

Questions of Content for Wilson's Fundamentality First

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Fundamentality First is highly ecumenical, in not ruling out as a matter of definition any of the seemingly intelligible views presupposing metaphysical structure which serve as our data... [N]o antecedent restrictions are placed on which goings-on might or might not be fundamental... [N]o antecedent formal restrictions [are placed] on which relations might potentially serve as metaphysical dependence relations... (Wilson *FFA*: §3.1)

Wilson proposes to understand metaphysical structure with her *Fundamentality First* framework, which packages primitivism about fundamentality with pluralism about dependence. She aims (*FFA*: §4) “to highlight the importance of metaphysical structure,” to put her “preferred Fundamentality First approach... on the table,” and “to argue that, by certain reasonable methodological lights, Fundamentality First offers a viable and indeed, quite attractive package deal.” I think that she partly succeeds, and thereby elevates primitivism about fundamentality into a promising starting point.

But I have a criticism and an invitation to offer, where my criticism is that Wilson has not yet imbued her framework with enough content, and so my invitation is: *please say more*.

Wilson (*FFA*: §Intro) offers an introductory statement of her framework, as conjoining:

- *Primitivist Fundamentality*: What makes it the case that some goings-on at a world *w* are fundamental at *w* is metaphysically primitive
- *Pluralist Metaphysical Dependence*: What makes it the case that some goings-on at a world *w* metaphysically depend on other goings-on at *w* is a matter of the holding of diverse metaphysical relations, which (against the backdrop specification of what is fundamental at *w*) serve as metaphysical dependence relations

This is a helpful start.¹ But more looks to be added later, and much—to my mind—remains missing. In particular I am inviting:

- a canonical statement of Wilson's framework: what exactly does the framework say? For instance, are there any added principles concerning priority? (§1)
- informative constraints on her primitive notion of fundamentality: is it “anything goes” for the distribution of fundamentals? (§2)
- explicit principles concerning her pluralist notion of dependence: when exactly does one thing depend on another? (§3)
- inferential links to anything further (such as possibility, or explanation): does metaphysical structure have any consequences? (§4)

Overall I admire the originality of Wilson's approach, and I believe that her idea of starting from fundamentality holds promise. I come not to bury her approach but to praise it, and to help it find its best form. I am saying that more content is needed. Substantive comparisons with more contentful rivals—such as the grounding frameworks of Fine (2001), Rosen (2010), and myself (2009), as well as the building framework of Bennett (2017)—would then become possible.

¹ Wilson scholars will note a welcome development of the approach sketched in Wilson 2014 (pp. 560–63; see also Wilson 2016: 195–202), combining “primitivism about absolute fundamentality with pluralism about relative grounding relations.”

Underlying my criticism over content is a concern about Wilson’s guiding methodology. Wilson (FFA: §1.3.1) presses for *ecumenicity* (letting in intelligible views). But ecumenicity is a dangerous game: the history of philosophy reveals intelligible views enough to conflict with virtually any constraint, and so ecumenicity—without counterbalance—would topple virtually all constraints. (As I (*personal communication*) wrote to Wilson back in 2013, “this way lies anarchy.”) Indeed a framework can be maximally ecumenical just by imposing no constraints whatsoever, thereby ruling out nothing. Such an *empty ecumenicity* is hardly virtuous. An empty framework is but an idle wheel.

So I think that there is a further virtue that needs to be recognized, which I label *contentfulness*, which rewards frameworks for upholding plausible constraints. Contentfulness thus provides a needed counterbalance, preventing ecumenicity from tilting into emptiness. Overall, frameworks should strive to balance ecumenicity against contentfulness, and thereby find the virtuous middle ground between the vicious extremes of empty ecumenicity (all ecumenicity, no contentfulness) and full sectarianism (all contentfulness, no ecumenicity).²

So my underlying concern is that *Wilson’s methodology is tilted towards an empty ecumenicity*, where nothing is ruled out and anything goes. This comes to the surface in the passage I take as my opening quote, where Wilson praises her framework as “highly ecumenical” for lacking any “restrictions” on fundamentality or dependence. As I read this, she is praising her framework for lacking any constraints. As such—while my present invitation to Wilson is to add more content—my underlying invitation to her is to recognize the virtue of contentfulness, and see virtue in constraint.

