

CONSTITUTIVE EXPLANATION

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Pardon the indulgence, but let me begin with some autobiography. When, in the summer of 2009, I first read Fine (2001) and Rosen (2010) on ground, my immediate impression was that they were onto something. The concept of ground they presented seemed intuitive and familiar, and at the same time useful in framing a number of philosophical debates. It struck me that some of the questions in metaphysics I was thinking about at the time were well articulated as questions about what grounds what, so I started thinking about them in those terms.

But as time went on, I began to read papers on ground that I didn't really understand. The concept was being stretched and deformed in various ways—*reified* in various ways—that went far beyond what had initially attracted me to it. This new literature seemed to take ground to be some *part* of reality, some metaphysical analogue of the Higgs boson that somehow held the world together. The job of a metaphysician, on this new conception, was to peer into reality and discern where these “groundons” were flowing (of course, to see these groundons one needed goggles provided by specialist departments). Worse: I began to read papers attacking the notion of ground as unintelligible, or useless, or a mere gimmick; but all the time attacking this new notion so different than the one I had initially come to like!

In short, I came to think that the conception of ground that initially attracted me was more *deflationary* than the conception being developed—and criticized—in much of the literature. Which raises the question: just how deflationary about ground can one be, and still find use for it in philosophy? I will argue that ground can be significantly deflated: one can hold that it corresponds to no part of reality, that it is not primitive in any metaphysically significant sense, even that it is a person- or culture-relative notion with non-cognitive elements, and yet still find it philosophically important. I will not

argue that the best conception of ground is maximally deflationary in all these respects. But it is worth asking what the limit case looks like, if only to clarify whether certain objections to ground target the core notion or just inflated varieties.¹

I suspect that some will regard the deflated notion of ground outlined below as not really a notion of *ground* at all. For them, ‘ground’ by stipulation picks out something else—something more inflated—so they may read me as showing my hand as a grounding skeptic who agrees with Jessica Wilson (2014) that there is “no work for a theory of ground”. Very well, I am happy to give them the term. My substantive claim is that there is a deflated notion that can play much of the philosophically important role that ground has been asked to play; what we call the notion is then a verbal issue. Still, I will suggest that nothing in Fine (2001) or (2012) commits him to anything beyond a very deflated notion of ground. Use the term ‘ground’ as you like, but your usage strikes me as rather perverse if it turns out that Kit Fine was never talking about ground!

1. The role of constitutive explanation

I should start by saying what I mean by ‘ground’. As I use it, it is just a label for one sense of the English word ‘because’. Why is there a table here? One answer: Because someone put it there yesterday. Another answer: Because there are pieces of wood arranged table-wise. These answers are not in competition. The first has to do with the causal history that led to the table being here; the second explains what it is about the current situation that makes it the case that there is a table here. The former is called a causal explanation, the latter a *constitutive* explanation. ‘Ground’, as I use the term, is just a label for this latter sense of ‘because’.²

Other examples are ubiquitous. Why is a faculty meeting occurring? Because the faculty are gathered in a room discussing matters of importance to the department, etc. Why is this water hot? Because its mean kinetic energy is high. Why have I lost this game of chess? Because my king is in check-mate. Here we have not *causally* explained what brought about the meeting, the heat, or the loss; we have rather explained what underlying facts *constitute* the phenomena. I use ‘ground’ just as a label for this mode of explanation. This usage is not universal: some—notably Schaffer—explicitly use ‘ground’ to denote a relation that supposedly underlies or supports these explanations, and we will discuss this idea in due course. But even if there is such a relation, it is not (by stipulation) what I mean by the term.

As these examples illustrate, this notion of constitutive explanation is utterly familiar: it is a concept of ordinary English that is also commonplace in science. This point deserves emphasis. Some claim that ground is familiar in that it has been used in *philosophy* since Plato posed the Euthyphro dilemma. Others claim that ground is familiar in that *philosophers* find

various *recherché* examples involving sets intuitive. This may all be correct but I am making a different point, namely that ground is “quotidian” in Trogon’s (2013) sense that it is *an everyday concept used by the masses*. When I explain the concept to non-philosophers they recognize it immediately and talk intelligibly about it, offering examples of constitutive explanations in their own fields of biology, economics, journalism, or cooking. To them it is not a new concept. The only people I know who claim not to understand it are a handful of contemporary philosophers. In this respect the constitutive ‘because’ is no different from the causal ‘because’: the latter is also an everyday concept used by the masses; only a principled philosopher would claim not to understand it.

Of course, those who claim to find ground unintelligible may be reacting to people who use the term stipulatively to denote something else, perhaps a heavy-duty worldly relation between entities. If so, I have some sympathy with the skeptics. What I claim is quotidian is just *the constitutive sense of ‘because’*. Even a “grounding skeptic” like Thomas Hofweber can agree. He argues (2016, chapter 13) that judgements about what grounds what just reflect certain kinds of counterfactual or conceptual priorities. He then assumes that ‘ground’ must denote something *other* than these familiar relationships, and concludes that our everyday judgements about what grounds what do not show that we have an everyday grasp of this other thing. But from my point of view, the assumption is unwarranted: for all I have said, it may be that constitutive explanations just are reports of the familiar (counterfactual and conceptual) priorities that Hofweber discusses!³

More generally, what I have said so far leaves open what the right *theory* of constitutive explanation is. In this respect, again, the same goes with causal explanation. We all trade in causal explanations but very few of us have an opinion on whether the DN model is true, whether the causal “because” is primitive in any robust sense, and so on. Likewise, we can all give constitutive explanations without knowing what kinds of structures such explanations might track, what ontological gadgets the explanation presupposes, and so forth. I will soon discuss different theories of ground—some more inflationary, others more deflationary—but what I have said so far is neutral between them.

Still, my central claim is that one can accept a seriously deflated theory of ground and still insist that it plays an important role in philosophy. What role? Put simply, the role of *limning many issues of intellectual interest*. Consider the mind-body problem, the question of whether mind consists in matter. Materialists think it does; that mental phenomena are “fixed” or “determined” or “accounted for” entirely by material events and processes. Dualists disagree, insisting that some mental states are “brute”. To take another example, think of the debate between substantialist and relationalist views of space. The issue here is whether geometric relations between material bodies are “determined” or “fixed” or “accounted for” by their

positions in substantival space, as the substantialist thinks, or whether they are “brute”, as the relationalist thinks. We can all agree that the divide between dualism and materialism is deep, vital, and intellectually significant; likewise for the divide between substantivalism and relationalism. Both issues have been debated for centuries, both in philosophy and science. What I call the “grounding thesis” is the claim that issues like these should be understood in terms of ground; as the question of whether the mind is constitutively explained in terms of matter, or whether geometric relations between bodies are constitutively explained by their positions in substantival space.

