

Reply to Jason Turner
Author-meets-critics
Eastern APA 2018

A nice distinction:

- Making or ‘entity-based’ views according to which fundamentality is a feature of *things* (and relative fundamentality relations are relations among things), and
- Descriptive views according to which fundamentality is a feature of *descriptions* of the world (and relative fundamentality relations are relations between descriptions)

I do indeed hold a making conception, with a crucial caveat: words like ‘thing’ and ‘entity’ here must be understood in the broadest possible sense, as picking out entities of any ontological category: objects, facts, properties, whatever. My view is not object-centric.

Perhaps it would be better to call it a ‘world-based’ view than an ‘entity-based’ view?

Lewisian modality

Jason’s Lewis says that “modality is less fundamental than the goings-on in disconnected spacetimes,” which Jason says commits me to saying that there is this *thing*, modality, which is built out of disconnected spacetimes. Nope.

First of all, I explicitly deny that if x is more fundamental than y , x builds y (start of ch. 6). Further, I take it the Lewisian claim is a disguised generalization: each modal fact is grounded in a fact about the goings-on in disconnected spacetimes.

A quick word on ‘just is’

Like its cousin ‘nothing over and above’, ‘just is’ is a slippery phrase. *Sometimes* these phrases are used to make identity claims, and *sometimes* they are used to make building claims. Contrast:

‘water just is H₂O’ (identity)

‘this quantity of water just is a bunch of particles interacting in certain ways’ (building, for anyone who denies both compositional nihilism and composition as identity)

I think there is a difference. I know not everyone does—Thomasson, Rayo—and suspect Jason is on their side.

Everettian quantum mechanics: “The only thing that is physically real is a very high-dimensional space and a wavefunction in it.”

First interpretation: take that statement literally. This is perfectly compatible with my overall framework, though it’s a view I take to be false (chapter 8).

Second interpretation (Jason’s): the only thing that is *fundamental* is a very high-dimensional space and a wavefunction in it.

Jason says I can’t account for the second interpretation while the descriptivist can. I think both claims are false.

In my defense:

I never said that all building was local.

The concern about there being “multiple, equally good branching-structure descriptions of the world licensed by any wavefunction,” and no way to pick a unique one that characterizes the built entities seems to me to be a high-tech cousin of the problem of the many argument for compositional nihilism.

Why I think the descriptivist doesn't account for the second interpretation:

The descriptivist picture is that all that exists is the high-dimensional space and the wavefunction, which can be described in various ways. No further entities get ‘made’.

But this is the first interpretation, not the second.

Two concluding reconciliatory remarks

First: if you like, you can think of the book as conditional. *If* you are inclined to believe in made entities—composite objects, grounded facts, realized properties, what have you—then take the rest of the book as a detailed unpacking of what else you should think.

Second: suppose there are no built entities, that there is nothing but the “bare sea floor”. It is a perfectly good point, one that I think lurks in the background of Jason's comments, that it can still be the case that some descriptions of that bare sea floor carve at the joints and some do not. So if Jason gives me back the term ‘fundamental’, and accepts ‘natural’ in exchange, we have no disagreement about the *apparatus*. We have a disagreement about *what exists* (and possibly some metametaphysical background views about ‘just is’).