

## ON GROUND AS A GUIDE TO REALISM

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### *Abstract*

According to Fine (among others), a nonbasic factual proposition must be grounded in facts involving those of its constituents that are both real and fundamental. But the principle is vulnerable to several dialectically significant counterexamples. It entails, for example, that a logical Platonist cannot accept that true disjunctions are grounded in the truth of their disjuncts; that a Platonist about mathematical objects cannot accept that sets are grounded in their members; and that a colour primitivist cannot accept that an object's being scarlet grounds its not being chartreuse. The Finean might try to defend these implications, but it generates further problems. Instead, the principle should be rejected. An important upshot is that the principle cannot be relied on to distinguish robust realism from anti-realism about a propositional domain, for the principle obscures ways of taking features to be both real and fundamental.

**Key words:** Grounding, Fundamentality, Realism, Anti-Realism, Moral Non-Naturalism

### 1. A Finean Principle of Ground

Grounding is an explanatory relation standardly introduced by way of examples, together with an account of its theoretical role. To ask what grounds  $p$  is to ask what it is *in virtue of* that  $p$  holds: 'if the truth that  $p$  is grounded in other truths, then they account for its truth' (Fine, 2001, p. 15). While there may be various modes of explanation (causal, logical, normative), grounding explanation distinctively invokes a metaphysical relation of dependence that, among other things, entails necessary connections between distinct facts (Rosen, 2010; Audi, 2012; Dasgupta, 2014).

Within this framework, it is natural to think some true propositions may be ungrounded (or basic). Perhaps certain microphysical facts do not obtain in virtue of anything else. Say that a propositional constituent is 'fundamental' if it occurs in a true,

basic proposition (Rosen, 2010. p. 112).<sup>1</sup> If <electrons have negative charge> is true and basic, then, *inter alia*, the property *being an electron* is fundamental.

Some nonbasic propositions contain a fundamental constituent. A question in the theory of ground is whether there are general principles governing the grounding of such propositions. Kit Fine (2001, 2007) proposes the following principle (call it PRIMITIVE):

Whenever a constituent occurs in a true, basic, factual proposition and also occurs essentially in some true, factual proposition, then any [full] ground for the latter proposition must contain the constituent.

A constituent occurs *essentially* in proposition p if substituting it with something else can change p's truth value (2001, p. 18). To regard a true proposition as *factual* is to be a realist about it. PRIMITIVE does not apply if a propositional domain is understood in anti-realist terms. Later we shall consider in greater detail what anti-realism about a propositional domain amounts to, but we'll be working primarily with paradigmatically realist views on which the truths in question have all the trappings of robust factuality (e.g. mind-independence). So, to illustrate, if <electrons attract protons> is a true, factual, nonbasic proposition that essentially involves the property *being an electron*, and this property is a fundamental, fully factual constituent of reality, then, according to Fine, facts involving the property must feature in the grounds.<sup>2</sup>

PRIMITIVE does important theoretical work. It undergirds Fine's criterion for distinguishing an anti-realist characterization of a propositional domain from a realist characterization. Fine's criterion has proven influential in meta-ethics. For example, Dreier (2004) uses it to distinguish quasi-realism from full-blooded realism about moral properties. But, I argue, the criterion is problematic because it relies on a principle that is vulnerable to several dialectically significant counterexamples.

<sup>1</sup> This is intended to be stipulative. Whether fundamentality should be defined in terms of ground is controversial. See Mehta *forthcoming*.

<sup>2</sup> Pautz (2016, p. 485) describes a closely related 'congruence constraint' on ground: 'if a fact involves a certain real item, then the facts which ground that fact also involve that item.'

## 2. The Grounding Principle Should be Rejected

Certain canonical examples of grounding appear in virtually every introduction to ground. These include the fact that true disjunctions are grounded in the truth of either of their disjuncts and that true conjunctions are grounded in their true conjuncts (Correia, 2010, § 6; Rosen, 2010, p. 117; Fine, 2012, §7; Kment, 2014, p. 165). Taking the relata of the (full) grounding relation to be facts, and writing ‘[p]’ for ‘the fact that p,’ we can state the following principles:

- (I) If p then: [p] grounds [p  $\vee$  q].
- (II) If p and q then: [p] and [q] ground [p  $\wedge$  q].