The analogous view about *causal* explanation—that *it* also limns issues of intellectual interest—is hard to deny. Consider the question of the human origins, of how we came to exist. A central issue is whether we owe our existence to the designs of an intelligent agent, or to natural and non-intentional processes. The divide between these two answers is a vitally important divide in logical space, and has fittingly consumed much of intellectual history. And the divide clearly concerns *causal explanation*: at issue is whether the causal explanation of how we came to exist is design-free or not.⁴ The grounding thesis is just the analogous view that the notion of constitutive explanation also divides logical space along important joints.⁵

So put, the grounding thesis may sound trivial, hardly worth stating. Who would deny that questions of *explanation* divide logical space at important joints? But here, as in life, what’s worth saying depends on one’s audience. Suppose someone insists that the question of human origins concerns the meaning of “humanity”, of whether it can be analyzed in design-free terms. Then one should reply that that distorts the issue; that the issue concerns the world and not our concepts; that Darwin’s contribution had nothing to do with the meaning of “humanity” and everything to do with a profoundly brilliant explanation of how complex biological life came to be. Or suppose someone insists that the issue is whether our existence “nominally supervenes” on non-intentional facts, where Y nominally supervenes on X iff any two nominally possible worlds that agree on X also agree on Y. Once again, one should reply that this misses the issue: if we live in a world with deterministic laws that are time-reversal symmetric, then the present nominally supervenes on the future just as much as it does on the past; yet the question of human origins surely concerns our distant past, not the future. To this theorist one should insist that the important issue is not a matter of nomic supervenience but rather the *causal explanation* of our existence. This is not trivial, and could in principle be false. But it is plausible.

The early literature on ground can, I think, be read analogously. Some philosophical trends have tried to understand a range of philosophical questions as questions of conceptual analysis. The mind-body problem, for example, would be framed as the question of whether one can analyze mental concepts in material terms. The grounding theorist insists that this distorts the original question of interest; that the mind-body problem

primarily concerns the nature of *minds*, not “minds”; that the question of substantivalism likewise concerns *the world*, not our way of thinking about it.⁶ Nor, she argues, do the worldly questions of interest concern metaphysical supervenience. They are, rather, questions of explanation: What explains (in the constitutive sense) the mind? What explains physical geometry? This thesis is not trivial, and it may even be false. But it is, I think, plausible.⁷

Still, I will not argue that the grounding thesis is correct. My claim is conditional: that *if* the grounding thesis is correct that issues like these are best understood in terms of ground, a significantly deflated conception of ground will do.

Given what I mean by ground, and given the role I just described it as playing, you might think that my conditional claim is uncontroversial. If so, great! And if you don't think this now, I hope you do soon. This is to say that I do not intend to say much that is striking here. Still, it is worth saying if only because the recent literature on ground tends to focus on theories that are strikingly inflationary in one or more of the follow respects: (i) they *reify* ground, holding that constitutive explanations reflect some genuine *part* of reality such as a worldly relation that holds between facts, propositions, or entities of some other kind; (ii) they hold that constitutive explanation is, or tracks, something *primitive* in a metaphysically significant sense; and (iii) they hold that constitutive explanations are *objective and absolute*, not relative to certain interests that might vary from culture to culture or time to time. The focus on theories that inflate ground along one or more of these dimensions is so pervasive that one could be forgiven for presuming that grounding theorists are *committed* to some such inflationary conception of ground, so that by objecting to this or that inflationary framework one has objected to ground writ large. It is just this presumption I want to warn against. I will not argue that these inflationary theories of ground are false; just that ground need not be inflated in these ways in order for it to play its role of limning issues of importance. I will address these three respects in which ground has been inflated in turn.

2. Ontology

Start with the question of reification. Some discussions of ground give the impression that talk of ground denotes, or otherwise tracks, some kind of distinctive, worldly relation of “grounding” that holds between propositions or facts or entities of some other sort. But I will argue that grounding theorists need not reify the grounding relation, nor the supposed relata. I do not expect this to be controversial, so I will be swift.

Explanations are answers to why-questions, and constitutive explanations are no different. Why did a faculty meeting occur? Because the faculty gathered in a room, discussed matters importance to the department, and

so on. These explanations can be expressed in a number of ways, using S, T, and U as schematic sentence positions:

- (1) S because T, U, . . .
- (2) What explains why S is that T, U, . . .
- (3) The following facts—that T, that U, . . . —constitutively explain why S.
- (4) The fact that S holds in virtue of the following facts: that T, that U, . . .
- (5) S in virtue of the fact that T, the fact that U, . . .
- (6) The proposition that S is true in virtue of the fact that T, that U, . . .
- (7) The proposition that S is true because the propositions that T, that U, . . . are true.

Now, locutions (3)-(7) appear to be committed to facts or propositions, by which I mean (roughly) that they are true only if there are facts or propositions. Let us take appearances at face-value for the sake of argument. But what if one thought there were no such things as propositions or facts. Could one still offer constitutive explanations in the form of (1) or (2)?

One view is that one could not; that while (1) and (2) contain no explicit quantifier, they are nonetheless true only if there are such things as the fact that S, that T, that U. But on a more deflationary view, the truth of (1) and (2) does not require that there are any such things as facts or propositions. On this view, if one asserts that a meeting occurred because various people gathered in a room, one may be committed to the existence of meetings, people, and rooms, but not abstract entities such as facts or propositions.

It is an open question which view is correct, but I do not wish to settle that question here. My claim is simply that even if the more deflationary view is correct one can still maintain, with the grounding theorist, that many vital questions in philosophy concern which explanations of the form (1) and (2) we should accept—for example whether a person is conscious because of their physical state. This should not be surprising, for presumably the same goes for causal explanation too. Even if one rejects an ontology of facts and propositions, one can still ask whether we exist because (in the causal sense) of the intentions of an intelligent designer, and one can still consider this a question of urgent intellectual importance.

