

Sangiovanni, A., *Humanity without Dignity. Moral Equality, Respect, and Human Rights*.

Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2017, pp. x + 320.

Although one should be cautious to call a philosophical book beautiful, I think that *Humanity without Dignity* properly deserves such qualification. Not only does it display rigor and clarity in developing the complex and interrelated arguments, and not only does it advance an original thesis concerning the grounding of human rights, but it is also beautifully written and shows a mastery of classical texts and literature which is unusual in an analytical work. The result is an enrichment of the argumentation with historical depth and literary examples, which makes the reading truly enjoyable.

The book's main question is the following: human rights presuppose moral equality among humans; in turn, moral equality is usually accounted for on the basis of our dignity, which constitutes the status demanding recognition and respect. In most accounts of the grounds for moral equality and human rights, dignity is singled out as the core of human worth, the kernel of our common humanity. Sangiovanni disputes this prevalent account, carefully criticizing the three main views on dignity (ch.1), namely the Aristocratic view (from Aristotle, to Cicero, to Baldassar Castiglione), the Christian view and the Kantian view. Then he presents his alternative (ch.2), based on a negative approach to the issue, by means of analyzing and reflecting on the reactive attitudes governing the practices of treating others as inferiors. From such a reflection, it emerges that cruelty is the wrong displayed in the different ways of treating others as inferior, and cruelty is defined as the unauthorized and wrongful use of others' vulnerability to attack or obliterate people's capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self. Then he takes up a thorough analysis of discrimination in order to illustrate how social cruelty works in demeaning, obliterating and deleting the sense of self of discriminated persons (ch.3).

In the second part of the book, Sangiovanni turns to human rights, looking for a concept that is consistent with the previous discussion of moral equality and of the harm produced by inferiorizing treatments. In line with his argumentative approach in the first part, he defines human rights in the negative, as "those moral rights whose systematic violations ought to be of universal, legal and political *concern*"; thus, through violations engendering universal concern, human rights can be identified and asserted (ch.4). Equipped with this concept, then, he proceeds discussing some central topics in the philosophical discussion of human rights, namely the moral bases of international human rights and the distinction between basic or, better, fundamental from non-fundamental rights (ch.5). Finally, he wonders whether we have an obligation to pursue the protection offered by human rights at the international level and to embody such protection in a system of international norms (ch.6). Viewing human rights as primarily meant to protect people from attacks on their equal moral status enables him to answer many open questions, for example, which rights are fundamental and hierarchically prior to others, and adds a philosophical depth to purely legal and political approaches more focused on enforcement and on the list of the human rights we have. I think that the moral equality perspective, forcefully put forward by Sangiovanni, is indeed the key to understanding and supporting the international system of human rights, and, much more than other approaches to

global justice, such as luck egalitarianism or utilitarianism, makes sense of what is intolerable in certain circumstances of life beyond poverty and deprivation.

I shall focus my critical discussion on two points of the first part of the book concerning which I have some reservations, namely the notion of the integral sense of self—and its role in the architecture of the main argument—and the view of respect as opacity respect. Let us start by considering Sangiovanni's negative approach to moral equality. Instead of looking for the common property in which human worth consists, Sangiovanni, provisionally assuming moral equality, examines its violations and wonders what is wrong about them. All major forms of treating people as inferior (stigmatizing, dehumanizing, infantilizing, objectifying, instrumentalizing) share social cruelty as their common denominator, and what defines cruelty is not just the harm and the injuries produced, but the demeaning attitude for cruelty aims at attacking or destroying the integral sense of self, taking advantage of others' vulnerability. Thus, it is the integral sense of self the fundamental good and crucial interest shared by all human beings, beyond their different capacities, circumstances and projects. This notion, which is reached through the negative approach, is able to satisfy the two desiderata which the grounding of moral equality should respond to (and which dignity fails to satisfy), insofar as it explains a) why we are morally equal (equality desideratum) and b) why moral equality is worthy and should be protected by rights (rationale desideratum). The alternative to dignity is therefore not another property, supposedly, common to all human beings, but it is rather the central human interest to develop and preserve a sense of self. The grounds of moral equality consist not in the kernel of human value shining inside any human being, but rather in what we most care about, which makes us all vulnerable to wrongful violations and hence requires protection via moral rights. The rejection of social cruelty, implicit in all inferiorizing treatments threatening the integral sense of self, calls for respect and moral rights. Sangiovanni thinks he has disposed in this way of the main difficulty concerning the possession of the property which makes us *digni*, worthy of equal consideration and respect, namely the actual variation in rational capacity and rational deliberations from which some human beings (small children, severely disabled individuals, victims of Alzheimer and senile dementia) are in fact excluded.

Moral equality requires that the reciprocal relationship within the moral and social community be governed by respect. The kind of respect relevant for Sangiovanni is "recognition-respect", according to a well-known distinction made by Stephen Darwall,¹ that is, the respect that we owe each other unconditionally, just as (equally vulnerable) human beings, and not the "appraisal-respect" which is attributed on the basis of achievements and merits and is not equal. Moreover, the recognition-respect here in order is also "opacity-respect"² for it implies restraint confronting others, keeping the right distance to protect the self-presentation of other people without exposing them to inquisitiveness, rudeness and discomfort.