These grounding claims are intended to be uncontroversial. But PRIMITIVE entails that they must be rejected by a logical platonist who takes logical operators to be fundamental entities.<sup>3</sup> A platonist who thinks a logical law involving disjunction, say [(p  $\vee$  q)  $\rightarrow$   $\neg$ ( $\neg$ p  $\wedge$   $\neg$ q)], is a true, basic, robustly factual proposition containing disjunction as an essential constituent can’t accept (I) if PRIMITIVE is true. For PRIMITIVE requires that she invoke a fact involving disjunction to ground [p  $\vee$  q]. Fine accepts (I) as a canonical example of grounding, and canonical examples should not rule out substantive views in the metaphysics of logic. PRIMITIVE is therefore vulnerable to counterexample by Fine’s own lights.

The Finean might respond: it is not clear that [(p  $\vee$  q)  $\rightarrow$   $\neg$ ( $\neg$ p  $\wedge$   $\neg$ q)] can be taken as basic. Suppose we view the logical laws as equivalent to their corresponding disjunctions. The example proposition becomes [ $\neg$ (p  $\vee$  q)  $\vee$   $\neg$ ( $\neg$ p  $\wedge$   $\neg$ q)]. Such disjunctive propositions are grounded in their true disjuncts. So, the logical platonist who does not dispute the Finean criterion for being fundamental and who embraces standard views about the grounds of logically complex propositions has not yet produced a clear example of a proposition containing disjunction that is true, factual, and clearly basic.<sup>4</sup>

There are several things to say in response. First, nothing in Fine’s (2012) pure logic of ground forces the Platonist to accept the formulation of logical law statements as particular disjunctive facts (or even as mere universal generalizations over such facts). Fine’s logic of ground does not say what the grounds of a claim

<sup>3</sup> On logical platonism generally, see Rush 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this worry.

involving the logical consequence relation are supposed to be. More importantly for our purposes, it does not matter that there is *a* possible view in the philosophy of logic concerning the logical laws on which the example does not work. There are views that take the logical laws to be strong metaphysical laws, ones involving a primitive notion of logical consequence (cf. Tahko, 2014, p. 242).<sup>5</sup> We can stipulate that a proponent of such a view tells us that the logical laws involving disjunction should be formulated as nomic generalizations: e.g.  $\forall\phi\forall\psi\{(\phi\vee\psi)$  logically implies  $\neg(\neg\phi\wedge\neg\psi)\}$ . Rather than being grounded in their instances, these strong laws explain *why* particular facts like  $[(p\vee q)\rightarrow\neg(\neg p\wedge\neg q)]$  hold, while being themselves metaphysically basic (cf. Armstrong, 1983). No basic principle of ground should rule out such a view of the logical laws; nor, as we shall see later, should it classify such views as *anti-realist* about logic simply based on their account of the grounds of particular disjunctive facts.<sup>6</sup>

Suppose, then, the Finean takes a different tack and insists that the Platonist should reject the standard view regarding the grounds of particular disjunctive facts because, by her own lights, the explanation is incomplete: it needs to be supplemented by some fact involving disjunction. Instead of saying  $[p]$  grounds  $[p\vee q]$  all by itself, we should say that  $[p]$  together with, say,  $[p\rightarrow(p\vee q)]$ , grounds  $[p\vee q]$ . But this seems implausible and goes against standard views on grounding. Following Fine (2012) and Rosen (2010), it is tempting to explain why  $[p]$  grounds  $[p\vee q]$  by appeal to the nature of disjunction—someone who understands disjunction's nature should be able to see that the connection holds. So, the explanation of the grounding fact  $[[p]$  grounds  $[p\vee q]]$  may involve an essential truth about disjunction. But the platonist seems just as able as anyone else to give this type of explanation for (I)'s truth. Moreover, there are costs to expanding the grounds of  $[p\vee q]$ . If a further fact involving disjunction is required to make it the case that  $p\vee q$ —say  $[p\rightarrow(p\vee q)]$ —then it would seem that  $[(p\wedge(p\rightarrow(p\vee q)))\rightarrow(p\vee q)]$  should

<sup>5</sup> See also Berto's (2006) 'ontological' formulation of the law of non-contradiction.