Thus, the grounding theorist need not believe in propositions or facts; nor (therefore) need she believe in a relation of “grounding” that holds between them. Nor, I note in passing, need she accept an inflationary conception of truth. Admittedly, constitutive explanations are sometimes glossed in form (6); if this is read as an instance of (5), then it is a constitutive explanation of why a certain proposition has the property of being true. And perhaps it is the kind of explanation that an inflationist about truth would give. Still, this does not mean that grounding theorists must offer such explanations; it just means that inflationary views of truth can be expressed in the framework of ground. Thus, suppose one endorsed a deflationary

conception of truth, characterized roughly as the view that there is no robust property of truth; that truth is a device of disquotation; and so on. One could maintain with the grounding theorist that deep and vital questions in philosophy concern which explanations of the form (1) or (2) we should accept. This is just a reflection of the fact that explanations—both constitutive and causal—generally concern worldly phenomena, not representations of such. When I ask what constitutively explains why there is a meeting occurring, I am asking why there is *a meeting*, not why some proposition or representation of the meeting is true.

I said that grounding theorists are not committed to an ontology of propositions or facts, nor (hence) a relation of grounding that holds between them. Might they be committed to a relation of ground that holds between “sub-propositional” entities? One might think so if one’s thinking about ground is based on certain theories of causal explanation. For it is common to distinguish *causal explanations* from *relations of causation*, and some theorists, including Lewis (1987), have proposed that the former just report information about the latter. Analogously, one might think that constitutive explanations just report information about some relation between entities that is the analogue of the relation of causation. Following Kovacs (2016), let us call these *relations of production*. Thus, suppose a pen is red because (in the constitutive sense) it is scarlet. Then the idea is that this explanation reports a relation of production between scarletness and redness, i.e. that the former “produces” the latter. Jonathan Schaffer (2009, 2016, and forthcoming) and Al Wilson (forthcoming a, forthcoming b) each develop views of this sort. They call the relation between scarletness and redness ‘ground’, but since I use that term to denote constitutive explanation I will stick with Kovacs’ terminology of “production” instead.⁸

Should we endorse this view that constitutive explanations just report relations of production? I am undecided and won’t discuss this here. Instead, my claim is just that the grounding theorist can coherently deny the view, and hence deny that there is any such relation of production. Again, this is just as it is in the case of causation, where Lewis’ view is one among many. One alternative is the DN model, which says (roughly) that there is a causal explanation when the thing to be explained follows from the explainer together with a natural law. Another alternative is the unificationist model, on which (leaving out all the interesting details) an explanation of an event subsumes it under general, unifying principles. On neither of these views does a causal explanation require distinctive causal relations between events; they just require natural laws or general principles. Correspondingly, one alternative to Schaffer’s view of constitutive explanation would be an analogue of the “DN” model, on which there is a constitutive explanation when the thing to be explained follows from the explainer together with something like a “metaphysical law”, or an essential truth, or an analytic truth, or something of that ilk.⁹ And Kovacs (manuscript) develops a “unificationist”

model of ground, on which grounding explanations subsume phenomena under general principles of some kind. If either of these models are right, then constitutive explanations do not require a distinctive relation of production between entities.

Now, it is clear that even if one rejects Lewis' view in favor of a DN model or unificationist model of causal explanation, one can still understand important issues such as the origins of humanity as an issue concerning causal explanation. My (very weak) claim here is just that the same goes for constitutive explanation: that a grounding theorist can limn issues that matter in terms of constitutive explanation without thinking that those explanations report underlying relations of production.¹⁰

Thus, if the grounding theorist asserts that there is a meeting going on because various people are doing various activities, what is she thereby committed to? People, activities, and meetings; perhaps. But not propositions, or facts, or states of affairs; nor a worldly relation of "ground" between such things; nor a relation of production between entities. In this sense the grounding theorist need not think that ground is part of reality; she need not think that there is some worldly item, *grounding*, that constitutive explanations track. She just thinks that some things are thus-and-so because of others.

3. Primitivism

So much for the question of reification. But that question, I think, marks the least consequential dimension along which ground can be inflated or deflated. Even if one thinks that constitutive explanations express a relation between facts, one might go on to say that this is a relation in the sparse sense; that it is no more metaphysically significant than the myriad other sparse relations out there. Conversely, even if one denies that constitutive explanations express or track relations, one might still think that constitutive explanations are metaphysically significant.

This leads us, then, to the more important question of *primitiveness*. It is sometimes said—by friends and foes of ground alike—that ground is primitive in some substantial sense. Let me now argue that grounding theorists are not committed to this view: one can coherently insist that ground plays an important role in limning issues that matter without thinking that it is a primitive in any serious sense.

What does it mean to say that ground is primitive? This is often left unspecified, and in fact there are many senses in which ground might be said to be primitive. I will distinguish six:

- ideologically primitive
- modally primitive

- scrutably primitive
- metaphysically primitive
- methodologically primitive
- intellectually primitive

As we will see, the first four are relatively substantial senses of being primitive, but the final two are not. To foreshadow, my claim is that grounding theorists must take ground to be primitive in the final two senses, but not in the others.

Let me explain the six notions. Following McDaniel (forthcoming), let us say that a concept is *ideologically primitive* iff it has no reductive definition or analysis. To illustrate, assume in what follows that the canonical form of a constitutive explanation is (1). Then a reductive definition of ground would take the form

S because T, U, ... = df

where ‘because’ does not appear on the right-hand side.

By contrast, something is *modally primitive*, roughly speaking, if it does not supervene on anything else. These two senses of ‘primitive’ can come apart. For one might think that ‘knowledge’ is ideologically primitive, given the failure to analyze it in other terms. But it is not modally primitive: worlds agreeing on all the non-knowledge facts about belief, truth, justification, causation, and so forth, agree on all facts about knowledge.

Ground is modally primitive if constitutive explanations do not supervene on anything else, but this comes in different strengths depending on what we include in “anything else”. Call a fact *non-grounding* if it can be expressed without the constitutive ‘because’. The non-grounding facts include all the categorical facts, and also facts about relations of production, essences, laws of metaphysics, and so forth (so long as they can be expressed without ‘because’). Then ground is *strongly modally primitive* iff constitutive explanations do not supervene on the non-grounding facts. By contrast, ground is *weakly modally primitive* if ground does not supervene on the categorical facts alone. Thus, if ground is weakly but not strongly modally primitive, then two metaphysically possible worlds can agree on all categorical facts but disagree on what constitutively explains what, so long as they also disagree on the production relations or such like.

Now, many grounding theorists would deny that ground is even weakly modally primitive. For a common assumption about ground is that ground is “internal”:

Necessarily, if S because T, U, ... then: necessarily, if T, U, ... then S because T, U, ...