1. What is Wilson’s Framework?

To begin, I invite Wilson to offer a canonical statement of her framework. She (FFA: §Intro) offers a helpful introductory statement, conjoining *Primitivist Fundamentality* and *Pluralist Metaphysical Dependence*. But it is unclear to me if this is meant to be the end of the story, and so it is unclear to me what exactly we are discussing in the end.

For instance, priority plays a major role in Wilson’s subsequent discussion (FFA: §1.3.5, §2.2.1, §3.5), and near the end (FFA: §3.5) she praises her framework for “providing a story about how priority gets fixed.”³ But as the reader may confirm, the concept of priority does not occur in either *Primitivist Fundamentality* or *Pluralist Metaphysical Dependence*. Obviously her framework must include some principle(s) in which the concept of priority occurs, to provide “a story about how priority gets fixed.”

Moreover, supposing that some principle(s) for priority are meant to be included in Wilson’s framework, it is unclear to me which principle(s) exactly. Wilson’s (FFA: §2.2.1) discussion of priority uses undefined notions, yields no canonical formulations, and comes explicitly hedged as just a “suggested somewhat-algorithmic strategy.” Overall her discussion of priority reads to me more like an idea in progress than a fixed final formulation. (I recommend below that she fully embrace this attitude.)

Moreover, Wilson’s ideas about priority would—if included in her framework—trigger ecumenicity objections. Briefly, her guiding strategy is that, when non-fundamental goings-on stand in dependence

² Space precludes further discussion of general methodological issues around ecumenicity and contentfulness. I address these issues in a companion paper (Schaffer *manuscript*).

³ In some more detail: Wilson (FFA: §1.3.5) lists *The Unfixedness of Priority* as one of her five guiding methodological precepts, needed to accommodate both sides of debates such as the monism-pluralism debate, where there is agreement on the parthood patterns but disagreement over priority. (As such *The Unfixedness of Priority* seems like a corollary of ecumenicity.) She then (FFA: §2.2.1) offer an extended discussion of how priority gets fixed, and concludes (FFA: §3) by claiming that Fundamentality First meets her five precepts in part (FFA: §3.5) by “providing a story about how priority gets fixed.”

relations, the direction of priority (if any) is “fixed indirectly” by looking for a “direction” of priority from the fundamentals to the non-fundamentals, and then seeing if the non-fundamentals follow “the same direction.” But this would rule out intelligible views that conjoin (1) views about fundamentals that do not yield a single direction of priority from fundamentals to non-fundamentals, and (2) any priority ordering whatsoever among the non-fundamentals. For instance, there is an intelligible view conjoining (1) middle-ism (Inman 2017, Bernstein 2021), on which certain mereologically middling entities such as biological organisms are fundamental; and (2) an Aristotelian perspective on which organs like the heart are prior to their ventricles and other functional parts. This intelligible view would be ruled out since (1) under middle-ism, parthood yields two directions of priority from fundamentals to non-fundamentals (both up and down from the middle), and so no such thing as “the direction of priority” here; so that (2) there is no prospect of parthood imposing any priority among non-fundamentals in “the same direction,” which rules out the Aristotelian perspective (or anything other than treating the non-fundamentals as one big lump). Given Wilson’s emphasis on ecumenicality, can she accept this?

For another example, it is unclear to me whether or not Wilson’s framework is also meant to include any connections between fundamentality and dependence. She introduces these concepts (*FFA*: §Intro) as jointly constituting “metaphysical structure,” yet without connection these concepts would remain entirely loose and separate. The thought that there is an underlying notion of “metaphysical structure” integrating fundamentality and dependence would be undermined.

Wilson (*FFA*: §Intro) endorses the connecting claim that the non-fundamental must be dependent. But this is just mentioned in passing in an initial footnote, and neither given a canonical formulation nor invoked again. And it would—if included—trigger ecumenicality objections as well. For instance, it would rule out intelligible “third way” views on which some things are neither fundamental nor dependent, such as views (inspired by Dasgupta 2014) on which the dependence facts themselves are neither fundamental nor dependent but *autonomous* (not within the metaphysical structure but rather serve as the “scaffolding” for the structure). Can Wilson accept this loss of ecumenicality?

As a final example, it is unclear to me whether or not Wilson’s framework is also meant to include any explicit definition of “metaphysical dependence relations.” As the reader may confirm, *Pluralist Metaphysical Dependence* makes reference to this notion, but Wilson neither defines it nor accepts it as a primitive. (Indeed she (*FFA*: §3.3) speaks of fundamentality as her “one primitive.”) Rather she considers three accounts of what makes a relation count as a metaphysical dependence relation, and says that each is promising, but that she is “not settled on any one.” I disagree that any of these are promising, but leave that to the side.⁴ My point is just that Wilson owes us a settled definition, or else it is not clear if she is entitled to claim fundamentality as her “one primitive.” (And will a definition prove sufficiently ecumenical for her?)

