

**Overview of *Making Things Up***  
Oxford University Press, 2017  
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**Introduction:**

A certain kind of talk is ubiquitous both inside and outside philosophy: talk of some things or phenomena being *made of* or *accounted for* or *obtaining in virtue of* others.

The book is about the class of relations that does this work, which I call ‘building relations’, and about their connection to talk of fundamentality.

Three core commitments:

- Pluralism about building relations
- Agnosticism about metaphysical foundationalism
- Content neutrality

Two big claims

- Talk of what is fundamental, as well as talk of what is more fundamental than what, is best understood as reducing to talk about what building relations obtain or fail to obtain.
- Causation is vastly more intertwined with allegedly synchronic vertical building than ordinarily supposed.

**Chapters 2 and 3: Characterizing the class of building relations**

To get a preliminary fix, here are examples of building relations: composition, constitution, set-formation, property realization, grounding.

These relations differ in various ways. That is compatible with them being similar in others, and I claim that building relations form a unified family.

Why say that there are a bunch (why pluralism rather than some version of monism)? And what does it mean to say that they form a unified family?

In chapter 3, I turn to the question of what features building relations have in common. I offer a 3 part account, the gist of which is that all building relations are

*Directed*, in that they are asymmetric and irreflexive

*Necessitating*, roughly in that builders necessitate what they build

*Generative*, in that they license a certain kind of talk: ‘in virtue of’, ‘because’

A lot of the interesting stuff in chapters 2 and 3 is in the details, alas.

## Chapter 4: Causing

Here I argue for two distinct claims about the relation between causation and building.

Claim 1: it is appropriate to characterize the resemblance class in a way that includes causation as well as putatively synchronic building relations

Claim 2: Often, what it takes for ‘ordinary’ building relations—relations like composition or grounding—to obtain is, in whole or in part, for some causal facts to obtain.

These are distinct claims and do not entail each other.

It is compatible with claim 1 that the narrower class of ‘canonical’ or ‘vertical’ building relations that does not include causation itself is more natural than the broader class that also includes causation.

But claim 2 means that causation pervades building in a different way.

## Chapter 5: Absolute Fundamentality

I distinguish 3 different notions of fundamentality that are tangled together in the literature.

Here are the first two:

Independence:  $x$  is independent if and only if  $x$  is not built by anything.

Completeness: the set of the  $xx$ s is (or the  $xx$ s plurally are, or some single  $x$  alone is) complete at a world  $w$  just in case its members build (...) everything else at  $w$ .<sup>1</sup>

Even just distinguishing these two is important; they are frequently confused in the literature. In the book, I also articulate and investigate various theses connecting independence and completeness. E.g. is it guaranteed to be true that the set of all and only the independent entities is minimally complete? (Answer: only if building<sup>2</sup> is transitive and well-founded.)

The third notion of fundamentality is naturalness in the Lewis/Sider sense.

Naturalness: the perfectly natural properties are those such that “sharing of them makes for qualitative similarity, they carve at the joints, they are intrinsic, they are highly specific, the sets of their members are ipso facto not entirely miscellaneous” (Lewis 1986, 60).

I argue that the best notion of fundamentality is independence. My arguments for independence over completeness are largely conceptual analysis; my arguments for independence over naturalness are partly conceptual analysis and partly uncovering tensions (etc.) between various threads of the notion of naturalness.

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<sup>1</sup> The parenthetical complexity is required due to my commitment to content neutrality. What is/are the complete entities? I myself would expect it to be a bunch of stuff physicists talk about, but I want to leave this definition available to someone who thinks some single entity, perhaps God, does all the work.

<sup>2</sup> More precisely... independence and completeness can either be defined in a way that quantifies over all building relations, or else indexed to a particular one. In the former case what is required is that all building relations be transitive and well-founded; in the latter what is required is that the particular one in question be so.

## Chapter 6: Relative Fundamentality

I argue against taking relative fundamentality—aka ontological priority—to be an undefined primitive, so that the relative fundamentality facts are themselves fundamental.

Instead, I argue that relative fundamentality, like absolute fundamentality, can be understood in terms of building. For one thing to be more fundamental than another is for certain patterns of building relations to obtain.

This is a deflationism about relative fundamentality. It's not a further ontological or ideological commitment beyond building.

The details of my account of relative fundamentality are too complicated for this overview. Suffice it to see that neither of the following two simple, nice accounts work:

a is more fundamental than b just in case a builds b.

a is more fundamental than b if a is closer to the bottom of its building chain than b is to its.

So I propose something more complex.

All I want to do today is draw out two consequences of the combination of the building-based account of relative fundamentality with other commitments of mine.

Consequence 1: pluralism about ontological structure.

Consequence 2: demotion of ontological priority or promotion of causal priority, whichever way you like to think of it.

## Chapter 7: Building Building

This chapter takes up the question of whether the building facts are themselves built, and if so, how. That is, suppose  $a$  builds  $b$ . Then there is the fact that  $a$  builds  $b$ . Does that fact obtain in virtue of anything? I argue that it obtains in virtue of the existence and nature of  $a$ . This chapter builds (sorry) on a previous paper of mine, and engages in detail with Shamik Dasgupta's objections to that paper, and thus is a little too inside baseball to bother going into detail about here.

## Chapter 8: In Defense of the Nonfundamental

In this chapter I defend the existence of the nonfundamental, and the appropriateness of their inclusion in metaphysics.

First, I argue that there is no parsimony-based reason to deny the existence of nonfundamentalia. I argue (with Schaffer) that parsimony considerations only apply to fundamental things. More precisely, nonfundamental things do contribute to the tally of how many things there are, but they do *not* contribute to the complexity of a theory that posits them in a way that makes it less likely to be true.

Second, I defend a conception of metaphysics according to which it is *not* the study of fundamental reality, but rather on which some nonfundamental things are perfectly good topics of metaphysical inquiry