<sup>6</sup> There are facts other than those concerning the logical laws that platonists might reasonably regard as fundamental. Tieszen (2011, p. 97), exploring the views of Frege, Husserl, and Gödel, suggests that a key feature of platonistic rationalism about logic is the claim that knowledge of logical truths is object knowledge, and moreover that the 'givenness' of logical objects in rational intuition is not susceptible to further explanation. For such a platonist,  $[I$  conceive  $p\vee\neg p]$  is either itself fundamental or grounded in a fundamental fact involving disjunction. A full-scale defense of such claims and platonistic rationalism more broadly is not presently required.

also be included in the grounds, and more complex logical principles *ad infinitum* (Carroll 1895).<sup>7</sup> Later we shall consider what basis the Finean might have for insisting that the platonist accept the unwelcome consequences of denying (I).

The fact that sets are grounded in their members is another grounding claim often presented as canonical. The existence of the singleton set containing Socrates—i.e.,  $[\exists x, x = \{\text{Socrates}\}]$ —is grounded in the existence of its sole member, or  $[\exists x, x = \text{Socrates}]$  (Shaffer, 2009, p. 375; Fine, 1995, p. 271). Canonical examples should not render trivially false substantive views in metaphysics. But as before, when combined with Fine's principle, the claim rules out mathematical platonism. If the set forming operation  $\{\}$  is a fundamental element of reality, and, accordingly, features as a constituent of some true, basic, factual propositions—say, the axioms of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory—then PRIMITIVE forces the mathematical platonist to invoke some fact involving  $\{\}$  to ground the existence of Socrates' singleton.<sup>8</sup> In other words, PRIMITIVE places the mathematical Platonist squarely outside of the consensus on ground.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Shouldn't the logical Platonist admit that  $[[p]$  grounds  $[p \vee q]]$  is itself grounded in some fact involving disjunction, a logical law or a truth about the nature of disjunction? She should, but we still have a violation of PRIMITIVE because the Platonist does *not* invoke disjunction to ground  $[p \vee q]$ , a non-basic true factual proposition involving disjunction. See also discussion in section 3.

<sup>8</sup> These examples suggest a recipe for generating counterexamples to the principle. There are general ontological principles of the form:  $\langle$ For any entities (that meet condition C), there is some F that is R-related to these entities $\rangle$ . For example,  $\langle$ For any entities (that meet condition C), there is a set containing all and only those entities $\rangle$ ;  $\langle$ For any entities (that meet condition C), there is an entity that is their mereological sum $\rangle$ . Given such principles, one might say  $[$ there is an F that is R-related to  $x, y, z, \dots]$  is fully grounded in  $[x, y, z, \dots \text{ exist}]$ , perhaps together with  $[x, y, z, \dots \text{ meet condition C}]$ . And, yet, if either the property F or relation R is fundamentally real, then such views violate PRIMITIVE.

<sup>9</sup> The only other challenge to the principle, as far as I know, is due to Horwich (2007) who provides several purported counterexamples that are dialectically far more controversial. Horwich offers  $[$ Mars exemplifies the property of rotating $]$  is grounded in  $[$ Mars is rotating $]$ ; and  $[$ the number of unicorns are 0 $]$  is grounded in  $[$ there are no unicorns $]$ . But, as Fine (2007, p. 18) points out, it is not clear that a factual and basic constituent has actually been eliminated from the grounds in these examples:  $'[i]$ n the first case, the property of rotating occurs 'nominally' in the grounded proposition and only 'predicatively' in the grounding proposition. But in changing its mode of occurrence, it is not thereby eliminated.' Horwich's third case involving an artificial predicate relies on a grounding principle concerning universal generalizations that Fine rejects (p. 19).

The examples discussed here have the advantage of relying on grounding claims that Fine and others accept as canonical. Moreover, the examples presuppose platonist views which ensure that the constituent eliminated from the grounds is both factual and fundamental. The point of raising these cases is precisely that PRIMITIVE renders canonical grounding claims parochial and substantively controversial.

One might be tempted to treat the grounding of facts involving mathematical and logical constituents as a special case, and to think Fine's principle remains safe to use in general theory. But the problems with PRIMITIVE go deeper.