Putting this together, I am asking:

- are any principles concerning priority included, and if so which?
- are any principles connecting fundamentality and dependence included, and if so which?
- is any definition of “metaphysical dependence relations” included, and if so which?

⁴ Just to illustrate my concerns, one of the accounts Wilson calls “promising” identifies the metaphysical dependence relations with the *internal* relations, in Lewis’s (1986: 62) sense of relations that never divide duplicates. But Wilson (*FFA*: §2.4) also says that parthood, set membership, and identity are metaphysical dependence relations, and *none* of these relations are internal in Lewis’s sense! Parthood, set membership, and identity all divide duplicates: let *a* be a part of *b*, and *c* be a duplicate of *a*. Then *a* is a part of *b*, a member of {*a*}, and identical to *a*, but *c* need not be a part of *b*, a member of {*a*}, or identical to *a*. Moreover, examples of relations that are internal in Lewis’s sense include *being the same shape as* and *being more massive than*—which would be truly surprising candidates for being metaphysical dependence relations.

Overall I invite Wilson to offer a canonical statement of her framework, so it is explicit what exactly we are discussing in the end.

My recommendation to Wilson, alluded to above, is to embrace the idea of a work-in-progress, at least with respect to the three points bulleted above. This would be to allow that there are *many* Fundamentality First frameworks under consideration, all starting from *Primitivist Fundamentality* and *Pluralist Metaphysical Dependence*, but continuing in different ways. It would be perfectly reasonable for Wilson to put forward, not a single fixed framework for final evaluation, but rather many developing frameworks for further exploration. (Indeed it would be unreasonable for us to expect more!) I see many promising options here that all deserve discussion.⁵

But once it is allowed that there are *many* Fundamentality First frameworks to consider, it should be seen that these many frameworks differ widely in their virtues. Whether a framework provides “a story about how priority gets fixed” turns on whether it includes priority principles. Whether a framework only invokes “one primitive” turns on the undefined notions it deploys. How ecumenical a framework is turns on which constraints (if any) it includes, etc. Overall I consider it premature to assess how virtuous “Wilson’s framework” is, or to draw any comparisons. “Wilson’s framework” first needs to find its best form.

2. What is Fundamentality?

So far I have invited clarifications on what is in Wilson’s framework(s). In what remains I focus on what I regard as missing from her framework so far, and formulate some further principles that she might consider adding, all to the point of helping her framework find its best form. I begin with her primitive notion of fundamentality.

2.1 Imbuing content

Wilson (FFA: §1.1) helps give some content to her primitive through illustrations. She means the sort of thing that philosophers mean when they say that simple particles are fundamental, or that the whole cosmos is fundamental, or that a deity is fundamental. This is a helpful start. But (of course) more than a handful of illustrations is needed to pin down a primitive. With primitives I think that one should also specify surrounding axioms that give the notion some inferential role and allow us to triangulate a location in the wider conceptual network (cf. Schaffer 2016a: 251, on primitivism for grounding). That will not be enough to convince skeptics but seems to me to be a reasonable minimal requirement on imbuing content to any posited primitive.

I am asking Wilson to include some axioms to help pin down a meaning for her primitive, even though axioms invariably court controversy and cost ecumenicality. As Wilson (FFA: §2.4; see also Bliss & Priest 2018: §3) notes with respect to purported axioms for grounding, all are “subject to counterexample.” Such is a generic feature of virtually all philosophically interesting notions. For instance, virtually all purported principles of causation and of knowledge face alleged counterexamples. Controversy is the price of content.

Here are a few examples of the sort of axioms involving fundamentality that might be added. Note that I choose to regiment Wilson’s “goings-on” as *entities* (*‘a,’ ‘b,’ ...*), with fundamentality as a property (*‘F’*) and dependence as a relation (*‘D’*). This choice is optional—a Finean regimentation via operators on sentences is also possible—but regimentation requires that some choice be made.⁶

⁵ Also well worth discussing are “hybrid” frameworks that start from *Primitivist Fundamentality* but replace *Pluralist Metaphysical Dependence* with a unified grounding principle.