Clearly, this implies that ground is not weakly modally primitive.¹¹

Still, even if one denies that ground is weakly modally primitive, one might think it is primitive in the epistemic sense that facts about ground are

not apriori derivable from other facts. This leads us to the notion of being *scrutably primitive*. Formally speaking this is just like being modally primitive except that now we use *epistemically possible worlds*, in David Chalmers' sense of the term, in place of metaphysically possible worlds (see Chalmers (2012) and references therein for more on epistemic possibility). For Chalmers, an epistemically possible world is, roughly speaking, a way things could be for all one knows apriori. Then ground is *strongly scrutably primitive* iff two epistemically possible worlds can agree on all the non-grounding facts and disagree on what constitutively explains what; that is (roughly speaking) if knowledge of all the categorical facts and facts about production relations and essences and so forth does not put one in a position to apriori derive what constitutively explains what. And ground is *weakly scrutably primitive* iff two epistemically possible worlds can agree on all the categorical facts while disagreeing on what constitutively explains what. Thus, if ground is weakly but not strongly scrutably primitive, then knowing all the categorical facts of the world would not put you in a position to apriori derive what explains what, but adding knowledge of the non-categorical facts about essences and so forth would do the trick. And if ground is not even weakly scrutably primitive, then one can apriori derive what explains what just from knowledge of the categorical facts alone.

Being scrutably primitive is not the same as being ideologically primitive. Knowledge, for example, is arguably ideologically primitive, but not scrutably primitive since it is (arguably) apriori derivable who knows what from a complete description of the non-knowledge facts. The relation between scrutable and modal primitiveness is more complex and depends upon background views about the relation between metaphysical and epistemic possibility.

The three senses of being primitive just described are all reasonably substantial: if something is ideologically, modally, or scrutably primitive then it has a "life of its own" in some definitional, modal, or epistemic sense. But one might also think that ground is primitive in some more straightforwardly metaphysical sense. This leads us to what McDaniel (forthcoming) calls *metaphysical primitiveness*. As McDaniel recognizes, this is a "catch all" category that comes in many flavors depending on what tools of metaphysics one recognizes. One might say that ground is metaphysically primitive because it is perfectly "natural" or "structural", in the Lewis-Sider sense of these terms (Lewis 1983; Sider 2011). Or one might say that ground is metaphysically primitive in the sense that it does not "ontologically depend" on anything else. There are other flavors of metaphysical primitiveness too; I will not attempt to list them all. Just for the sake of specificity, I will focus on the first flavor and stipulate that ground is *metaphysically primitive* iff it is perfectly natural.

In contrast to these four robust senses in which ground may be primitive, there are two considerably less robust senses. McDaniel says that ground

is *methodologically primitive* iff “it is dialectically permissible to appeal to grounding in one’s metaphysical theories without attempting to define or analyze this notion” (forthcoming, chapter 8); or, I will add, without attempting much in the way of clarification either. This is not to deny that further philosophical reflection might lead one to doubt the intelligibility of the notion after all; it is just to say that such reflection is not a prerequisite for reasonably using the notion of ground in asking questions and theorizing about their answers. Finally, let us say that ground is *intellectually primitive* if it limns logical space in interesting ways; if the kinds of issues we often find ourselves concerned with are questions of what grounds what.

Now, must a grounding theorist take ground to be primitive in any of these senses? Clearly she must regard ground as intellectually primitive. Her view is that ground limns logical space along lines that matter; this is *by definition* to say that it is intellectually primitive. And given that ground is—like causation—an everyday concept expressed in natural language, it is surely methodologically primitive too. To think otherwise would be akin to claiming that it is dialectically impermissible to ask what causes cancer prior to producing a definition or analysis or clarification of the notion of causation! Insofar as causal explanation is clearly methodologically primitive, so too is constitutive explanation.

But I claim that the grounding theorist need not regard ground as primitive in any of the four more robust senses. Again, a comparison with causal explanation will help. Lewis famously analyzed causal explanation in terms of causation, and causation in terms of counterfactuals, and counterfactuals in terms of laws, and laws in terms of summaries of categorical matters of fact.¹² Thus, on his view causal explanation is not even weakly modally primitive: worlds agreeing on categorical matters will agree on what causally explains what. Nor, on his view, is causal explanation metaphysically primitive in our sense, since it is (on his view) not perfectly natural. And if we propose his account as a linguistic analysis of terms, it implies that causal explanation is not ideologically primitive either. As for whether causal explanation is scrutably primitive, Lewis’ view itself does not settle this one way or another. But it is plausible that, on Lewis’ view, full knowledge of the categorical facts puts one in a position to apriori derive knowledge of the facts about laws, and then counterfactuals, and then causal dependence, and finally the causal explanations. Let us adopt this understanding of Lewis’ view for the sake of argument.

So, on the view under consideration, causal explanation is not ideologically, modally, scrutably, or metaphysically primitive. But still, I claim, this should cast no doubt whatsoever on the idea that causal explanation is intellectually primitive; that (say) the question of human origins is usefully framed as the question of what *causally explains* our existence. I suspect that Lewis himself regarded causal explanation as intellectually primitive in this

sense—that is presumably why he took it to be an important concept in need of philosophical attention!

The same goes for ground. Suppose there is some analysis of constitutive explanation that bottoms out in patterns of categorical facts, perhaps analogous to the Lewisian analysis of causal explanation. If so, then ground would not be ideologically or modally or scrutably or metaphysically primitive. But—just as with causal explanation—I see no reason why this should cast doubt on the idea that ground is intellectually primitive; that it limns many questions of interest. The question of whether matter constitutively explains the mind seems deep and important, regardless of whether constitutive explanation is primitive in any of these robust senses.

My main claim in this paper is that the role of ground I started with—that of limning issues of interest—can be filled by a deflated notion of ground; in particular, one that is not primitive in the senses just discussed. But at this point one might object that this main claim is true but insignificant. For what is emerging is that the role I started with is rather minimal; no surprise then that it can be filled by a deflated notion! To this I plead guilty: I agree that the claim, once clarified, should not be surprising. But the objection might be pressed that ground was always supposed to do *more* than this, something that only a primitive notion could do. Relatedly, one might object that my use of the term ‘ground’ is idiosyncratic: others use it explicitly to refer to something that is primitive in some robust sense, so that all I have shown is that ground (in their sense of the term) is not needed to limn many issues that matter. In short, the objection is that I have changed the subject: if I have said something true, I have not said anything interesting about *ground*.