Generally speaking, the negative approach used by Sangiovanni has clear advantages over alternatives when dealing with human values, a highly sensitive area for disagreement. It is indeed easier to find agreement on the intolerability of the violation of a given value, and the reactive attitudes to violation provide

¹ Darwall, S. 1977, "Two Kinds of Respect", *Ethics*, 88, 39-49.

² Carter, I. 2011, "Respect and the Basis of Equality", *Ethics*, 121, 538-71.

insight to single out a special value on which we could agree by implication. Yet, here is precisely my critical point: why is it that the value or fundamental good that the intolerable violation to our moral equality points to is the integral sense of self, instead of dignity? I understand that dignity cannot be the starting point for the argument in favor of equal human right, for dignity, literally, means that human beings are worthy (*digni*) but it requires an account of a) why we are worthy, in virtue of what property, and b) how come we are all equally worthy. Sangiovanni believes that none of the responses in the three traditions of dignity is satisfactory; hence, he takes the different negative route to moral equality. In this way, he is able to establish that inferiorizing treatments, taking advantage of human vulnerability, are socially cruel, hence moral equality ought to be presupposed to make sense of our reactive attitudes. Yet, at this point, why is it that the inferiorizing treatment attacks the integrity of our sense of self, instead of our dignity? It seems to me that the greatest good of the integral sense of self does not necessarily follow from the intolerability of social cruelty and of inferiorizing treatments. Why cannot the sense of self be the sense of one's worth, hence of one's dignity? I conjecture that his reason to favor the sense of self over dignity lies in two issues linked to dignity above mentioned. The first issue is to specify what human worth consists in, what is the special human value in virtue of which all human beings have dignity, and the answer is usually found in rational capacities, both in the Christian and in the Kantian tradition, though differently specified. The second issue is precisely connected with this answer, for, first, the rational capacities are not present in all human beings equally, and, second, in some of them, like in the severely mentally handicapped or in very small children, are absent. Thus, it seems that dignity cannot be the ground for moral equality. I think however that similar issues can be raised concerning the integral sense of self. Sangiovanni's argument is based on the difference between a property and a crucial center of our care and concern. The latter does not presuppose equal intellectual and moral capacities, and everyone, no matter how clever and morally accomplished, cares about oneself. Yet if the care for oneself is understood as the instinct of self-preservation, this is certainly something that we all share, but also something that goes beyond humanity, encompassing all living beings. Sangiovanni, however, means something more distinctly human, namely the capacity of seeing oneself, and of constructing and reconstructing one's image according to what one wants to be, as well as the capacity to present oneself to others so as to be socially recognized. Another part of an integral sense of self is the gap between how we see ourselves and how we want to be seen, which is often a reason for self-improvement, as well as the reason to limit our social exposure. Clearly though, caring for the integral sense of self implies the *capacity* of developing, revising and reshaping our images according to our commitments and wishes. And not all human beings share this capacity in the same measure across the board and some people are completely deprived of a proper sense of self. Thus, it seems to me that the issues connected with grounding moral equality on dignity, in a way resurface here. For no matter what the grounds for moral equality, the problems a) of human variations and b) of human beings that are not autonomous persons in the proper sense arise and cannot easily be disposed of, even adopting a negative approach.

The problem of human variations, whether concerning the capacity of rational agency or of having an integral sense of self, has been, to my mind, satisfactorily responded to with reference to the range property, that is a non-variant

property supervening over a range of possible variations of the variant property.³ Sangiovanni, too hastily, dismisses the range property argument because he says that it is still to be explained why the equal possession of the range property should count more than the unequal possession of the underlying property in the highest degree. I think that the answer can be found in Sangiovanni own's argument. He has explained that the way to get to the basis of equality, i.e. the sense of self—expressed in a range property following my suggestion—is through our reactive responses to the various forms of inferiorizing treatments. From there we arrive at the intolerability of the social cruelty underlying such kinds of treatment, and to the crucial importance of the sense of self. The responsive attitudes to violations are actually independent of how deep and articulated is the sense of self, and of whether it is the product of autonomous reflection or induced by social conditioning. It is from outside that we react to the violations, and how well developed is anyone's sense of self does not count in judging the violation intolerable. The sense of self is ascribed from outside, hence it is a range property, which we presume present in everyone and which makes us indignant at its violations. Consider now the second issue of moral equality, however grounded, namely the fact that some human beings are not autonomous and seem deprived of the capacity of having a sense of self as well (or the rational and moral capacities) above a certain threshold. Here, again, I think that Sangiovanni's negative approach can be helpful: if the starting point is the violations and our consequent reactive attitudes, the latter are even stronger the more vulnerable is the victim. This establishes the moral status of the victim, no matter if deprived of an integral sense of self, for the victim is the recipient of our reactive attitudes, of our care and affection, and capable of reciprocating our affection and love. Such moral status deserves protection by rights and respect by us, though rights and respect are not equal insofar as these persons are not recognized as autonomous. The negative approach adopted by Sangiovanni can indeed help in solving both issues, but, in my view, it does not change if the ground of moral equality is dignity rather than the integral sense of self, at least once dignity is not assumed as the first premise but as the arrival point of a negative argument proceeding from violations.