⁶ Here I must go beyond Wilson’s intentionally neutral notion of “goings-on.” Wilson (FFA: §1.1; *personal communication*) uses “goings-on” so as to be ecumenical over various views, covering options from deities

Principle	Regimentation	Gloss
<i>Basis</i>	$(\exists x) Fx$	Something is fundamental
<i>Superstructure</i>	$(\exists x) \neg Fx$	Something is non-fundamental
<i>Exhaustion</i>	$(\forall x) (Fx \vee Dxy)$	Everything is either fundamental or dependent
<i>Exclusion</i>	$\neg(\exists x)(\exists y) (Fx \wedge Dxy)$	Nothing is both fundamental and dependent
<i>Supervenience of Dependence</i>	$\neg(\exists w1)(\exists w2) w1 \text{ and } w2 \text{ are worlds with the same fundamentals but different dependence patterns}$	Dependence supervenes on fundamentality
<i>Modal Constancy</i>	$Fa \rightarrow \Box(\text{EXISTS}_a \rightarrow Fa)$	The fundamental is necessarily fundamental (where it exists)
<i>Uniformity across Duplicates</i>	$Fa \rightarrow (\text{DUPLICATE}_{ab} \rightarrow Fb)$	Duplicates of fundamentals are also fundamental
<i>Uniformity across Mereological Rank</i>	$Fa \rightarrow (\text{SAME-MER-RANK}_{ab} \rightarrow Fb)$	Things at the same mereological rank as fundamentals are also fundamental
<i>No Gaps</i>	$\text{SUM}(\text{Fundamentals}) = u$	The sum of the fundamentals is the whole mereological universe
<i>No Overlaps</i>	$Fa \wedge Fb \rightarrow \neg \text{OVERLAP}_{ab}$	Fundamentals do not overlap
<i>Inexplicability of Fundamentals</i>	$Fa \rightarrow \neg(\exists x) \text{EXPLAINS} \langle \text{EXISTS}_x, \text{EXISTS}_a \rangle$	If something is fundamental, then nothing explains why it exists
<i>Existence</i>	$Fa \rightarrow \text{EXISTS}_a$	The fundamental exists
<i>Irreducibility</i>	$Fa \rightarrow \neg(\exists x) \text{REDUCES}_{ax}$	The fundamental is irreducible
<i>Spatiotemporalism</i>	$Fa \rightarrow \text{LOCATED}_a$	The fundamental is located
<i>Causalism</i>	$Fa \rightarrow \text{POWERFUL}_a$	The fundamental is efficacious

through to theories in one fell swoop. (Wilson scholars will trace Wilson's use of "goings-on" back to her earlier critique of grounding, where she (2014: 536) introduces "goings-on" as neutral between "entities, propositions, or facts," to critique grounding theorists such as Fine, Rosen, and myself in one go.) I think that such neutrality is misplaced in a positive framework, since it leaves it unclear what Wilson's conception of metaphysical structure is supposed to be a structure *of*, and it precludes proper regimentation: there is no regimentation that is neutral between treating fundamentality as a property of entities, or as an operator on sentences. So I invite Wilson to make a specific choice here, even at the cost of some ecumenicity.

I think that the choice of entities best fits Wilson's overall perspective, especially her (FFA: §2.4) list of dependence relations as entity-involving relations such as parthood and set membership (see also Wilson 2016: 175–76). But nothing in my discussion turns on this choice. The reader who prefers a different choice may adjust my principles as they see fit. Even the reader who prefers not to choose ("for ecumenicity's sake," or for any other reason) may still consider my principles for cases involving entities.

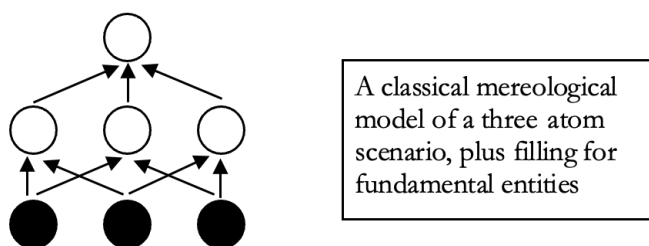
I find some of these principles plausible, but I am not arguing for (or against) any of these principles here, nor am I asking Wilson to take a stand on everything here or even on anything in particular. I am just asking her to take a stand on something, and put forward some handful of principles such as these, to imbue more content into her posited primitive.⁷

(Principles connecting fundamentality and dependence would specifically help, to support the idea that these genuinely combine into some underlying structure worth calling “metaphysical structure”: §1.)

