Verticity: Mereology, Priority, Fundamentality
Spring 2010
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This seminar will be about a variety of topics in the vicinity of verticle determination, or what I like to call building. Cars are built out of wheels, engines, and so forth. Maybe the mental facts are determined by the physical facts, or the moral facts by the natural facts. Etc.; examples abound.

There are (at least!!) two kinds of controversy here. One has to do with which particular ‘building’ claims are true. for example, are the mental facts determined by the physical facts? But another kind of controversy has to do with the building relations themselves. Which relations are building relations? How many are there? How do particular ones work?

We will briefly look at one issue of the former sort—namely, a recent controversy about whether or not “the whole is prior to its parts… the cosmos [is] fundamental, with metaphysical explanation dangling downwards from the One” (Schaffer 2010, 31). But for the most part, we will focus on issues of the second sort. What relations hook the less fundamental to the more fundamental? Are there more or less than we might have thought? Can those relations themselves be fundamental?? What is fundamentality, anyway?

Two building relations in particular will occupy our attention: composition and grounding. A lot of ink has been spilled over what van Inwagen calls the Special Composition Question: under what conditions do two (or more) things compose a third? But we will not directly address this, nor the familiar ensuing literature about whether any (nonliving) composites exist, whether unrestricted mereological composition is true, etc. Rather, we will address questions more in the vicinity of van Inwagen’s General Composition Question: what is composition? Do the axioms of extensional mereology adequately capture the relations between ordinary material objects and their parts? If not, how does composition work? And should we take formal mereologists just to have been tragically misled, or is there another way of thinking about their project?

Grounding: a lot of work grounding has appeared over the past 5 or 10 years. We will get up to speed on this literature, keeping an eye both towards questions about the logic and metaphysics of grounding, and also to questions about the role of grounding in a realist met metaphysics. We will finish the term by reading some of Sider’s manuscript in progress, which is both related to and critical of that project. Among other things, we will look at his interesting defense of the claim that no building relation can itself be fundamental.

Evaluation: Those taking the course for credit will either write
• two 15 page papers, one due on March 19, and one due on May 15, or
• one 30 page paper in two drafts, due April 15 and May 15, respectively.
I won’t hand out paper topics, but I’m of course happy to consult with you.

Readings: will be online, via a shared Dropbox folder. Since we’re never reading more than a couple of chapters of any given book, I’m not requiring you to buy any. That said, anything mentioned below would make a good addition to your library:
Introduction: verticality, fundamentality, building, composition as a central case

Bennett, “Construction Area,” §1-4 (ms)

Composition: how does it work? why mereology?

Fine, “Things and their Parts” (1999) (note: Koslicki spells out Fine’s view in some detail, so this is more or less optional)
Optional further background on mereology: Koslicki chapter 1; Simons, *Parts: A Study in Ontology*, chapter 1-2 (1987)


Is there more than one kind of composition relation? Many? Can we say anything more general?

Fine, “Toward a Theory of Part” (ms)
Bennett, “Construction Area,” §5-8 (ms)
Sharvy, “Mixtures” (1983)

What is fundamental? (and the beginnings of a sideways glance at the question ‘what is fundamentality?’)

Cameron, “Turtles all the Way Down: Regress, Priority, and Fundamentality in Metaphysics” (2008)

More on grounding:

Schaffer, “Grounding as the Primitive Concept of Metaphysical Structure” (forthcoming)
Fine, “Guide to Ground” (forthcoming)

Spring Break

no class (Pacific APA)

Grounding, structure, and the aims of metaphysics

Fine, “The Question of Realism” (2001)
Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* (forthcoming)

(Particular readings for particular dates TBA)