The second critical remark I should like to make concerns the view of respect as opacity respect, which Sangiovanni elaborates on the basis of Carter's.⁴ If moral equality is ultimately grounded in having (developing and preserving) an integral sense of self, then respect is a kind of restraint against coming too close to people's sense of self. Such a distance is required in order to protect the sense of self from violations, from social cruelty, and a common and daily violation is being exposed to the public gaze without our consent. I do not dispute that certain kinds of unauthorized exposure are disrespectful, but is this sufficient for characterizing all there is to respect for persons as opacity and distance? Sangiovanni subscribes to Darwall's notion of recognition respect as the relevant form of respect governing relationships among equals. Yet recognition respect is always also *recognition* of the person as a *person* and as an *equal*. While respectful actions vary in different contexts, they are always accompanied by *an attitude of regard* for the other person, which precisely represents the recognition element in respect. Actually, I think that one kind of violation of the equal moral status of

³ Carter, I. 2011, cit.

⁴ Carter, I. 2011, cit.

persons, and an attack on their sense of self, aimed at inferiorizing others, is invisibility, which, curiously enough, does not figure in the list of forms of inferiorizing treatment analyzed by Sangiovanni. Is it not the case that respecting members of oppressed groups as persons, via obscuring their life and circumstances, bracketing the latter as irrelevant, implies reproducing their invisibility *qua* members of their group? Is it not a way of recognizing them as persons only *beyond* who they are and in a way dispensing with their membership in the oppressed group?⁵ If invisibility is included in the list of inferiorizing treatments, the question is: can the quest for recognition, regard and consideration, especially crucial in case of historic discrimination, be reconciled with opacity respect? In a sense, Sangiovanni suggests such reconciliation when he says that, in order to respect people as persons, we have to take them as self-presenters claiming to be recognized according to their own modes of presentation (89). In that case, the opacity would concern the content of the personal presentation and perspective not to be scrutinized closely and exposed unnecessarily, while the individualizing act of recognition would concern the gaze of regard towards others. I am not sure Sangiovanni would agree with my amendments but it is worth noting that his own argument provides a basis for the solution to this problem.

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⁵ Galeotti, A.E. 2010, "Respect as Recognition. Some Political Implications", in Seymour, M. (ed.), *The Plural States of Recognition*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 78-97.

Iacona, A., *Logical Form: Between Logic and Natural Language*. Cham: Springer International, 2018, pp. vi + 133.

The central tenet of Andrea Iacona's book is that "two notions of logical form must be distinguished: according to one of them, logical form is a matter of syntactic structure; according to the other, logical form is a matter of truth conditions. [...] In the sense of 'logical form' that matters to logic, logical form is determined by truth conditions" (v). The work is composed of three parts: chapters 1-3 provide a broad-stroked, yet informative history of the notion of logical form from Aristotle to date; chapters 4-6 constitute the core of the book, where a novel truth-conditional understanding of logical form is articulated; chapters 7-9, finally, discuss a number of applications of the core theory in such areas as logic, epistemology, and the semantics of natural language. As most of the non-historical material had previously appeared in print, this book bears witness to the author's nearly decade-long engagement with the topic.¹

It is a familiar empirical observation that we are able to grasp the meaning of all sorts of complex sentences, even ones we have never heard before. The standard explanation for such cognitive abilities of ours is that the semantics of

¹ Iacona, A. 2010, "Validity and Interpretation", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 88, 247-64; Iacona, A. 2013, "Logical Form and Truth Conditions", *Theoria*, 28, 439-57; Iacona, A. 2015, "Quantification and logical form", in Torza, A. (ed.), *Quantifiers, Quantifiers, and Quantifiers: Themes in Logic, Metaphysics, and Language*, Cham: Springer, 125-40; Iacona, A. 2016, "Two Notions of Logical Form", *Journal of Philosophy*, 113, 617-43; Iacona, A. 2016, "Vagueness and Quantification", *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 45, 579-602.

natural language is compositional: the meaning of a complex sentence is specified by its structure together with the meaning of its constituents. On a view that has been developed by Tarski, Davidson and Montague among others, the meaning-defining structure of a sentence is its logical form. For example, the meaning of 'John is tall and Betty is at the party' is uniquely specified by the meaning of its atomic subsentences, together with the semantic rule associated with sentences of the form ' $p \wedge q$ '. This is what Iacona calls the 'semantic role' of logical form (31).

We are also familiar with the adage that an inference is valid in virtue of its form. For example, 'John is tall and Betty is at the party. Therefore, Betty is at the party' is valid because it instantiates the schema ' $p \wedge q$. Therefore q '. According to a view, fully articulated by Frege and Russell but tracing back to ancient syllogistic, the feature of a sentence which explains its inferential properties is its logical form. This is what Iacona calls the 'logical role' of logical form (24).