Virtually all principles rule out some intelligible views, and so trigger ecumenical objections. For instance, *Exclusion* rules out the divine aseity view Wilson cites (*FFA*: §1.3.1), involving a self-dependent fundamental deity, *Modal Constancy* rules out certain monistic views on which our cosmos is fundamental but would be dependent if it were a fragment of a larger cosmos, and *Causalism* rules out views on which consciousness is fundamental but epiphenomenal (I will mention some more examples in passing below). So in asking Wilson to endorse some principles for fundamentality, I am in effect asking her to moderate her quest for ecumenicality for the sake of content.

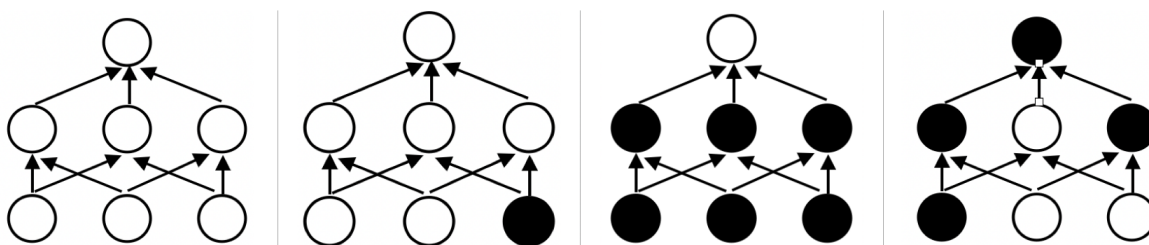
2.2 Providing constraint

Axioms not only help provide content, but they also help prevent an over-generating of spurious “options.” Some theoretical options ought to be ruled out, and it is part of the work of frameworks to rule out the options that ought to be ruled out. To see how Wilson’s framework over-generates spurious “options” concerning the distribution of fundamentality, start from a simple model of classical mereology with three atoms, under a classic *priority atomist* view on which all and only the atoms are fundamental:



No problem yet: priority atomism is a serious option that ought to be let in.

But—holding fixed this one mereological structure—let’s consider some “wilder” choices for circles to fill in as fundamentals:



⁷ Bliss & Priest (2018: §2) provide a helpful list of potential structural principles and their interactions. They (2018: 1) characterize an orthodox “Great Chain of Being” picture, on which “reality is hierarchically arranged with chains of entities ordered by relations of ground and/or ontological dependence terminating in something fundamental.” Their concluding suggestion (2018: 31) is that “Reality may well not have the metaphysical structure of a well-founded chain, but a much more complex and fascinating one.” In the main text I am asking Wilson whether she accepts any structuring principles at all, whether orthodox or fascinating.

The leftmost image depicts there being no fundamental entities. It could be ruled out by *Basis*, though *Basis* then rules out intelligible “infinetist” views on which things get ever more fundamental without limit (Bohn 2018, Morganti 2018).⁸ The next image (moving rightwards) depicts there being just one fundamental atom. It may seem to lack enough fundamental entities to generate the rest, and it also arbitrarily divides atoms over fundamentality status. It could be ruled out by *No Gaps*, or by *Uniformity Across Mereological Rank*. The third image has all the atoms and all the two-atom fusions being fundamental. It may seem to have too many fundamental entities. It could be ruled out by *No Overlaps*. The fourth image is intended to depict a fairly random re-shuffling of fundamentality status, though this particular pattern could be ruled out by either *Uniformity Across Mereological Rank* or *No Overlaps*.

Overall, just this one three atom model of classical mereology hosts 128 mathematically possible shading patterns (2 colors over 7 nodes, so 2^7 patterns), representing 128 logically consistent assignments of “fundamentality” over seven individuals. *Wilson’s framework allows every single pattern*. There are no constraints whatsoever on the distribution of fundamentality, even holding fixed the full mereological structure of the scenario. I am not taking a stand here on which logically consistent fundamentality patterns should be ruled out (perhaps some of the four above are ok), but it seems to me clear that at least some of these 128 patterns should be ruled out. Indeed I wonder how we could know what was fundamental, or why we should care, if we could randomly re-shuffle the fundamentality pattern without consequence.

Notice that not only is the distribution of fundamentality completely unconstrained in Wilson’s framework, but the features of those fundamentals are completely unconstrained too. This matters for reasons that emerge next.

