

# Anchoring as Grounding: On Epstein's The Ant Trap

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Draft of April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017

The project of social ontology is built on the observation that social facts are not “brute” facts in nature. The fact that Tufts is a university, that the Federal Reserve is raising interest rates, that the word ‘Aristotle’ refers to Aristotle, and that Mario Batali is a restaurateur, are all the case—at least in part—in virtue of various facts about people. Theories of social ontology identify, implicitly or explicitly, some cohesive set of social facts or objects such as “institutional facts,” “semantic facts,” “artifacts,” etc. For that set, they work to provide an account of the other facts in virtue of which social facts are the case, or in virtue of which social objects exist. (Epstein 2013: 54)

In *The Ant Trap*, Epstein (2015) connects social ontology with contemporary metaphysical work on grounding, leading to an insightful model of social reality informed by a strong understanding of both the social sciences and metaphysics, and detailed through a wide range of realistic examples. This is outstanding work, enriching social ontology and contemporary metaphysics together.

I agree with much of Epstein's view. In particular I endorse the broad outlines of his account of how background rules and foreground moves can operate together to generate social facts, and I embrace his use of metaphysical grounding. This is worth building on. But there is one part I would build over: Epstein holds a “grounding-anchoring-framing” view on which social reality is built through three relations, while I prefer a “grounding-only” view (what Epstein calls “conjunctivism”) on which grounding does all the work. I argue that a grounding-only view is needed to underwrite the roles of rules and free social ontology from obscure *sui generis* relations.

## 1. Two Views of Social Reality

I begin by putting Epstein's grounding-anchoring-framing (*GAF*) view and my preferred grounding-only (*GO*) alternative on the table. As Epstein (2015: espec. ch. 6) suggests, social facts can be built through two factors—which I label “rules” and “moves”—operating together. There are background social rules which determine what counts as what, much as the background rules of chess determine what counts as a checkmate. Then there are foreground social moves that get made and thereby yield specific social outcomes, much as a particular chess move might count as checkmate.

Thus consider the example (drawn from Searle 1995) of why a given piece of paper, Billy, has the property of being money. One relevant consideration involves the rules in operation in the relevant locale. There might have been a rule on which all and only seashells are money, or a rule on which all and only things printed in my office are money. But instead there is a rule on which—simplifying massively—all and only things printed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) are money.<sup>1</sup> That rule sets the background conditions for what counts as money. Against this background, there are certain facts about Billy, in particular the fact that he was printed by the BEP. That fact sits in the foreground to “make the move” through which Billy comes out as money, given the background rules for what counts as money.

The question is how best to understand the metaphysics behind these rules-and-moves operations.

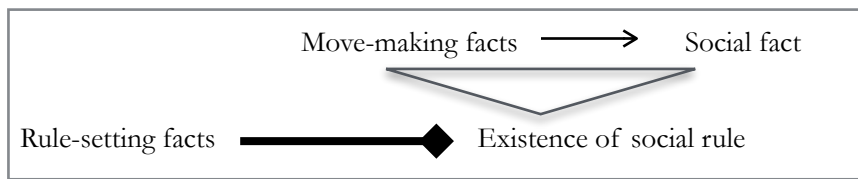
### 1.1 *The grounding-anchoring-framing view*

Epstein (2015: 82–5) offers a grounding-anchoring-framing (*GAF*) view, with the move-making facts in the foreground generating some given social fact, and the rule-setting facts in the background framing the whole situation. Here is the general model as I understand it, and its application to the example of money:

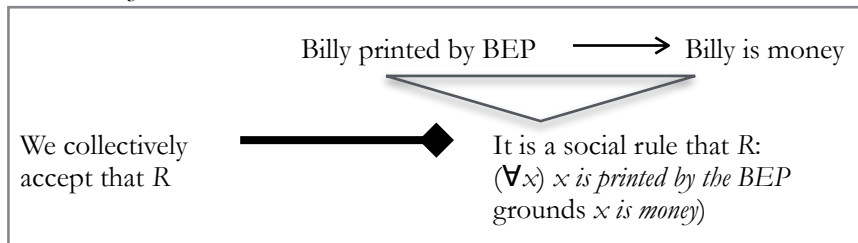
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<sup>1</sup> In fact the BEP merely produces all US paper money. US coins are produced by the United States Mint, and the BEP also produces US postage stamps, as well as various awards certificates and government ID cards.

GAF



GAF, money



There are three relations of interest in *GAF*. First, there is the thin arrow from the move-making facts to the social fact. This the move-making arrow, understood as a grounding arrow, with grounding understood (2015: 69) as tracing “not the causal reason... but the metaphysical reason” why a given fact obtained. So Epstein would say that Billy’s being printed by the BEP grounds Billy’s being money. I agree.