According to the 'current conception', there is a unique notion of logical form playing both the semantic and the logical role (36). On that conception, the logical form of a natural language sentence, which can be exhibited in a suitable formalization (typically, carried out in first-order logic or some extension thereof), accounts for the meaning of a sentence, as well as its inferential properties. Iacona's central thesis is that the current conception is misguided, as different theoretical roles require different notions of logical form (38).

The current conception has it that logical form is an intrinsic property of sentences. For instance, the influential view developed by Montague identifies the logical form of a natural language sentence with its deep syntactic structure, that is, the syntactic structure of its formal regimentation. (Other, not merely syntactic versions of intrinsicalism about logical form are discussed in the book, such as Davidson's semantic approach.) Iacona does not take issue with intrinsic logical form's ability to play the semantic role: once a natural language sentence s is regimented as a formula r , the syntax of r suffices to specify the meaning of s as a function of the meaning of r 's subformulas.

The author's first key claim is that the intrinsicalist conception of logical form cannot fulfill the logical role. In some special cases, it can: the aforementioned inference 'John is tall and Betty is at the party. Therefore, Betty is at the party' can be correctly assessed as valid by simply attending to the syntactic structure of its premise and conclusion. On the other hand, if someone says 'this is not this' while pointing first at an object a , and then at a distinct object b , it is clear that the speaker has not uttered an inconsistency. If so, the sentence is correctly formalized as ' $a \neq b$ ', although none of its intrinsic properties forces such a formalization, as opposed to the inconsistent, and incorrect ' $a \neq a$ ' (48). Likewise, the inference 'Now it is raining. Therefore, now it is raining' is invalid, as one might utter the premise at a time t , when it is in fact raining, and the conclusion at some later t' , when the rain has stopped. This fact suggests that the form of the argument is ' $\phi(t)$. Therefore $\phi(t')$ ', rather than ' $\phi(t)$. Therefore $\phi(t)$ ', as the intrinsicalist view would suggest.

The moral that Iacona draws from the above observations is that no intrinsic property of an utterance can play the logical role. According to his *truth-conditional notion* of logical form, such a role is played instead by an extrinsic property of an utterance, namely by a property it has in virtue of the proposition it expresses relative to an interpretation (63). Propositions are here individuated

hyperintensionally, since we want to distinguish the logical form of necessarily equivalent sentences such as '1 + 1 = 2' and 'if snow is white, then snow is white'. When it comes to modeling propositions, the author seems to favor Kit Fine's theory of truthmaker content, which identifies propositions with sets of states—structureless abstract entities acting as the verifiers of statements. Accordingly, the propositional content of a sentence 'p' is the set of all its possible verifiers. The content of '1 + 1 = 2' is therefore distinct from the content of 'if snow is white, then snow is white', since the first, but not the latter includes states about numbers.² It is worth remarking that the truth-conditional notion of logical form can be substantiated by alternative accounts of fine-grained content (57).

Although Iacona does not develop an algorithm for producing the (truth-conditional) logical form of sentences of any particular fragment of natural language, he lays the groundwork by offering an adequacy condition (AC) for all such possible algorithms, according to which logical form is just as fine-grained as propositional content. More precisely:

(AC) Any interpreted sentences 'p' and 'q' have the same formalization, up to equivalence,³ if and only if they express identical propositions (58).

This condition is meant to encode the key thesis that logical form, in the sense playing the logical role, is determined by propositional content, and is therefore an extrinsic property of sentences.

As Iacona argues, the aforementioned counterexamples to the intrinsicist conception of logical form can be handled by an adequate formalization. On the Finean view of content, the proposition expressed by an utterance of 'this is not this' in the relevant context is the set of all states that make it the case that a is not b; accordingly, the logical form of 'this is not this' is expressed by the formula 'a ≠ b'. The argument 'Now it is raining. Therefore, now it is raining' is invalid, when premise and conclusion are uttered at different times t, t' . For in such a context, the proposition expressed by the premise only includes states that make it the case that it rains at t , whereas the proposition expressed by the conclusion only includes states that make it the case that it rains at t' ; accordingly, the argument exemplifies the schema ' $\phi(t)$. Therefore $\phi(t')$ '.

It appears, however, that the conjunction of Iacona's truth-conditional notion of logical form (as constrained by AC) and Fine's theory of truth-maker content may not be sufficiently general. For example, on Fine's theory the content of a natural language sentence ' P and Q ' is the set of states $s \sqcup t$ such that s and t are verifiers of ' P ' and ' Q ', respectively, and $s \sqcup t$ is their mereological fusion. Since, in general, $s \sqcup s = s$, the content of any sentence ' P ' is identical to the content of ' P and P '. By AC, ' P ' and ' P and P ' have therefore the same logical form, up to equivalence. But arguably we had better not conflate the logical form of ' P ' and ' P and P ', if we want to acknowledge contexts in which it is correct to say that the logical form of the latter, but not the former is conjunctive.