It is very tempting to think [*x* is scarlet] grounds [*x* is not chartreuse]. As before, we assume our essentialist diagnostic for the completeness of grounding explanations: given the natures of the constituents of [*p*] and [*q*], does explaining [*q*] in terms of [*p*] leave an explanatory gap? Intuitively, someone who understands the nature of the determinate colour properties—*what it is* to be scarlet/chartreuse—and also understands the nature of negation should require no further metaphysical explanation for why [*x* is not chartreuse] holds given [*x* is scarlet].<sup>10</sup> That a thing cannot both be (solidly) scarlet and (solidly) chartreuse is not some further fact that one might fail to grasp despite being fully aware of the nature of *being scarlet* and the nature of *being chartreuse*. So, the grounding explanation seems unimpeachable.

But now consider the colour primitivist.<sup>11</sup> The primitivist (or simple objectivist) treats the colours as fundamentally real monadic properties of things. While there may be standard causal or psycho-physical explanations for *why* a thing is chartreuse, in terms of surface reflectance properties of objects, wavelengths of light, our brain chemistry, and so on, none of these facts provides a complete *metaphysical* explanation of the colour fact. The view is often motivated by appeal to what we know simply from reflecting on the natures of properties like *being chartreuse*. Someone who knew everything there is to know concerning micro-physical and other non-colour facts would still be in the dark about *why* when such non-colour facts obtain they give rise to an object's being chartreuse as opposed to, say, being scarlet. Accordingly (or so the primitivist argues), [*y* is chartreuse] is plausibly basic or lacking a full metaphysical explanation.

But taking the colours as fundamental and real in no way bars the colour primitivist from thinking that the natures of *being chartreuse* and *being scarlet* preclude a thing's being both. In other words, there is no conflict in thinking both that (1) [*y* is chartreuse] is robustly factual and lacks a complete metaphysical

<sup>10</sup> There might be open questions involving other modes of explanation (e.g. causal explanation). On the differences between causal and metaphysical explanation, see discussion in fn21.

<sup>11</sup> On primitivist-realism about colour, see Gert (2006).

explanation, and (2) [ $x$  is scarlet] grounds [ $x$  is not chartreuse]. This is a straightforward counterexample to PRIMITIVE.<sup>12</sup> Whether one accepts colour primitivism or not, no basic principle of ground should rule out such a plausible combination of metaphysical commitments.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. The ‘No Ground-Essence Mediation’ Reply

A means of disarming the various examples might seem tempting at this point. The examples all rely on essentialist principles mediating grounding explanations.<sup>14</sup> [[ $p$ ] grounds [ $p \vee q$ ]] is underwritten by or is itself grounded in an essential truth about disjunction. The fact that [ $\exists x, x = \text{Socrates}$ ] grounds [ $\exists x, x = \{\text{Socrates}\}$ ] is underwritten by the nature of the set-forming operator. We know [ $x$  is scarlet] grounds [ $x$  is not chartreuse] because of the natures of *being chartreuse*, *being scarlet*, and *negation* taken together. Suppose one insists that these essentialist truths that allegedly underwrite the first-order grounding claims must be themselves included in the grounds. So, we should say [ $x$  is scarlet] together with various essentialist facts about the colours and negation jointly ground [ $x$  is not chartreuse]. Including the essentialist facts in the grounds, we’re told, results in a tighter explanation, and the requirement conveniently forces the realist to invoke the features she regards as fundamentally real in explanation.

Some problems with this strategy were considered earlier in the case of disjunctive facts. But there are more general problems. First, it is perfectly standard to assume, as Fine himself does, that essentialist facts can at least in some cases underwrite grounding explanations (Fine, 2012, p. 75; Rosen, 2015, pp. 130–132). Paradigmatic examples of grounding that involve mediation by bridge principles, essentialist or otherwise, are widely endorsed. Because

<sup>12</sup> To make things explicit: a true factual proposition is grounded without mentioning one of its constituents—*being chartreuse*—which is fundamentally real (assuming colour primitivism) and which occurs essentially (replacing *being chartreuse* with *being scarlet* in  $\langle x$  is not chartreuse  $\rangle$  changes the proposition’s truth value).

<sup>13</sup> As before, it shouldn’t be necessary to fully motivate colour primitivism for present purposes, though I return to questions of plausibility in section IV.