Let me make two points in response. First, I do not think I have changed the subject—or, at least, *a* subject. Much of the contemporary interest in ground stems from Fine’s influential papers of 2001 and 2012, and I have followed his use of the terms here here. In both papers he explicitly uses the term as a label for a constitutive mode of explanation expressed by the word ‘because’, just as I did here. Nothing Fine says in these papers indicates that he takes this to be, or track, anything primitive in the robust senses discussed above. And in both papers the central role he describes the concept as playing is that of limning questions of philosophical interest; see for example (Fine 2001; section 5) and (Fine 2012; section 1.2). Thus, I submit that what I mean by the term here, and the central role I emphasize, is an accurate reflection of what Fine talked about in those influential early papers. This is not to deny that others use ‘ground’ differently: as I said in section 2 the term is ambiguous in the contemporary vernacular. But it would be odd to say that Fine was never talking about ground in *any* sense of the term!

But that point is largely verbal. The second and more important point is that even if I am changing the subject, it is a subject worth changing. Putting aside the term ‘ground’, my substantive claim is that there is a

philosophically important role—that of limning the logical space of views in ways that matter—that can be performed by a notion of constitutive explanation that is deflated in the above ways. I do not think this should be controversial, but it is easy to miss if the deflated notions are not carefully distinguished from their inflated cousins.

For example, Jessica Wilson (2014) argued that there is “no work” for ground in philosophy; that all we need to do metaphysics are particular relations such as identity, parthood, set-membership, functional realization, the determinate-determinable relation, and the proper subset relation.¹³ Wilson calls these “small-g” grounding relations, in contrast with the “big-G” Grounding relation that she takes to be posited by recent grounding theorists. She does not entirely reject all talk of constitutive explanation, she just understands it as “schematically and neutrally ranging over specific ‘small-g’ grounding relations” (p. 557). Hence, she concludes, ground has no role to play in philosophy.

Is Wilson right that all constitutive explanations ranges over the specific small-g relations she lists? I am not sure.¹⁴ But even if she is right, the conclusion does not follow. At most, what follows is that ground is not metaphysically or modally primitive—I take it that this is what Wilson means when she denies that ‘the metaphysical posit of Grounding [tracks] a course-grained joint in nature’ (p. 556), or that it tracks ‘a distinctive aspect of metaphysical reality’. Perhaps it also follows that ground is not ideologically or scrutably primitive either. Still, all that is consistent with the claim that ground is *intellectually* primitive in the sense that it limns many philosophical issues of importance.

Perhaps the disagreement here is merely verbal. Perhaps by ‘big-G’ grounding, Wilson stipulatively means an inflated notion of ground that is metaphysically or modally or ideologically primitive, so that her conclusion is that there is no work for ground in *that* sense of the term. If so, I have no objection.¹⁵ My point is that even so, we may still claim with the grounding theorist that there is work for a deflated notion of constitutive explanation: its work is to limn many issues of importance.

This is consistent, note, with Wilson’s observation that we are often interested in more specific questions involving small-g relations. Koslicki (2015) makes a related point, insisting that ground is too course-grained to capture important differences concerning the metaphysics of diverse items as minds, holes, heaps, artworks, and so on. They are surely correct: philosophers working on the mind-body problem do not just want to know *whether* the body explains mind; they also want to know *how* the explanation goes, *which* specific small-g relation between mind and body (if any) facilitates the explanation, and so on. But that is consistent with the grounding theorist’s claim that an important division in logical space is between views on which there is *some explanation or other*, and views on which there is none.¹⁶

Compare again with the case of causal explanation. The division between views on which the causal explanation of our existence appeals to design, and “naturalist” views on which it does not, is clearly of fundamental intellectual importance. But of course there are many possible naturalistic explanations available—some emphasizing natural selection, others emphasizing genetic drift and other non-adaptationist processes—and many details about our actual phylogenetic tree to fill in. Naturalists should be interested in all these particulars. But this is consistent with the claim that causal explanation is intellectually primitive; that one of the deep and important issues of the modern era is whether there is *some causal explanation or other* that is design-free. This point is well illustrated by Mike Pence’s speech in 2002 to the House of Representatives, in which he claimed that a particular naturalistic conjecture about the relation between Neanderthals and modern humans had recently been empirically disconfirmed, and then invited us to conclude that naturalism was on shaky grounds.¹⁷ The reply, of course, is that the issue at stake between Pence and the naturalists is whether *some naturalistic process of other* was responsible for our existence, not any particular theory of the Neanderthals. The notion of causal explanation is ideally suited expressing this general issue. My claim is that constitutive explanation plays a similar role. Thus, it is precisely *because* ground is coarse-grained in the ways that Koslicki and Wilson emphasize that it is so well suited to limning big-picture issues such as whether mentation arises from brain processes *in some way or other*. I therefore take its coarse-grainedness to be a virtue, not a vice.¹⁸

Thus, my main claim—that ground can play the role of limning issues of importance even if it is not primitive in any substantive respect—is consistent with much of what Wilson argues. This illustrates how weak the claim is, but it is not entirely uncontroversial. I would expect some push-back on the claim that ground can limn issues of importance even if it is not *metaphysically* primitive; that is, even if it is not perfectly natural.¹⁹ So let me set aside some worries that arise in this regard. If ground is not perfectly natural, one question is whether it is more natural than other things in its immediate vicinity. More precisely, call an expression *indiscriminate* iff out of all the candidate semantic values that roughly fit our usage, none are (significantly) more natural than the rest. For example, ‘mountain’ is arguably indiscriminate: the properties

being a mound over 1000 feet tall,
being a mound over 1001 feet tall,

and so on, are all candidate semantic values that roughly fit our usage of the term, but none are more natural than the rest. The worry is then that if ground is indiscriminate, it cannot limn issues that matter.

But why not? One reason might be that, if it is indiscriminate, then questions of ground will turn out to be *nonsubstantive* in Sider’s sense:

each answer comes out true on one of the (equally natural) candidate semantic values. But if this is the worry, it rests on a non-sequitur. True, if an expression is indiscriminate then *some* questions involving it may be nonsubstantive. But it does not follow that *all*, or even *most*, questions involving it are. The question of whether there are mountains in India is clearly substantive, for the answer is ‘yes’ on all candidate semantic values of ‘mountain’.

Still, the objection might be pushed that we have no reason to *care* about questions of causal or constitutive explanation, if the concepts are indiscriminate. Now, put like this the objection again rests on a non-sequitur: ‘mountain’ is indiscriminate, but it is hard to see why we should not care whether there are mountains in India. But perhaps the objection is best heard as shifting the burden of proof; as a request for some reason to care about questions of casual or constitutive explanation, if the concepts are indiscriminate.