² See Fine, K. 2017, "A Theory of Truthmaker Content I: Conjunction, Disjunction and Negation", *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 46, 6, 1-50; Fine, K. 2017, "A Theory of Truthmaker Content II: Subject-matter, Common Content, Remainder and Ground", *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 46, 6, 675-702.

³ Given a suitably fine-grained equivalence relation for formulas which is stronger than the strict biconditional.

The issue can be addressed either by weakening AC, allowing sentences with the same content to have different logical form, or by adopting a theory of propositional content more general than Fine's.

Turning to some applications of his proposals, Iacona employs the truth-conditional notion of logical form in order to shed light on Frege's puzzle: what makes it so that 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is informative, whereas 'Hesperus is Hesperus' is not, if the two sentences express the same proposition? The author indeed agrees that those sentences express the same proposition, which is captured by the formula ' $h = h$ ' (or equivalently, ' $h = p$ '). What explains their difference in epistemic status is that it is not trivial that one and the same formula adequately captures the logical form of both 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' and 'Hesperus is Hesperus', and so it is not trivial that the two sentences are logically equivalent (80). The philosophical moral is that logical knowledge (in this particular case, knowledge that ' $h = h$ ' is a logical truth) is compatible with ignorance of logical form (such as ignorance of the fact that ' $h = h$ ' is the logical form of 'Hesperus is Phosphorus'). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the truth-conditional account does not force upon us Iacona's own solution to Frege's puzzle, as he could have just as well claimed that 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' and 'Hesperus is Hesperus' express distinct propositions (given a suitably fine-grained theory of content), and so by AC that they have non-equivalent logical forms.

Another application of Iacona's theory concerns the logic of quantifier phrases, such as 'all', 'some', 'most', 'half' etc. On the truth-conditional account, the logical properties of sentences like 'all whales are mammals' and 'half the philosophers are wise' are supposedly accounted for by their first-order formalization. A potential objection to the present approach is that not all quantifier phrases are first-order definable: although we can translate 'some As are Bs' into predicate logic, it is not possible to do the same with 'half the As are Bs'. However, Iacona reminds us that "if logical form is determined by truth conditions [...], formalization is representation of content rather than translation" (106). So, although 'half' is not first-order definable, 'half the philosophers are wise' can nevertheless be formalized as $\exists_2x(Px \wedge Wx)$ (i.e., '2 philosophers are wise') if there are 4 philosophers, as $\exists_3x(Px \wedge Wx)$ (i.e., '3 philosophers are wise') if there are 6 philosophers, etc. The same line of reasoning carries over, *mutatis mutandis*, to a number of other first-order undefinable quantifier phrases.

I myself have misgivings about Iacona's proposed solution. For his strategy hinges on the key assumption that the content, and thus the logical form of 'half the As are Bs' is a function of the actual extension of A , B . But then, by the same token, the content, and thus the logical form of 'some As are Bs' should also be a function of the actual extension of A , B , in such a way that, if there are n wise philosophers, 'some philosophers are wise' gets formalized as $\exists_nx(Px \wedge Wx)$ —by all means an overly revisionary view of the logical form of existential quantifier phrases, which Iacona does not endorse, and rightly so. This disanalogy between the logical form of first-order definable vs undefinable quantifier phrases cries out for explanation. One might address the issue by claiming that a sentence with a first-order definable quantifier phrase, such as 'some philosophers are wise', has in fact two candidate formalizations: $\exists_nx(Px \wedge Wx)$, which is a function of the actual domain, and $\exists x(Ax \wedge Bx)$, which is domain-independent—and that the latter takes priority. However, Iacona doesn't provide any princi-

pled reason for choosing the domain-independent formalization over the alternative. Moreover, if domain-independent formalizations are indeed to be preferred, a uniform way to formalize quantifier phrases presents itself. For if we assume that logical form is expressed in a second-order language, all quantifier phrases are definable, and so ‘half the philosophers are wise’ will be formalized by the standard domain-independent truth-condition $\frac{|P \cap W|}{|P|} = \frac{1}{2}$ (i.e., ‘the number of wise philosophers is half the number of philosophers’). Notice that this alternative solution is consistent with Iacona’s central tenet that logical form is determined by content, provided that the content of a quantified sentence is not a function of the actual domain of interpretation. It is also consistent with Fine’s view that the content of a sentence is the set of its possible truth-makers, and not just the possible truth-makers that agree with the actual ones in matters of domain.

Logical Form touches upon a number of other applications and discussions for which there is no space here. The book covers a vast ground, and does so by meeting the highest standards of clarity and rigor, without ever getting overly technical. Moreover, most chapters are self-consistent, which allows a more focused approach to the work. I warmly encourage anyone working in the philosophy of logic, language, and in linguistics, to read *Logical Form*.

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Bliss, R. and Priest, G. (eds.), *Reality and its Structure: Essays in Fundamentality*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. vii + 311.

Bliss and Priest’s edited volume *Reality and its Structure* collects together fifteen essays on metaphysical grounding. Unlike its nearest predecessors—Correia and Schnieder’s *Metaphysical Grounding* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Hoeltje, Schnieder and Steinberg’s *Varieties of Dependence* (Ontos Verlag, 2013)—this collection is less about introducing and defending the notion of grounding and more about challenging the received view. It is similar, in this respect, to Mark Jago’s *Reality Making* (Oxford University Press, 2016), even though it appears to be much more focused than this latter.