<sup>14</sup> On essentially mediated grounding explanations, see Rosen (2010, p. 131) and Fine (2012, p. 75). For further discussion of mediating principles, see Bennett (2011), deRosset (2013), and Kment (2014).

this reply denies our right to an assumption standardly made in theorizing about metaphysical explanation, it seems *ad hoc*.

Second, it is not at all clear that invoking the essentialist facts as grounds in the cases discussed above results in a tighter explanation. Consider the case of the colours. That a thing cannot both be (solidly) scarlet and (solidly) chartreuse is not some further fact it is possible to be in the dark about despite grasping [*x* is scarlet] and [*x* is not chartreuse]. [*x* is scarlet] is a fact that is partly constituted by *being scarlet*. It is hard to imagine grasping [*x* is scarlet] without grasping at least some of *what it is* to be scarlet, including its chartreuseness-excluding nature.<sup>15</sup> That is why there is no explanatory work for the relevant essentialist fact about *being scarlet* to do that is not already done by [*x* is scarlet] in which scarletness appears.

Third, the reply undercuts the principle's theoretical usefulness. Fine and others rely on PRIMITIVE to distinguish the realist from the quasi-realist (or 'nonfactualist') about a propositional constituent. The Finean test for realism proceeds as follows. Take a nonbasic proposition which involves a constituent whose full-blown reality is disputed but that both sides acknowledge is fundamental—say, the moral property of *being wrong*.<sup>16</sup> Ensure that the chosen proposition's overall factuality is not disputed by the realist and quasi-realist. For example, both might accept <Sam believes lying is wrong> is factual.<sup>17</sup> Now ask: what grounds the truth of this nonbasic factual proposition? Fine's thought is:

<sup>15</sup> Of course, it is not always the case that an item's essence wholly figures in a fact involving that item. [*x* is water] is grounded in [*x* is h<sub>2</sub>O] and it lies in the nature of *being water* that if a thing is water, it is h<sub>2</sub>O. Knowledge of the relevant essentialist fact about water requires knowing some chemistry. But the colour case is special because plausibly the colour properties have at least partly manifest essences directly involved in colour facts.

<sup>16</sup> To simplify matters, we can assume the realist and quasi-realist both regard the feature whose full-blown reality is disputed as fundamental—that is, as featuring in some true, basic propositions.

<sup>17</sup> According to Fine (2001, pp. 16–18), it is critical that we find a proposition that both sides agree is not just *true* but also factual—e.g. Sam believes lying is wrong. The quasi-realist and realist disagree about the factuality of a constituent of the proposition—namely, *wrongness*. But they agree about the proposition's overall factuality. The reason this is important is that if the target nonbasic proposition is one that the quasi-realist regards as *nonfactual*, she *will* invoke the contested feature in explaining it. For example, the quasi-realist might say that [fraud is wrong] is a nonbasic nonfactual true proposition, and is grounded in something like the fact that fraud involves deception and *deception is wrong*. Fine isn't entirely clear on the rules that govern the grounding of nonfactual propositions, but he is clear in requiring that the target proposition that is supposed to generate the grounding disagreement be one whose overall factuality is not under dispute.

the realist, and only the realist, invokes facts involving the disputed constituent to ground the target proposition (2001, pp. 17–18).

Fine's test for realism relies in part on *PRIMITIVE*, which forces the realist to invoke a constituent she regards as fundamentally real in grounding non-basic propositions involving the constituent. But grounding-essence mediation also plays a key role in generating the explanatory asymmetry on which the test depends by allowing the quasi-realist to ground the target proposition *without* invoking the disputed constituent. Fine thinks the quasi-realist (unlike the realist) can fully ground a non-basic proposition involving *wrongness* without mentioning *wrongness*, because the quasi-realist takes the constituent to be ontologically lightweight (2001, p. 18).<sup>18</sup> It is notoriously difficult to say precisely what such talk of ontological lightness amounts to. But roughly, the quasi-realist is happy to say fundamental moral properties and facts exist, but only in some deflated sense—the relevant entities are less than fully real (Blackburn, 1993). For our purposes, the thing to focus on is this: by Fine's own lights, a fact about the nature of the (quasi-real) constituent explains why it can be excluded from grounding explanations of facts involving it.