2.3 Unity for big-‘F’ Fundamentality

Axioms not only help imbue content to primitives and provide needed constraints on the “options,” they also help justify the thought that there is a unified notion at work. Here one can—borrowing rhetoric from Wilson 2014—distinguish her big-‘F’ Fundamentality view on which there is one substantively unified general property of fundamentality, from the pluralist idea that there are many little-‘f’ fundamental properties—such as mereological simplicity, and set-theoretic *ur*-element status—unified only in name. And one can then (as per Schaffer 2016b: 161) ask the friend of primitive fundamentality—just as Wilson asks the friend of primitive grounding—*why posit big-‘F’ Fundamentality in addition to the many little-‘f’ fundamentalities?* (Wilson of all people should face this question.)

Let’s recall Wilson’s two main arguments against big-‘G’ Grounding. Her leading objection is that big-‘G’ Grounding *says so little*, leaving open questions about existence, reduction, and causal efficacy. Thus she (2014: 540; see also Wilson 2016: 174) says:

The problem here is not just that claims of Grounding (failure of Grounding) leave open some interesting questions; it is that such claims admit of such underdetermination—about whether the dependent goings-on exist, are reducible or rather distinct from the base goings-on, are efficacious, and so on—that even basic assessment of claims of metaphysical dependence, or associated views, cannot proceed by reference to Grounding alone.

And so she goes on (2014: 541–42) to speak of grounding as “useless” because too “coarse-grained” and (2014: 544) leaving open “questions that are crucially relevant.”

⁸ A requirement of fundamental entities would fit Wilson’s (FFA: §2.1.2) guiding foundationalist analogy between fundamental entities and axioms: “The axioms generate, somehow or other, all the non-axiomatic (derivative) propositions in the system; the fundamenta generate, somehow or other, all the non-fundamental (derivative) goings-on in the world.” Though this analogy already brings in ecumenicality concerns as to views that are anti-foundationalist.

But—recalling the discussion around *Fictional Fundamentals*, *Reducible Fundamentals*, and *Epiphenomenal Fundamentals* in §2.2—fundamentality equally fails to settle any of Wilson’s questions. Parroting Wilson’s words above, we are equally not told “whether the [fundamental] goings-on exist, are [irreducible]..., are efficacious, and so on.” And by Wilson’s lights we should equally dismiss big-‘F’ Fundamentality as “useless.”

Wilson’s (2014: 569–70) secondary objection is that big-‘G’ Grounding *lacks formal unity*. She (FFA: §2.4) re-states this as: “The lack of any formal or related unity among the metaphysical dependence relations informs (among other things) my rejection of the supposition that there is a generic relation or notion—primitive or not—of metaphysical dependence, ...” But fundamentality—absent unifying axioms—equally lacks any formal unity. So by Wilson’s lights, a lack of formal unity among the many little-‘F’ fundamentality properties should equally inform a “rejection of the supposition that there is a generic [property]—primitive or not—of metaphysical [fundamentality].”

Thus I conclude that including some axioms for fundamentality would help add content and constraint into Wilson’s framework, could help unify fundamentality, and could even stabilize Wilson’s stance of rejecting big-‘G’ Grounding while embracing big-‘F’ Fundamentality. (There would be a cost in ecumenicality, but the cost is worth it.)

3. How Does Dependence Work?

Moving from questions about Wilson’s primitive notion of fundamentality to questions about her pluralist notion of dependence, I confess that I simply do not understand her account of dependence. I think something crucial went missing. If I am just confused here, I hope to at least make my confusions manifest, for Wilson to dispel.

So Wilson (FFA: §2.4) posits a plurality of metaphysical dependence relations, including parthood, set membership, and identity. So far, so okay. She then says that dependence between goings-on is “a matter of the holding of diverse metaphysical relations, ...” This is the part that I do not understand. *How exactly* is dependence between goings-on “a matter of the holding” of such relations? For instance, suppose that *a* is a part of *b*. Does that fix that *a* depends on *b*? Or that *b* depends on *a*? Or both? (Or neither??) The following crucial bit of information seems missing:

Entity Dependence Question: Given that *R* is a metaphysical dependence relation and that *Rab*, what follows as to the dependence relation(s) between *a* and *b*?