In their introductory essay (“The Geography of Fundamentality”) Bliss and Priest argue that the received view of metaphysical grounding amounts to the conjunction of four theses:

1. *The hierarchy thesis*: Reality is hierarchically structured by metaphysical dependence relations that are *anti-reflexive*, *anti-symmetric*, and *transitive*;
2. *The fundamentality thesis*: There is some thing(s) which is fundamental (that is, such that there is nothing on which it depends);
3. *The contingency thesis*: Whatever is fundamental is merely contingently existent;
4. *The consistency thesis*: The dependence structure has consistent structural properties.

Bliss and Priest offer a useful taxonomy of the alternatives to the received view (7-13) based on the combination of four structural properties: *anti-reflexivity* (AR), *anti-symmetry* (AS), *transitivity* (T), and *extendability* (E), viz. the claim that

everything metaphysically depends on something else. The *hierarchy thesis* corresponds to the combination of *AR*, *AS*, and *T*, while the *fundamentality thesis* corresponds to $\neg E$. Since $\neg AR$ implies $\neg AS$, and $\neg AS$ and *T* imply $\neg AR$, there are five possible combinations of the first three properties and their negations. In particular, if *AR* or *T* are put aside, *circles of ground* become possible. Moreover, all these five combinations are compatible both with *E* and with its negation. In particular, the received view is a form of *metaphysical foundationalism* (F), according to which each dependence chain *terminates in a foundational element*; notable alternatives to foundationalism are *infinetism* (I), according to which there are no foundational elements, and *coherentism* (C), the most radical version of which states that everything metaphysically depends on anything else.

The main question that this volume tackles is whether there are compelling reasons for taking foundationalism to be the *right* picture of reality. Before moving on, we must get clear of some misconceptions. First, some might suggest that foundationalism is true *by definition*, since the notion of grounding is *defined* as being anti-reflexive, anti-symmetric, transitive, etc. A related point would be that that notion was introduced *at some theoretical purpose*—for example, in order to deliver a certain picture of reality—and it can serve this purpose only if it has all the properties listed above. Of course, we can define the notion of grounding just in this way; the question is not, however, about our definitions, but about the reasons for which we believe that reality *responds* to those definitions (cf. Bliss' essay, 74). Even so, one might argue that the received view does not need *arguments*, since it is *obvious* that grounding is anti-reflexive, anti-symmetric, transitive, etc.; we agree with the Editors that these intuitions are either empty or not trustworthy (10). The *arguments* for the received view divide into two categories. On the one hand, some arguments are *metaphysical*: they offer reasons to believe that the world cannot be such as to contain metaphysical dependence relations which violate the standard view; on the other hand, other arguments are *explanatory*: since grounding is intimately connected with metaphysical explanation, it may be that it cannot violate the standard view without losing such connection. As the essays in this collection make abundantly clear, however, the alternatives to foundationalism have been grossly underestimated in the current literature, and, for this reason, foundationalism itself is poorly defended—if defended at all.

The volume is divided in three parts: Part I addresses the *hierarchy thesis*, Part II addresses the *fundamentality thesis*, and Part III is about the *contingency* and the *consistency theses*. The first two parts are more substantial (7 and 6 essays respectively), while the third one is significantly shorter than the other two (2 essays). I will proceed by summarizing the main contributions of each essay (leaving some comments in brackets).

1. The Hierarchy Thesis

Gabriel Rabin ("Grounding Orthodoxy and the Layered Conception") explores the connections between the received view and the *layered conception of reality*, that is, the idea that dependence relations structure reality into a hierarchy of levels. Rabin argues that non-standard conceptions of grounding, which give up on one or more of its structural properties, are still able to recover this layered conception; in particular, the layered conception is compatible both with *non-irreflexivity* (grounding is not always reflexive) and *reflexivity*, and with *non-*

asymmetry (grounding is not always asymmetric) even if not with *symmetry*. Moreover, the layered conception is compatible with failures of transitivity. Appealing to the fact that the notion of metaphysical dependence has been introduced *with the purpose of* delivering a layered picture of reality offers therefore little advantage to metaphysical foundationalism over many of its alternatives.

Elizabeth Barnes (“Symmetric Dependence”) claims that metaphysical dependence must be understood as *non-asymmetric* rather than anti-symmetric. Her examples include, among others, the following one. Arguably, the evacuation of Dunkirk is an essential part of World War II: WWII wouldn’t have been the same if that evacuation had not occurred. At the same time, what the evacuation of Dunkirk depends, at least in part, on its being part of WWII: if that evacuation wasn’t occurred as part of WWII, it wouldn’t have been *the evacuation of Dunkirk*. So, it does seem that both the evacuation of Dunkirk depends on WWII, and that WWII depends on the evacuation of Dunkirk.