In other words, an alleged essentialist fact about *being wrong*—namely, it's ontological lightness or less-than-full factuality (whatever this means)—underwrites the quasi-realist's full metaphysical explanation of facts about moral belief in non-moral terms. One might ask the quasi-realist: why does *wrongness* appear in a non-basic proposition that is grounded in facts not involving *wrongness*? This seems like a meaningful explanatory question. And the quasi-realist should advert to an essentialist fact about *wrongness*: once one understands the kind of property *being wrong* is, one sees that one needn't invoke it in explaining factual propositions involving it.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore crucial to the test's effectiveness that the quasi-realist be allowed to exclude from grounding explanations relevant essentialist truths.

<sup>18</sup> The quasi-realist might ground [Sam believes lying is wrong] in [Sam desires not to lie]. Quasi-realism in ethics pairs a deflationary view of moral properties and moral facts with non-cognitivism (or 'expressivism') about moral belief. There is some debate over the coherence of such a position, but we can assume coherence. For our purposes, 'quasi-realism' is meant to be a catch-all term for sophisticated and viable anti-realist positions.

<sup>19</sup> One way to put it is that the quasi-realist invokes moral properties in *higher-order* metaphysical explanation. She appeals to what such properties are like in explaining why they needn't be invoked in grounding certain nonbasic facts involving them that don't also involve the relation of grounding.

So, not only is it contrary to conventional wisdom to suppose that essentialist facts underwriting grounding explanations must feature as grounds themselves, it is not a theoretically viable option for the Finean.

#### 4. Does the Principle Remain Theoretically Useful?

Perhaps PRIMITIVE and Fine's test for realism remain defensible in individual domains. Fine's test has been especially popular in metaethics, inspiring several 'explanationist' approaches to distinguishing moral realists from quasi-realists based on whether a theorist invokes moral properties in explanations of non-basic facts involving such properties.<sup>20</sup> None of the discussed counterexamples to PRIMITIVE involve moral properties. So, perhaps its theoretical relevance is not fully undermined.

But the fact that the test relies on a questionable principle of ground should give us pause. We cannot take for granted that a moral realist who takes *wrongness* to be fundamentally real *must* invoke the property in grounding nonbasic propositions involving it. The general structure of the previous counter-examples to PRIMITIVE suggests a worry. As we have seen, grounding facts like [[p] grounds [q]] can in turn be grounded in or derived from essential truths involving the constituents of p and q without these essential truths featuring in the grounds of [q]. So, suppose a moral realist takes on the following commitments:

It lies in the nature of *wrongness* that a person *P* is *R-related* to  $\langle x$  is wrong  $\rangle$  if *P* is disposed to treat *x* in certain ways:  $C(P, x)$ .

*Being R-related* to  $\langle x$  is wrong  $\rangle$  may involve *believing x is wrong*. But the nature of the relation is not what matters. The crucial point is that on such a view, it lies in the nature of *wrongness* that a person can be related to it simply by satisfying a non-moral behavioral condition,  $C(P, x)$ , one that never mentions *wrongness*. For example, if *x* is the act of lying, the non-moral behavioral condition might involve *P* avoiding lying or acting resentfully towards those who lie. Accordingly,

<sup>20</sup> See Dreier (2004, pp. 36–39). Critics of Fine's test in meta-ethics have wondered whether the quasi-realist should embrace the notion of metaphysical explanation on which the test depends (Asay, 2013). But there is a deeper problem with the test—it relies on a questionable principle of ground.

- (1) [R(Sam, <lying is wrong>)]  
a non-basic factual proposition involving *wrongness* can be grounded in
- (2) [C(Sam, lying)]  
a fact that never mentions *wrongness*, while the grounding fact
- (3) [[C(Sam, lying)] grounds [R(Sam, <lying is wrong>)]]  
*is* underwritten by an essential truth about *wrongness*—namely:
- (4) It lies in the nature of *wrongness* that  $\forall P \forall x (C(P, x) \supset R(P, \langle x \text{ is wrong} \rangle))$ .