I see four main answers for Wilson, and I would like to know which (if any) she intends:

- *Left Dependence:* If *R* is a metaphysical dependence relation and *Rab*, then *a* depends on *b*
- *Right Dependence:* If *R* is a metaphysical dependence relation and *Rab*, then *b* depends on *a*
- *Bi-dependence:* If *R* is a metaphysical dependence relation and *Rab*, then *a* depends on *b* and *b* depends on *a*
- *Further Factor:* If *R* is a metaphysical dependence relation and *Rab*, then whether *a* depends on *b* and/or whether *b* depends on *a* turns on some further factor *X*

These are different ways of saying *how exactly* the dependence relations among goings-on are “a matter of the holding of diverse metaphysical relations, ...”

Furthermore, I am afraid that none of the above answers seem workable for Wilson. Starting with *Left Dependence*, and recalling that Wilson includes parthood, set membership, and identity among the metaphysical dependence relations, I see three main problems. (1) With parthood, since I am a part of the cosmos, *Left Dependence* entails that I depend on the cosmos. Monists may rejoice, but this rules out the classical pluralist view Wilson is concerned to let in for ecumenicality’s sake, which includes the claim that proper parts *do not*

depend on their wholes.⁹ (2) Turning to set membership, since Socrates is a member of {Socrates}, *Left Dependence* entails that Socrates depends on {Socrates}. This looks simply backwards, and rules out the now-orthodox Finean (1994) view that {Socrates} depends on Socrates *and not vice versa*. (3) Identity makes for the worst disaster of all. Since everything is self-identical, *Left Dependence* entails that everything is self-dependent. This turns dependence into a reflexive relation and yields a radical failure of ecumenicality, ruling out virtually all orthodox views of metaphysical structure, and even heterodox views that posit only limited self-dependence, such as the *divine aseity* view Wilson herself is concerned to let in (FFA: §1.3.1), on which God alone has the special status of self-dependence. Surely Wilson (of all people) does not mean to rule out nearly all intelligible metaphysical views!

Right Dependence seems like the more natural view for the set membership case above, but (1) with parthood it suffers from the same ecumenicality problem for the monism-pluralism debate, now ruling out the classical monist view that proper parts depend on their wholes *and not vice versa*.¹⁰ And worse, (2) the disaster with identity recurs. *Right Dependence* equally entails that everything is self-dependent, and so rules out nearly all intelligible views of metaphysical structure, again yielding a radical failure of ecumenicality.

Bi-dependence only makes matters worse, suffering from the problems of *Left Dependence* and the problems of *Right Dependence* together. It rules out both the classical pluralist view and the classical monist view, it renders Socrates dependent on {Socrates}, and it forces everything to be self-dependent with a consequent radical failure of ecumenicality.

By elimination *Further Factor* may seem like the only option for Wilson, but it leaves her framework incomplete. We need to know what factor *X* is—and we need to think about whether any of the problems mooted for the previous options will recur, or new problems will ensue, etc. (How does Wilson propose to avert the disaster with identity?) Here is a further respect in which “Wilson’s framework” may be best understood as a work-in-progress, with many continuations all worth considering (§1).

There may seem to be a way forward for Wilson here, which is to identify factor *X* with what may (§1) be the remaining notion in her framework: *priority*. Here is a natural implementation:

Further Factor: Priority. If *R* is a metaphysical dependence relation, *Rab*, and *a* is prior to *b*, then *b* depends on *a*

Further Factor: Priority could avert identity problems, at least given an account of priority on which nothing is prior to itself. And it could let in classical pluralist and monist positions, given that the sides disagree about priority. And given principles by which fundamentality constrains priority (FFA: §2.2.1), it could even help to

⁹ The classical pluralist does not merely claim that wholes depend on proper parts. She also claims that this is not a case of mutual dependence, but rather a case where proper parts do not depend on wholes. Russell (2003: 92) makes such a “one way dependence only” claim here: “[T]he existence of the complex depends on the existence of the simple, and not vice versa.” *Left Dependence* would rule out the “and not vice versa” aspect of Russellian pluralism.

¹⁰ Again the classical monist is not making a claim that proper parts and wholes are mutually dependent, but rather saying that dependence *only* runs down from whole to proper part, and not vice versa. In this vein Proclus (Baltzly 2010: InTim. II. 13.15–14.10) says:

For the circle is not established from semi-circles but rather the opposite is the case. For when the circle already exists—and not as something composed out of semi-circles—then when the diameter is drawn then at that point semi-circles are made. The name itself proves this, since ‘semi-circle’ has its derivation from ‘circle’ and not vice versa.