I do not know exactly what the correct answer to this challenge is, but I see no reason to doubt that there is one. To illustrate, here are two candidate answers. Sider (2011, p. 54) defines an indiscriminate concept to be *conventional* iff we introduced it with a certain goal in mind and any of the candidate semantic values would equally serve that goal, so we chose one of them as the semantic value arbitrarily. The concept ‘1 inch’ is his example: we introduced it with the goal of representing distances within a certain small range; any unit length between 1 and 3 inches (say) would have done the trick; we then chose the unit we did arbitrarily. If a concept is conventional, we should care about questions involving it *precisely because* we care about the goal it was introduced to serve. Thus, one answer to the current challenge would be to argue that causal or constitutive explanation is conventional in this sense.

Another possibility is that our concepts of explanation are “projective” in Sider’s sense that (i) one (or some small number) of its candidate semantic values *V* is in fact its semantic value, and (ii) what fixes *V* as its semantic value are our attitudes or responses to *V*. As an example, Sider (2011, chapter 4) proposes the following toy account of ‘beautiful’: it refers to a certain physical property *P*, and does so not because *P* is more natural than other properties in the vicinity but because we have positive aesthetic reactions or attitudes to things with *P*. If this is right, it would be odd to complain that we have no reason to care about beauty. To the contrary, one might argue, we should care about questions of beauty *precisely because* it is a property towards which we have positive attitudes! Thus, another answer to the current challenge would be to argue that causal or constitutive explanation is projective in this sense. On this view, one of the many equally natural candidate semantic values is special because *we* find it particularly elegant, or simple, or aesthetically beautiful in some other respect. Indeed, this view nicely accounts for the fact that explanations have these aesthetic qualities!

We are starting to see just how deflationary a grounding theorist can be. She may insist that ground limns issues of intellectual importance, even while holding the conventionalist or projectivist views of ground just described.

4. Realism

Let me turn now to the third respect in which ground can be deflated. The issue here concerns whether constitutive explanations are objective, or whether they are relative to facts about us such as our interests or concerns; facts that may vary from culture to culture or time to time. As I use the term, a “realist” thinks the former while an “anti-realist” thinks the latter. Thus, the anti-realist picture is that two cultures might offer conflicting constitutive explanations and yet there may be no fact of the matter who is “really correct”: each explanation may be correct relative to their respective interests and concerns. Recent discussions of ground tend to tacitly presuppose a realist picture—indeed much of the literature largely overlooks the possibility of anti-realism.²⁰ But I will argue that grounding theorists are not committed to realism.

Since the issue of realism vs anti-realism has received relatively little attention, let me start by explaining it. I said that the realist thinks that grounding claims are objective, but what does this mean? A flat-footed characterization would describe the realist as thinking that the facts about ground have the form

(1) S because T, U,

while the anti-realist thinks they take the form

(1*) S because T, U, . . . relative to R.

where R is some feature of us such as our interests, concerns, cognitive constitution, etc. But this appeals to “facts” and their “form”, and I argued earlier that a grounding theorist may not recognize any substantive notion of fact. A somewhat more sophisticated characterization might follow Chalmers’ (2009) characterization of realism and anti-realism about ontology. This approach would describe realism about ground as the view that assertions of the form of (1) have objective truth-values, where a truth-value is objective if it does not depend on a parameter like R. Anti-realism can then be characterized as the negation of realism, and would include views on which the truth-value of assertions of (1) depend on a choice of interests or concerns, and views on which they do not have truth-values in the first place. This is not wholly satisfactory either, but it will do for our purposes.²¹ For concreteness, I will assume that R consists in various conative attitudes such as interests, concerns, and desires.

So characterized, anti-realism is consistent with a number of semantic views. These include a contextualist view on which the truth-value of an assertion of (1) depends on the attitudes of the *asserter*, and a relativist view on which it depends on the attitudes of the *assessor*. The anti-realist might also say that assertions of (1) have a non-cognitive content, for example an expression of (one's approval of) the relevant conative attitudes. I will not try to decide these issues here. I note only that the projectivist view described in the last section does not count as anti-realist. On the projectivist view, our attitudes and responses help fix the semantic value of the constitutive 'because', but the semantic value thereby fixed may itself be fully objective. By contrast, according to anti-realism our attitudes play a different role: they help determine the truth-value of an assertion of (1), insofar as it has one.

The anti-realist thinks that constitutive explanations are relative to a set of interests, but that leaves open whether all interests are equally rational when it comes to seeking explanations. A "Humean" view would be that any internally consistent set of interests are rational, but the anti-realist might think that there are extra constraints. For example, she might adopt a "constructivist" view on which various rational constraints stem from the nature of human agency, or perhaps from the proper function of a human being. Again, I will not try to decide this issue here.

The anti-realist says that 'because' is interest-relative, but we should not confuse the relativity here with the interest-relativity in the *practice* of giving explanations. It is a familiar point that *what one should say* in answer to a question 'Why P?' depends on what the asker knows, what you know, what the common-knowledge in the conversation is, what purposes and interests the asker has in asking the question, and so on. Thus, even if the DN account of causal explanation is true, it may be that when answering the question "What causally explains why P?" in a particular context, you should only cite a fraction of the full explanation. But this fact about pragmatics has nothing to do with explanation *per se*: it is ubiquitous in any request for information. If I come to your pick-up soccer game and ask what rules you play, it would be some kind of joke to respond "No touching the ball with your hands; no kicking your opponent in the face . . .". It is true that you play by those rules, but obviously I know this, and you know that I know this. What I want—and what you know I want—is information about the rules that might vary between different pick-up games: whether you play the off-side rule, whether you allow goalies, and so on. As Lewis said, there is no such thing as the pragmatics of explanation *per se*; there is just pragmatics (see Lewis 1987, p. 227).