Ricki Bliss (“Grounding and Reflexivity”) focuses on *circles of (immediate) ground*, that is, circles which are formed by *reflexive* instances of metaphysical dependence. She claims that the most compelling arguments against circles of ground are *explanatory*—self-grounded entities would give rise either to *viciously circular* metaphysical explanations, or to *explanation failures*—rather than *metaphysical*—self-grounded entities would, in some sense, ‘bootstrap themselves into being’. In her careful examination of these arguments, Bliss points out that metaphysical foundationalism is not obviously better off, from the explanatory point of view, than a theory which posits circles of ground: even if self-grounded entities metaphysically explain their own, foundationalism routinely posits entities for whose existence there is no explanation at all.

Daniel Nolan (“Cosmic Loops”) considers the possibility of loops which go around all the levels of reality. An example of a ‘cosmic’ loop is an *Aleph-world*, in which there is an object—the *Aleph*—which contains anything else as a proper part, including the Aleph itself (the example is taken from Borges’ famous short piece). An Aleph-world requires giving up either on *AR* or *T*. Nolan explores this second path: he suggests that, even if cosmic loops require dependence relations to be non-transitive, these relations could still be *locally* transitive, that is, transitive in a sufficient small portion of the cosmic loop. (Assume that this strategy could be generalized—that is, suppose that grounding is non-irreflexive even if it is *locally* anti-reflexive, non-asymmetric even if it is *locally* anti-symmetric, etc.. This would have some notable consequences for the epistemology of *grounding*: we could have *justified metaphysical beliefs* about dependence’s having certain properties even if these properties fail in the periphery).

Thompson (“Metaphysical Interdependence, Epistemic Coherentism, and Holistic Explanation”) argues for a form of *metaphysical interdependence* (MI), that is, the view that (i) there are no foundational facts and (ii) one entity can appear in its own metaphysical ancestry. MI requires to give up both on *AS* and on *E*. Thompson supports MI with an analogy with epistemic coherentism; Moreover, she points out that the friends of metaphysical interdependence stand in need to recognize *holistic metaphysical explanations*, that is, metaphysical explanations of an entity in terms of a cluster of other entities which may depend on that entity itself (further support to holistic metaphysical explanation is provided by Barnes, 65-7).

Graham Priest (“Buddhist Dependence”) connects the contemporary debate with Eastern philosophical traditions. Metaphysical dependence is particularly central to Buddhist philosophy. Priest points out that, in the context of these traditions, foundationalism stands beside coherentism, and the standard conception of grounding (from the point of view of the contemporary debate) stands beside non-standard ones, according to which grounding is *non-well-founded*. (Notice that many of the views considered by Priest are about what *conceptually* depends on what; another debate which may highly profit from being informed by Eastern philosophies is the one on *conceptual grounding*).

Jon Litland (“Bicollective Grounds”) formulates a new account of *bicollective* ground. Grounding is said to be *left-collective* if there are some truths $\gamma_1, \gamma_2, \gamma_3$, etc. such that $\gamma_1, \gamma_2, \gamma_3$ ground ϕ *taken together*, without any of them grounding ϕ on its own. Grounding is said to be *right-collective* if there is some truth ϕ such that it grounds $\gamma_1, \gamma_2, \gamma_3$, etc. *taken together*, without ϕ grounding any of these truths. Finally, grounding is said to be *bicollective* if it is both right- and left-collective. Bicollective ground can be used to formulate, in particular, a form of *coherentism without circles*, since it might be that $\gamma_1, \gamma_2, \gamma_3$ depend on ϕ and ϕ depends on $\gamma_1, \gamma_2, \gamma_3$, without either γ_1 depending on ϕ neither ϕ depending on γ_1 .

2. The Fundamentality Thesis

Einar Duenger Bohn (“Indefinitely Descending Grounds”) argues that dependence relations could not be—and even actually aren’t—well-founded. Basically, his argument is that *hunky* worlds—that is, worlds which are both *gunky*—viz., such that everything in those worlds has a proper part—and *junky*—viz., worlds in which everything is a proper part of something else—requires that dependence relations are not well-founded; he then claims that we have inductive reasons to think that our world is actually hunky.

Notice that the main argument for taking dependence relations to be well-founded comes from considerations about *metaphysical explanation*: non-well-founded dependence relations would give raise to *vicious regresses* inasmuch as a complete—or *completely satisfactory*—explanation of any entity could not be provided. Bliss and Priest (18-9) point out that these argument can also be formulated in a way that fails to make a direct appeal to vicious regresses: the point would rather be that *non-fundamental* entities wouldn’t be apt to provide the kind of complete metaphysical explanation which is the foundationalist’s target. More in general, there is much to be learnt from this book about grounding and explanation. A road-map will be useful to the interested reader. Bliss (84-8) focuses on the role of explanatory argument in motivating *anti-reflexivity*. Barnes (55-60) argues that metaphysical explanations can be symmetric. Finally, Barnes (65-7), Thomson (119-23), and Litland (143-4) argue that metaphysical explanations can be *holistic*.

