – or so I want to propose. The view I present (i.e. Leibniz’s, as I see him) is, in short, this: bodies have a phenomenal and aggregative reality grounded on the actively representational power of unities which enter into them as constituents

Sebastián Briceño - Indefinitism, Pluralism and the Principle of Sufficient Reason

In the vast contemporary debate over the notion of grounding, at least two phenomena seem noteworthy: on the one hand, a renewed interest in the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), the principle according to which everything is explicable (Della Rocca 2010; 2014; 2020; Dasgupta 2016; Pruss 2006); on the other hand, a persistent attack against the main thesis of metaphysical Foundationalism—namely, that grounding is a well-founded relation—associated with a positive assessment of alternative ways of understanding grounding, such as Coherentism and Indefinitism (Bliss and Priest 2018). In some cases, the two phenomena seem to be internally connected. This is the case in one of the recent arguments used by Indefinitism against Foundationalism. According to this argument, Indefinitism is logically equivalent to the PSR, while Foundationalism is logically incompatible with the PSR, since the former position adheres to a form of explanatory universalism whereas the latter position admits brute facts and a brute line that separates grounded facts from brute facts. Therefore, *ceteris paribus*, Indefinitism should be preferred over Foundationalism (Aitken 2021; Aitken 2024; Bohn 2018; Guigon 2015).

My aim in this paper is to exert pressure against this last argument. I do not intend to rescue Foundationalism, but only to argue that, in light of the demands of the PSR, Indefinitism is in no better position than Foundationalism. My objection rests on the following two fundamental premises: (i) Indefinitism is committed to a real pluralism of entities as *relata* of real grounding relations. This commitment derives from its adherence to the Extendibility thesis and its refusal to appeal to an *omni-explainer*, an entity that more traditional forms of using the PSR typically resort to. (ii) This pluralism is taken as a brute fact and, therefore, a fact incompatible with the demands of the PSR. To illustrate this incompatibility, I rely on two old arguments recently explored by Della Rocca (2012; 2018): (ii.a) Hume’s argument against the PSR, which ultimately rests on a brute pluralism of entities; and (ii.b) Leibniz’s argument against brute relations, which ultimately rests on the PSR, and which, incidentally, exerts

strong internal pressure against Leibniz's own pluralism. The dilemma that faces Indefinitism is the following: either it renounces to brute pluralism and brute relations, or it renounces to the PSR.