

BOOK SYMPOSIUM

Making Things Up

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Summary

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It is commonplace to talk about certain facts obtaining in virtue of others, certain objects existing because others do, certain things being *made of* or *accounting for* others. For example, we might say that this coffee cup is made of atoms, and that it exists because those atoms are there in that arrangement. Or we might say that my action is morally wrong because it harms an innocent person, or that my conscious experience is accounted for by my patterns of neural activity, or that the meaning of a sentence is generated by the meaning of its constituents. All of these examples are simplified, of course, and I do not intend to defend any particular claims of this sort. Rather, I just want to call attention to the *kind* of claim being made. I call this kind of talk ‘building talk’, and I call the class of relations that back it ‘building relations’. The class of building relations includes composition, constitution, grounding, property realization and the like. The goal of *Making Things Up* is to get clearer about what features building relations share, how they are related to each other, and how they are related to fundamentality and causation.

In working out this picture, I aim to remain neutral about three things. First, I remain neutral about whether there is a single most fundamental building relation, largely because I remain neutral about whether different building relations can hold in different directions (see Bennett forthcoming for more discussion of this point). Throughout the book, I instead talk in terms of a plurality of building relations, and intend talk of ‘building’ in the singular as shorthand for quantificational or generic claims. Second, I remain neutral about metaphysical foundationalism, the claim that all chains of building terminate in something fundamental, and that the world thus has a bottom layer. Third, I try to remain neutral about substantive first order metaphysical questions about what in fact builds what, or what is fundamental, if anything is. Obviously, my choices of example cannot help but reflect

my own predilections, but they are not intended to be central to the project. My goal is rather to sketch a *framework* view that can be shared by people who do not agree about particular building claims.

In the first several chapters, I call attention to the prevalence of building, explore the question of what it means to say that some properties or relations form a unified family, and characterize the features all building relations share. I argue at length that building relations are:

Directed, in that they are antisymmetric and irreflexive;

Necessitating, in that builders necessitate what they build, at least in the circumstances;

Generative, in that they license ‘in virtue of’ talk and ‘because’ claims.

I also explore whether there might be a single most fundamental building relation, coming down, as I have noted, on the side of agnosticism.

Chapter 4 turns to causation, and the relation of causation to building. I defend two claims: first, that causation is a building relation, in the sense that the class that includes causation as well as more canonical ‘vertical’ building relations such as composition or grounding is unified and theoretically interesting. (Note, as I do in the book, that this claim is entirely compatible with the claim that the smaller class that does not include causation is even more unified and theoretically interesting.) The second claim is that particular instances of allegedly purely ‘vertical’, purely synchronic building relations frequently obtain in virtue of patterns of causation. For example, I argue that some building relations hold diachronically, such that x or the xxs at t_1 build y at t_2 , and that this is the case in virtue of underlying causal patterns in virtue of which the xxs or their parts persist to be parts of y . I also argue that some building relations, especially composition, frequently hold over an interval of time rather than at a single moment, and that they do so in virtue of the causal activities of the builders. I take these claims about how causation infiltrates building to be among the most distinctive in the book.

In Chapter 5, I distinguish three different notions of absolute fundamentality, and argue that the most central one is what I call independence: to be fundamental is to be unbuilt. One of the other notions I discuss is perfect naturalness, in the Lewisian sense. I argue that this notion is a bit of a muddle, and that it is really a notion of something else than fundamentality. That is of course not to say that it is a useless notion; I do think it useful for talking about kinds and properties. But it is not the central notion of fundamentality.

In Chapter 6, I turn to relative fundamentality. Many philosophers help themselves to talk of one phenomenon’s being more basic or more fundamental than another, but either say nothing about what that means, or else take the *more fundamental than* relation to be primitive. I argue that it is not primitive, and that it must instead be understood in terms of building. I go on

to offer a detailed story of just exactly how, though the details get complicated. One of the many interesting upshots is that on my picture, relative fundamentality relations are in the first instance indexed to particular building relations, and I leave open whether a generalized *more fundamental than* relation would be asymmetric. If it is not, the idea that the world has a single coherent building structure is problematized. (Whether or not the general relation is asymmetric is connected to the question of whether there is a single most fundamental building relation (§2.5).) The central overall claim that emerges from Chs. 5 and 6 is that both talk of what is fundamental, and talk of what is more fundamental than what, is best understood as simply another way to talk about what patterns of building obtain or fail to obtain. Consequently, to help oneself to the notions of fundamentality and relative fundamentality is not to take on board additional ontological or ideological commitments beyond the commitment to building relations.

In Chapter 7, I revisit a topic I explored in an article some years back (Bennett 2011) – if one thing grounds another, in virtue of what is that the case? What grounds the grounding facts? I earlier defended the view that if *a* grounds *b*, it does so in virtue of the existence and nature of *a*. Here, I attempt to broaden that story to other building relations, and defend it against objections that have been raised.

In Chapter 8, I defend (i) the existence of non-fundamental things and (ii) their aptness for study by metaphysicians. In the process of arguing for the first claim, I argue for a conception of Ockham's Razor according to which non-fundamental entities do not count against the simplicity of a theory (as in Schaffer 2015). And in the process of arguing for the second claim, I explore how to best characterize what metaphysics *is* if it is not investigation into the fundamental nature of reality. The picture of reality that emerges at the close of *Making Things Up* is that of a complex, structured world, filled with non-fundamentalia built out of less fundamental things.

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