Let the "pragmatic causal explanation" of why S, in a context C, be what is pragmatically appropriate to say in C in response to the question 'What causally explains why S?'. And let the "full causal explanation" of why S be the complete explanation that the pragmatic explanation presumably draws from.²² We can draw an analogous distinction between pragmatic and full

explanations in the case of constitutive explanation. When I said at the beginning that by ‘ground’ I mean constitutive explanation, I meant the notion of *full* constitutive explanation. Thus, the question of realism vs anti-realism concerns whether there is an interest-relativity in *full* constitutive explanations, not pragmatic ones.²³

One might object that if this is what I mean by ‘ground’ then I am no longer entitled to claim that ground is methodologically primitive; that it is dialectically permissible to use it without first analyzing or define it. I said that ground is methodologically primitive because it is part of natural language, but if natural language typically trades in *pragmatic* explanations then one might object that only the notion of pragmatic explanation, not full explanation, is methodologically primitive. I respond that this is a perverse way to think about methodological primitiveness. Consider the English term ‘rule’. In everyday discourse we almost never state the full rules of a game, as illustrated by the pick-up soccer game above. But this does not mean that we cannot be methodological primitivists about the notion of rules in the full sense. It is surely permissible to talk about the full rules of soccer in theorizing (say) about doping in sport, without first attempting to analyze what a rule is. Indeed, this phenomenon of pragmatic interest-relativity is ubiquitous and will occur in describing recipes, directions to parties, and so on. One rarely describes *everything*. But it surely does not follow that the notion of a complete recipe, or a complete set of directions, is not methodologically primitive! We should be methodological primitivists about recipes and rules; *mutatis mutandis* about ground.

This should suffice to give some idea of what anti-realism is. But it is sometimes easier to grasp a view by asking what reasons might count in its favor. So, what kinds of arguments lead to anti-realism? Very briefly, here are three. First, one might appeal to a connection between explanation and naturalness; that the explanation (causal or constitutive) of why P will be stated in terms that pick out natural kinds, or more generally in “structural” terms, as Ted Sider (2011) puts it. One might then argue with Kitcher (2012) that the notion of a natural-kind is interest-relative, and hence that explanation is interest-relative too. Second, one might appeal to a connection between explanation and understanding; that an explanation *just is* that which yields understanding. If one then thinks that whether an agent’s mental state is a state of *understanding* depends on her interests, this might induce an interest-relativity in explanation too. Third, one might argue that only the anti-realist can explain why we should care about discovering explanations.²⁴

In any case, my main concern here is not whether anti-realism is true, but whether the grounding theorist can accept it. And it seems to me that she can. Consider the case of causal explanation. Suppose one thinks that the notion of causal explanation limns many issues of importance such as the question of human origins. And now suppose we are told that anti-realism about causal explanation is true. This gives the question of our origins some

perspective: we see it now as a question with “historicity”, situated in our “cultural milieu”, so that answers may depend on our particular interests and concerns and do not reflect fully objective matters of fact. But does that mean that the question is no longer one that matters? I cannot see how it would. Perhaps the worry is that the interest-relativity would render the question of human origins *trivial* or *easy to settle*. But that is just a mistake: it may be that, given our interests and concerns, whether there is a design-free explanation of our existence (for us) can only be settled by extensive empirical investigation into our evolutionary past. Perhaps the worry is instead that the interest-relativity renders the question of human origins *unimportant*, or *not worth pursuing*, or *arbitrary*, resting as it does on *my* parochial concerns rather than others’. But again, this seems to me a mistake. After all, the question of what one prudentially ought to do obviously depends in part on one’s interests, yet is as important as it gets! And there is nothing objectionably “arbitrary” about basing my decisions on my own interests, for whose interests am I to use but my own? Quite the opposite, one might argue: it is precisely *because* the question of what I should do depends on *my* interests that the answer is meaningful *to me*! The same goes for questions of causal explanation, says the anti-realist.

And precisely the same goes for constitutive explanation. Suppose that as grounding theorists we frame the issue of substantialism as the question of whether geometric relations between bodies are constitutively explained by their positions in substantial space. And suppose we then discover that anti-realism is true, so that the answer depends in part on our interests and concerns. As above, this does not imply that the question is trivial: it may be that, given our interests, the right explanation (for us) of geometric relations between bodies hangs on all kinds of empirically and philosophically sophisticated lines of reasoning such as the bucket argument, symmetry arguments, and so on. Nor is the question rendered unimportant, arbitrary, or meaningless, as the case of prudential questions shows. True, in asking whether there is such a thing as substantial space we must choose some interests, but whose interests are we to use but our own? Indeed as before one might even argue that the fact that the answer depends on *our* interests is precisely what renders the question meaningful *to us*!

Thus, I claim, the grounding theorist is not committed to realism about ground: she can coherently say that ground is interest-relative and still insist that it limns logical space in ways that matter. This is the third respect in which ground can be deflated.

The resulting anti-realist picture of metaphysics is half-way Carnapian. Carnap famously said that metaphysical questions concerning the existence of (say) numbers or merological sums can be understood in two ways. There is the “internal” question of whether they exist *relative to a given linguistic framework*. And then there is the “external” question of whether they *really* exist, independently of a linguistic framework. Carnap’s view was that

internal questions are trivial, since they are settled by the analytic inference rules constitutive of the linguistic framework; and that the external questions are meaningless, since it is only from a linguistic framework that the relevant terms—like ‘number’—get their meaning. Hence his skepticism about metaphysics.

The picture we get on the anti-realist conception of ground is similar in two respects. First, anti-realism draws an analogous distinction between internal and external questions. The internal questions now concern what constitutively explains what relative to a set of interests; the external questions concern what “really” constitutively explains what, independently of any interests. Second, anti-realism implies that the external questions are without content.

Still, there is a difference. On Carnap’s view the internal questions were trivial, but the same is not true on the anti-realist picture developed above. For as we saw, the “internal” question of whether (say) geometric relations between bodies can be explained, relative to our interests, in their positions in substantival space may be a highly non-trivial, non-analytic matter. The question is not directly about our concepts or ways of representing the world, and cannot always be settled by ordinary apriori reasoning; sophisticated philosophical and empirical reasoning may be required such as the bucket argument, symmetry considerations, and so on. Thus, while the anti-realism view outlined here is Carnapian insofar as the external questions—of what “really” explains what—are meaningless, it does not lead to a Carnapian pessimism about metaphysics. Metaphysics can therefore retain its claim to asking a host of interesting and non-trivial questions.^{25,26}

Notes

1. To be clear, the conception of ground I initially latched onto was not deflationary in all these respects. It is only recently that I’ve come to see that it can be deflated more than I had previously thought.
2. I distinguished causal from constitutive explanation, but this is not to say that they are entirely unrelated. Sometimes, what constitutively explains why *x* is a *K* are facts about *x*’s causal history. This note is a US dollar bill because (in the constitutive sense) it was made and minted by the US Treasury—an intrinsic duplicate made elsewhere would be a forgery.
3. Similar remarks apply to Chris Daly (2012), who expresses skepticism about a certain conception of “grounding” but seems to accept the notion of constitutive explanation as I use the term.
4. Thus, I am using “causal explanation” in the broad sense to include explanations of natural selection. One might wish to reserve the term for explanations that reflect the kind of causal pushes and pulls that natural selection does not trade in. Still, natural selection explanations articulate processes and pressures that *led to some state of affairs coming to be*; in this sense they are not constitutive explanations.