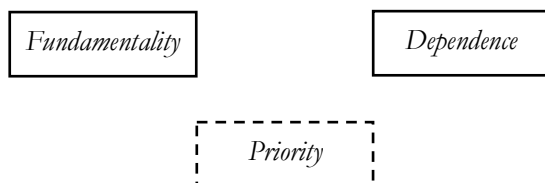
knit fundamentality, priority, and dependence together into a more integrated vision of metaphysical structure. This all seems promising.¹¹

But *Further Factor: Priority* is not workable for Wilson either, since she (FFA: §1.3.1; §2.1.2; §3.1) puts heavy weight on letting in views that posit dependent fundamentals, such as the view that there is a self-dependent fundamental deity. (Failure to let in such views—as a failure of ecumenicality—constitutes her leading objection to grounding approaches.) Wilson (§FFA: 2.2.1) is explicit that no metaphysical dependence relation can put a fundamental entity on the posterior side (fundamentals can only be on the prior side, never on the posterior side). So fundamental entities can never be posterior, and so—given *Further Factor: Priority*—fundamental entities could never be dependent after all.

As such not only does Wilson’s framework seem to me to be crucially incomplete in lacking an answer to *Entity Dependence Question*, but I see no way to complete it consistent with Wilson’s other commitments. Again, I leave open that I may just be confused here. But if not: some revisions are needed here. (I recommend trying *Further Factor: Priority*, even at the cost of suffering the same ecumenicality objection as grounding approaches. I independently recommend removing identity from the roster of dependence relations.)

4. What Follows?

Wilson understands metaphysical structure through fundamentality, dependence, and—perhaps (§1)—priority, but—as far as I can see—her framework draws no connections among these notions, and—I now add—no connections to any further notions, such as the plausibly “neighboring” notions of possibility and explanation. Indeed we can depict the total inferential power of her starting point, as given by *Primitivist Fundamentality* and *Pluralist Metaphysical Dependence* plus some possible priority principle(s), as follows:



We have two (or three) unconnected notions. And—my present point—this scatter is not connected to anything further. In the wider conceptual network, this is but an idle and spokeless wheel.

Some of the principles involving fundamentality mooted above (§2.1) could help here, such as *Supervenience of Dependence*, *Modal Constancy*, and *Inexplicability of Fundamentals*. There are other principles worth considering as well that do not involve fundamentality, such as:

Explicability via Dependence: $Dab \rightarrow \text{EXPLAINS} \langle \text{EXISTS}b, \text{EXISTS}a \rangle$

(*Gloss*: If one thing depends on another, then the existence of the latter explains the existence of the former.) Obviously this only scratches the surface of connecting principles worth considering.

¹¹ Indeed I originally mis-read Wilson as endorsing *Further Factor: Priority*, on grounds that (1) it was the only way I could see to get her out of the troubles with the other options; (2) it fits her claim (FFA: §2.2.1) that priority is what makes instances of parthood and the other relations “count as instances of a metaphysical dependence relation;” and (3) it explains the otherwise puzzling parenthetical “(against the backdrop specification of what is fundamental at n)” in *Pluralistic Metaphysical Dependence*. But Wilson (*personal communication*) explicitly and emphatically rejects *Further Factor: Priority*. Indeed—as I argue in the main text below—such a thesis would conflict with other commitments of hers.

So when I said (§2.2) that Wilson’s framework allows us to randomly re-shuffle fundamentality patterns without consequence, I mean that not only does it let in any random distribution of fundamentality, but that the fundamentality pattern can be randomly re-shuffled without any adjustments required to the dependence facts, the mereological facts, the modal facts, the explanatory facts, or anything further whatsoever. So overall I wonder how we could know anything about Wilson-style fundamentality, or why we should care, if it could all be randomly re-shuffled without consequence.

In conclusion, I admire the originality of Wilson’s approach, and believe that her idea of starting from fundamentality holds promise. But I think that her framework needs more content (and less ecumenicity). Alongside clarity as to what exactly is included in the framework, I think we also need informative constraints on primitive fundamentality, explicit principles concerning dependence, and inferential links to further matters that make clear what metaphysical structure does.

I understand that Wilson’s discussion is intended to set the stage for a book (Wilson *in progress*). Indeed Wilson closes (FFA: §4) with questions about modality, and ends on “stay tuned!” So it may well be that she has already worked out some contentful principles that suit her framework and background commitments. In that case, she may read my invitation to please say more as: *do tell!*¹²

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