The essentialist truth does not entail that *wrongness* is definable as, say, *being the property one is R-related to in condition C*. For all we have said, *wrongness*'s nature may still be *sui generis* and robustly factual—the property may be causally efficacious, for example.<sup>21</sup> Nor does the essentialist claim force the realist to deny the fundamentality of facts of the form: *x* is wrong. In general, that it lies in *F*'s nature that *F*-ness is *G* does not entail that facts like [*x* is *F*] obtain *in virtue* of facts involving *G*.<sup>22</sup> Hence, nothing said so far rules out the possibility that *wrongness* has a robustly factual nature and occurs in some metaphysically basic facts. Fine's criterion would classify such a view as quasi-realist simply for grounding [R(Sam, <lying is wrong>)] without mentioning *wrongness*. But the classification seems mistaken and, at the very least, under-motivated.

Perhaps the described view of *wrongness* is too implausible to be taken seriously. Our imagined theorist who rejects PRIMITIVE is committed to several essentialist facts about *wrongness*: (i) it has a *sui generis* and causally efficacious nature; (ii) its obtaining of some act-types is not to be explained in virtue of anything else; and (iii) its nature is such that persons are related to it simply by behaving in ways characterizable in non-moral terms. No moral realist, as

<sup>21</sup> To make her realism about *wrongness* vivid, suppose our imagined theorist thinks [lying is wrong] is what *causes* the non-moral dispositions in agents that result in their being *R-related* to <lying is wrong>. The causal preconditions of some fact do not generally belong in its grounds. [The workers are on strike] may be fully grounded in [the workers are picketing outside their workplace] even if there is a complex causal explanation for why the workers are striking (See Rosen, 2010: § 7; Bernstein, *forthcoming*). Similarly, our imagined realist needn't invoke moral facts involving *wrongness* in grounding [R(Sam, <lying is wrong>)] even if she thinks they are causally related.

<sup>22</sup> It lies in the nature of {2} that {2} is a set, but  $[\exists x, x = \{2\}]$  isn't grounded in facts involving sets. Similarly, it lies in *F*'s nature that *F* and *G* are coextensive does not entail that when a thing is *F*, its being *G* is *what makes it F*. See discussion in Rosen (2015).

far as I can tell, has explicitly defended such commitments. And this fact can be leveraged in Fine's defense. Fine (2001, pp. 20–21) admits that his test turns on considerations of what is *plausible* for the realist (or quasi-realist) to accept. No argument forces realists to accept the constraints entailed by PRIMITIVE. Rather, Fine's thought is that it would be *implausible* for realists not to accept the constraints. So, it will not do for purposes of refuting the principle merely to state a position ostensibly at odds with it. The candidate view needs to be developed in sufficient detail so we can be sure it is plausible enough to warrant accommodation in general meta-physical theorizing.

It is certainly not my aim to defend the plausibility of a moral realist position with the stated commitments. However, it is worth noting that several self-proclaimed moral realists have resisted being classified as *quasi*-realists under the Finean test.<sup>23</sup> The discussion suggests a direction these theorists may wish to go in rendering their view precise using the machinery of ground and essence.

More importantly, whatever we end up saying about the described view of moral properties, the earlier examples involving logical and mathematical platonism and colour primitivism rely on defensible and paradigmatically realist views in metaphysics. Take the colour case. Although moral realists don't usually characterize their view in terms of essences, this *is* one of the standard ways of characterizing colour primitivism. It is natural for the colour primitivist to say that it is facts about the manifest natures of colour properties like *being chartreuse* that explain why such properties are both real and fundamental. It is equally natural for the primitivist to say that  $[[x \text{ is scarlet}] \text{ grounds } [x \text{ is not chartreuse}]]$  is explained by the manifest natures of *being scarlet* and *being chartreuse*. This is a view about the colours that should be taken seriously and cannot be ignored if we are trying to understand realist positions in metaphysics generally.<sup>24</sup> It is precisely the kind of view that principles of grounding and a criterion for realism need to be tested against.

So, for all I have shown, Fine's criterion for realism may correctly classify standard *moral* views as realist or anti-realist. But the

<sup>23</sup> T.M. Scanlon (2014, fn. 62) observes in an intriguing footnote that he would be wrongly classified as a quasi-realist by the Dreier-Fine test. He does not explain why he rejects the classification, however. See also Wedgwood (2007).

<sup>24</sup> For what it's worth, I think the view is not just plausible, there are good reasons for taking it to be true.

counter-examples to PRIMITIVE reveal that the criterion fails as a *general* test for realism. It fails because paradigmatic realists in various domains can plausibly reject PRIMITIVE.

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