Kelly Trogdon (“Inheritance Arguments for Fundamentality”) questions the cogency of *reality inheritance arguments* for foundationalism. An influential version of this argument (basically due to Jonathan Schaffer) states that there must be a fundamental level because otherwise “[being would be] infinitely deferred, never achieved”. Trogdon suggests that the argument depends on three premises:

- P1. If A is non-fundamental, then A inherits its reality from what grounds it;

- P2. If A inherits its reality, there is some Δ which is the source of A 's reality;
 P3. If Δ is the source of A 's reality, then Δ is fundamental.

Trogon claims that, while $P1$ flows from Schaffer's conception of grounding, and $P3$ flows from the same conception together with $P1$, $P2$ is far more substantial, and can be supported on the basis of the following *inheritance principle*:

(IP) Necessarily, if A inherits ϕ then there are Δ that are a source of A 's ϕ -ness.

Trogon's strategy against the inheritance argument consists in arguing that, even if this principle is correct, the property of being *real* cannot be legitimately instantiate IP. His argument seems to be that, if something inherits its reality, then that thing exists *because* of that inheritance; however, it seems that the explanatory direction should go the other way round: the fact that that entity exists helps explaining why that entity inherits some property.

Mark Jago ("From Nature to Grounding") offers an account of grounding in terms of *nature*, where an entity's nature is understood in terms of its *real definition*, and the grounding profile of that entity can be read from the logical structure of that definition. For what matters to the general aims of the collection, Jago's account supports irreflexivity, anti-symmetry, and transitivity, but fails to support well-foundedness.

John Wigglesworth ("Grounding in Mathematical Structuralism") studies the place of metaphysical dependence in structuralism in the philosophy of mathematics. Structuralists claim that (i) mathematical objects depend on the structures they belong to, and (ii) that mathematical objects depend on all other objects in the same structure. Wigglesworth shows that, if both (i) and (ii) are taken as statements about dependence, they result in counterexample to the received view; in particular, dependence relations would be non-well-founded.

Wigglesworth's paper is the most extensive study of metaphysical dependence in mathematical structuralism so far. As he points out, structuralism offers counterexamples to virtually *any* aspect of the received view; for this reason, structuralism has a prominent place in this collection. Another road-map will be useful to the interested reader. Barnes (59-60) and Thompson (118-19) mention mathematical structuralism as an example of symmetric and holistic metaphysical explanations. Litland (143) claims that structuralism provides the best motivation in favour of bicolleative ground. Finally, Morganti (see below) suggests an analogy with structuralism in the philosophy of science. This collection will therefore be particular welcome by those interested in the connection between grounding and structuralism (and in the philosophy of mathematics in general).

Tuomas Tahko ("Fundamentality and Ontological Minimality") takes on a different conception of fundamentality, according to which fundamentalia are, loosely speaking, the *minimal 'reality-makers'*. This conception is nicely captured by what Tahko calls the principle of *ontological minimality*, according to which the fundamental level of reality consists of ontological minimal entities. Tahko claims, quite surprisingly, that this Ontological Minimality Principle is compatible with some forms of infinitism.

Matteo Morganti ("The Structure of Physical Reality") explores infinitism and coherentism in the light of the philosophy of science. As for infinitism, Morganti defends an alternative reply to the reality inheritance argument, according to which dependence relation do not 'transmit' existence, but existence *emerges* rather from the chain of ground as a whole. As for coherentism, he suggests that

dependence relations can be taken to be *quasi-transitive*, that is, so as to permit circles of grounding without there being any self-grounded entity.

3. *The Contingency and the Consistency Theses*

Nathan Wildman (“On Shaky Ground?”) explores what he calls the *contingent fundamentality thesis*, according to which being fundamental is not a necessary property that *actual* fundamentalia have in every world in which they exist. Wildman illustrates how this claim can be married either to *contingentism*—the claim that whatever is fundamental is contingent—or to *necessitarianism*—the claim that fundamental entities are necessary existent, and he points out that necessitarianism faces the problem of accounting for variations among possible worlds, since everything fundamental is, according to necessitarianism, necessary existent (other relevant remarks on grounding and modality are found in Barnes’ essay, 52, and in Bliss’ essay, 83-84).

Filippo Casati (“Heidegger’s *Grund*”) formulates two *para-foundationalist* accounts. According to the first account, there is a foundational element with inconsistent properties; according to the second account, the structure itself have inconsistent properties (in particular, both E and $\neg E$ hold). He then employs these accounts to model Heidegger’s notion of ground. (Para-foundationalism is not included in Bliss and Priest’s taxonomy; in general, para-foundationalism is a wide uncharted land, and we would probably have liked to read more about this as well.)

The general upshots of this collections seem to be two: (i) grounding is best conceived as *non-irreflexive*, *non-asymmetric* and *non-transitive* rather than anti-symmetric, anti-reflexive and transitive, and (ii) infinitism and coherentism are lively options. At the same time, foundationalism appears to be a far more loaded position that the general agreement suggests it to be. Reading this volume is intellectually profitable and highly satisfying; so we recommend it to anyone interested in this debate.¹

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¹ I am grateful to Ricki Bliss for sharing her work and for reading the first draft of this review.