5. The grounding thesis may be reminiscent of Jenkins' (2013) claim that when metaphysicians use terms like 'dependence', 'fundamentality', and so on, they typically mean something understood in terms of explanation. But while we are both interested in the idea that explanation is important to metaphysics, I am less interested than Jenkins about what metaphysicians mean by terms like 'dependence' and 'fundamentality'. Indeed unlike Jenkins I suspect that they often mean something that's not understood in terms of explanation.
6. This, I take it, was Fine's (2001, p. 10) point about questions of *de re* constitution, namely that they resist being framed in terms of linguistic or conceptual analysis.
7. Note that the grounding thesis is not an attempt to delineate the boundaries of metaphysics, or philosophy for that matter. Far from it: as emphasized earlier the concept of ground at issue is one of ordinary language, so it would be surprising if it was particular to one and only one intellectual subject. Moreover the grounding thesis just says that *some*, not necessarily all, interesting issues in philosophy and metaphysics are questions of ground; this is of course consistent with there being many other interesting questions too. Thus, the grounding thesis is consistent with Bennett's (2015) claim, with which I wholeheartedly agree, that there is no distinctive methodology of metaphysics, and that metaphysics cannot be characterized as the study of what grounds what.
8. Raven (forthcoming) distinguishes between "unionists", who identify ground with metaphysical explanation, from "separatists" who distinguish them. In his terms, I would count as a unionist and Schaffer a separatist. But the distinction seems to me largely verbal, for there may be no substantive disagreement between Schaffer and myself. We both agree that there are constitutive explanations, and for all I have said they may be underwritten by production relations. The only difference would then be a terminological decision of what to call 'ground'.
9. For models of ground along these lines, see Rosen (2010), Wilsch (2015), and Dasgupta (2014).
10. Schaffer has perhaps done more than anyone to explore the analogue between ground and causation. My point here is not that the analogy is a mistake (though see Koslicki (2016) and Bernstein (2016) for a dissenting view), but that he has drawn the analogy to a very particular model of causation.
11. Though see Litland (2015) for arguments against internality.
12. For an outline of the program, see Lewis (1987, Introduction).
13. Wilson also thinks that a "big-F" notion of Fundamentality is needed, but I ignore that part of her theory for now.
14. In particular, consider the following constitutive explanations: that P_vQ because Q; that Jones is a bachelor because Jones is unmarried and a man; and that two bodies are 1 meter apart because of their locations in substantival space. In none of these cases is there an obvious relation of identity, parthood, set-membership, functional realization, determinate-to-determinable, or subset-to-set, that could underwrite the explanation. Perhaps Wilson can argue that there is. Or perhaps the list of small-g relations she gave was incomplete. Still, as it stands it is unclear to me whether every constitutive explanation is underwritten by a small-g relation.
15. Which is not to say that I necessarily agree; at present I am undecided.

16. Ted Sider made this point in his Locke Lectures at Oxford University in 2016. In reply, Wilson (2016) accepts the point but observes that it does not follow that constitutive explanation “has a metaphysical correlate” (p. 11). I agree that nothing like this follows—at least not if “metaphysical correlate” means something that is primitive in the senses discussed above. My point is that the grounding thesis does not require a metaphysical correlate like that. Relatedly, Wilson (2016) says on p. 10 that ground cannot be a kind of explanation, since explanation contains epistemic-cum-psychological aspects and is not a “properly metaphysical notion of dependence”. My point is that the grounding thesis does not require that it be a properly metaphysical notion with no epistemic or psychological aspects. Again, there may be no disagreement with Wilson here, if she was stipulatively using “ground” to refer to something primitive in some robust sense.
17. His speech can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikax0Y0NJsY>.
18. Koslicki (2015) argues that there is a dialectical tension here: if notion of supervenience was criticized for being too coarse-grained, why is the coarse-grained notion of ground any better? The reply, I think, is that they are coarse-grained in different respects: supervenience is coarse-grained as to directionality, whereas ground is not. But in any case, the objection to supervenience was not *just* that it was coarse-grained, but also that it was not itself an explanatory notion.
19. Thanks to Ted Sider for brining this line of concern to my attention.
20. One notable exception is Thompson (manuscript), who explicitly aims to develop an anti-realist approach to metaphysical explanation. Jonathan Shaheen (2017), and Miller and Norton (forthcoming), might also be interpreted as proposing anti-realist views, or at any rate views that could be developed in that direction. Anti-realism is also acknowledged as a possibility in a brief remark by Schaffer (2010) to the effect that his relation of production can “in principle be relativized to one’s practical interests or theoretical scheme” (p. 347).
21. One issue is that someone might deny that explanations are interest-relative, and so count as a realist in the sense I intend, but nonetheless think that explanations are not strictly speaking “true” or “false” at all but rather “correct” or “incorrect”. So perhaps it would be better to characterize realism as the view that assertions of (1) can be evaluated—for truth, or correctness, or whatever the standard of evaluation is—without regard to a set of interests or concerns. But I will not pursue this subtlety here.
22. This distinction is along the same lines as Railton’s (1978) distinction between the “ideal explanatory text” and the “non-ideal explanation”.
23. There is a question of the semantics of pragmatic explanations in everyday discourse. Suppose that the full explanation of why S is that T, U, . . . , yet suppose that in context C the pragmatic explanation of why S is that T. How should we evaluate an assertion of “S because T” in C? On one view, it is false but pragmatically assertible. On another view, it is true thanks to the fact that, given the full explanation and the context C, “S because T” is the right thing to say. I will not try to settle this issue here. But note that one’s view here may influence the way one defines the realism vs anti-realism issue; see footnote 21.
24. I develop an argument along roughly these lines in Dasgupta (manuscript).

25. Kraut (2016) also develops a half-way Carnapian view on which the internal questions are non-trivial in this kind of way.
26. Many thanks to David Kovacs for his extremely detailed and illuminating feedback on this material. Thanks also to Sam Elgin and Alberto Tassoni for their helpful and timely comments on an earlier draft. Finally, thanks to participants at the workshop on “Metaphysics after Carnap” at Leeds in June 2016, where I presented this material, for their searching questions.

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