

Diversifying Syllabi 2018 Text Summary and Teaching Tips

SECTION ONE: to be completed by presenter (1-2 pages max.)

Article/Essay Title: “Doing Ontology and Doing Justice: What Feminist Philosophy Can Teach Us About Meta-Metaphysics”

Author: Mari Mikkola

Readability: Very Difficult

Note Not recommended for intro students.

Thesis:

Various notions of grounding fail to do justice to explaining social phenomena.

“Social ontological cases ill fit the presumption that grounding is fundamental, and the two alternative formulations that reject fundamentality also ill fit explanations of social facts. [Mikkola suggests] that, relative to the interests driving our inquiries, we must make evaluative decisions about which regimentation(s) of grounding to endorse. We may even have to give up the view that grounding is unified and uniform. We are faced with a theory choice [...]” (802).

Key Definitions:

Joint-carving – something is joint-carving if it is fundamental and part of reality’s structure.

Grounding – “a non-causal dependence relation expressed using common idioms like ‘in virtue of’” (785).

Reductionism – the goal of reducing all layered structures of reality into one (786).

Supervenience – a relation used to describe cases where some thing’s properties are determined by its other properties. Mikkola claims that this view delivers an account of how reality is layered, but is not explanatory in the way we might wish (786).

Fundamentality – a fact is fundamental if it is not explained by some other fact (788).

FUND – “the idea that grounding facts are fundamental” because “all facts that figure in grounding facts must themselves be fundamental” (789).

BECAUSE – “The idea is that we can allow grounding facts to be grounded as long as they ground out in some fundamentalia” (789).

Types of evidence (794):

- Intuitive evidence: (C) is intuitively more plausible than (\supset).
- Methodological evidence: it is justified to use methodology that explains facts about (social, cultural, political) groups in terms of the individuals composing them, and hence methodology that ‘explains facts about couples in terms of their individuals’.

- Explanatory evidence: ‘Suppose Jill accepts Jack’s marriage proposal. Given (C), the proposal and acceptance help cause Jack to marry Jill, thus helping to cause the couple to be married. But given (\supset), the proposal and acceptance would have instead helped cause the couple to be married, thus helping to cause Jack to marry Jill’. Of these, the first explanation (C) is preferable.

Superinternality – “aims to undermine the view that taking grounding to be grounded generates a vicious regress of either facts or relations” (797).

Brief Summary:

Mikkola suggests that social ontological cases do not do justice to our explanations of social facts. Both views that are fundamental and those that reject fundamentality do not clearly explain social facts.

We might, then, take a pragmatist approach that informs our decisions about what theories of grounding we should endorse, and this in turn has implications for the view that grounding is unified and uniform. Mikkola is receptive to this approach.

She claims that we ought to choose a disjunctive theory that “posits different kinds of grounding relations relative to different, and yet, legitimate background interests” (803). One way of doing this is by following Anderson’s model of dual justificatory burden.

Anderson suggests that our values can help inform our ontological theory choices. She argues that “in pushing for a cooperative model of theory justification the aim is to advance justice in multiple ways. When we do ontology we should aim to do both evidential and normative justice to our subject matter” (803).

SECTION TWO: to be completed by note taker during discussion

Article/Essay Title: “Doing Ontology and Doing Justice: What Feminist Philosophy Can Teach Us About Meta-Metaphysics”

Author: Mari Mikkola

Possible Applications:

*Because this article is fairly technical, we only recommend using the full article with an **upper level undergraduate metaphysics course**, but below we’ve identified some excerpts that might be used in other courses*

- Final section “Lessons” (802-804)
Still should only use in an upper level Metaphysics or perhaps a Feminist Philosophy course
- Section II (783-785) gives a review of feminist philosophy of science, to show how ostensibly value-neutral fields of study are actually (and legitimately) value-laden, which she will then analogize to metaphysics
Could use in a Philosophy of Science course
- Section III (785-789) provides a useful definition and explanation of various theories of grounding, including concrete examples.
Could use in a Philosophy of Science course, or (with lots of scaffolding) an Epistemology course

Complementary Texts/Resources:

- Two resources that are somewhat more accessible, but still quite related, on grounding
 - Ricki Bliss [“Viciousness and Circles of Ground”](#)
 - Jonathan Schaffer [“Social construction as grounding: or: fundamentality for feminists, a reply to Barnes and Mikkola”](#)
- Elizabeth Anderson “Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology”
- Elizabeth Barnes, “XV-Going Beyond the Fundamental: Feminism in Conetemporary Metaphysics” [also reviewed by Diversifying Syllabi]

Possible Class Activities:

- Have students make a list of various non-causal dependence relations and try to define them
- Have students try to work out the difference between explaining and grounding