Secondly, there is the thick diamond-headed arrow from the rule-setting facts to the existence of the social rule. This is the rule-setting arrow, understood (2015: 80) to represent “a different relation from grounding,” such that the rule-setting facts are “not part of the facts that ground [social fact f]. Rather they *set up* the rules: the frame principles.” This is anchoring. So Epstein would say that certain social facts—such as the collective acceptance of the rule that being printed by the BEP grounds being money, anchors the existence of the social rule that being printed by the BEP grounds being money. I disagree that this is a relation different from grounding. In a nutshell I am saying that the rule-setting facts are “the metaphysical reason” for the rule, and hence that rule-setting is a form of grounding too.

Thirdly, there is the triangle up from the existence of the social rule to the grounding complex. This is Epstein’s framing relation, which I take to relate a rule to a grounding fact. So the money rule frames the grounding fact [Billy’s being printed by the BEP grounds Billy’s being money]. Epstein neither affirms nor denies that framing is a relation at all, much less a grounding relation. I say it is grounding relation, too.<sup>2</sup>

The friend of *GAF* is not committed to the rule-setting facts being collective acceptances. Epstein only borrows the idea of collective acceptance from Searle (1995) for the sake of definiteness.<sup>3</sup>

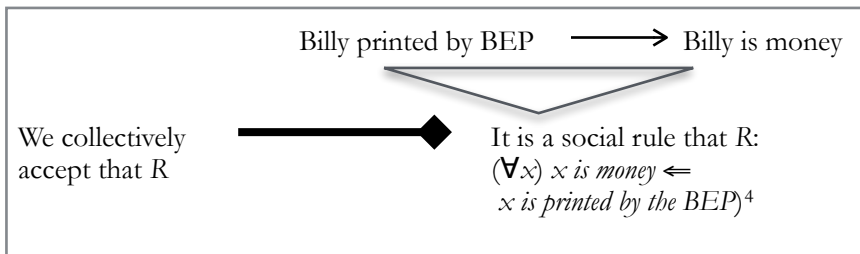
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<sup>2</sup> Epstein draws framing not with a triangle but with a box for the grounding complex inside a box for the rules. He (2015: 78) officially defines a frame as “a set of possible worlds in which the grounding conditions for social facts are fixed in a particular way,” which suggests a relation between the rule-setting facts and a set of worlds. He (*personal communication*) clarifies says that he thinks of framing as just selecting out some worlds, and as not “really anything metaphysically.” In the main text I speak of Epstein as endorsing *GAF* but he may only endorse *GA* (grounding-anchoring). I think he needs a framing relation too though: he needs a relation between the rules and their instances, much like an account of laws of nature needs a relation between laws and their instances. (Laws of nature too can be thought of as selecting out some worlds in which the causal conditions are fixed in a particular way, but this hardly entails that laws of nature are nothing metaphysically.) In any case I focus primarily on anchoring, and my objections apply to *GAF* and *GA* equally.

<sup>3</sup> Epstein (*personal communication*) in fact rejects viewing the rule-setting facts as collective acceptances. Alternatives include patterns of coordinated behavior, as well as the dictates of the authorities.

The friend of *GAF* is also not committed to the rules taking the form of universally generalized grounding claims that Epstein provides, and indeed I think she should reject the idea. For she wants rules to have modal implications, generating counterfactuals about social reality in other possible situations, for instance generating counterfactuals about whether something would or would not count as money in other possible situations, depending on whether or not it was printed by the BEP. But the rules as Epstein formulates them fail to entail that things not printed by the BEP do not count as money, since they allow that something not printed by the BEP might still count as money on some other basis. Epstein's rules just serve as one way conditionals, but he needs something more like a bi-conditional; or better, he needs something more like a function mapping *being printed by the BEP* to *being money* and also mapping *not being printed by the BEP* to *not being money*. This would lead to:

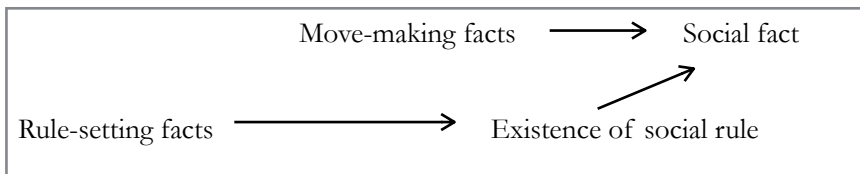
*GAF, money v.2*



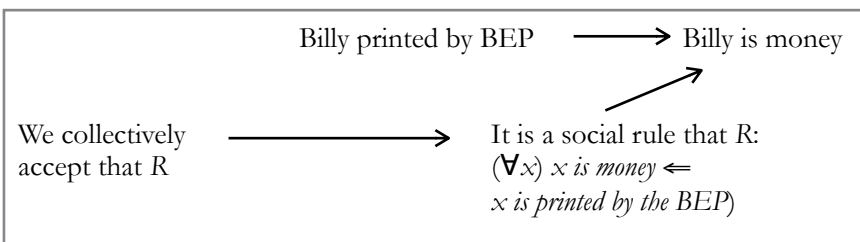
1.2 *The Grounding-Only View*

In place of Epstein's *GAF*, I prefer the following version of a grounding-only (*GO*) model:

*GO*



*GO, money*



<sup>4</sup> *Notation:* ' $\Leftarrow$ ' is read as a structural equation, with the variable on the left evaluated as a function of the variables on the right. The intended model has binary variables for *printed by the BEP* and for *money* (1=yes, 0=no), and the function says that the value of *money* is set to the value of *printed by the BEP*. This entails that not being printed by the BEP grounds not being money, as was wanted to explain why for instance this umbrella is not money, and a possible drawing of an anglerfish done by my son would not be money.

*GO* preserve all the nodes of *GAF* but redraws the arrows, in two different ways. The major difference is that all the arrows have been rendered as grounding arrows. The minor difference is that the “framing” arrow has been re-routed, not to the grounding complex but just to the social fact at the end.<sup>5</sup> These might seem like small differences, but—as I argue in §2—the question of whether all of the arrows are grounding arrows are not makes a major difference to social ontology.

Some further clarifications: The friend of *GO* (like the friend of *GAF*) can be noncommittal on the rule-setting facts and the form of the social rules. For definiteness I follow Epstein in speaking of collective acceptances, and I follow my recommendation from §1.1 for formulating the rules as functions. These details are not at issue (though the question of how to formulate the rules re-arises in §3.2). Also, it is intended for *GO*—although not depicted in the diagrams—that the rule-setting facts and the move-making facts together form a full ground of the social fact.

Finally, *GO* does not entail that there is a distinction between rule-setting and move-making, but just says that they have something in common, namely that both count as grounding relations. *Compare*: one need not deny that there is a distinction between baking and breaking in order to say that both have something in common, namely that both count as causal relations. In particular, I would say that rule-setting functions roughly like a structuring ground, while move-making functions roughly like a triggering ground (on analogy with the distinction between structuring and triggering causes: see Dretske 1988). But the relevant point here is just that the friend of *GO* may still distinguish rule-setting from move-making. This matters when considering Epstein’s objections (§3.1).

### 1.3 Common ground

Before proceeding to the dispute it is worth clarifying what is not in dispute. First, Epstein limits *GAF* to relations among facts, because he takes grounding to be a relation that only relates facts (cf. Rosen 2010).<sup>6</sup> But—as Epstein (2015: 74–75) is well aware—there are other types of social entities, including social objects (dollars), social properties (being money), and social events (making money). *GAF* as Epstein presents it cannot cover any of these other aspects of social reality. On my preferred view of grounding (Schaffer 2009), grounding can relate not just facts but any entities whatsoever, in which case my preferred grounding-only model can be smoothly extended to cover such entities as social objects, properties, and events. Whether *GAF* can be so smoothly extended depends on whether “anchoring” and “framing” can be smoothly extended too. This might be some advantage for *GO*, but for present purpose I keep the focus on social facts to avoid this largely separate matter. It is common ground between Epstein and myself that grounding is a relation that can at least relate facts, so I focus here just on the fact-side of social reality.

Secondly, Epstein and I are both looking at models of metaphysical structure *at a given time*. Adding in a temporal dimension would add in causal arrows that would allow, for instance, the social facts at a given time to influence the rule-setting and/or move-making facts at a later time, and so allow for social feedback loops and account for certain forms of social change.<sup>7</sup> Both *GAF* and *GO* are equally compatible with any manner of cross-temporal causal connections. (Though for those who think that causation can only relate events, incorporating causal connections will first require extending the models beyond the social facts into the social events.) It is common ground between the friend of *GAF* and the friend of *GO* that it makes sense to investigate the metaphysical structure at a given time. (Both *GAF* and *GO* stand opposed to any views on which social reality is essentially diachronic, only to be made sense of through causally extended processes.)

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<sup>5</sup> *Terminology*: *GO* is a species of what Epstein (2015: 115) labels “conjunctivism,” which claims that “the grounds for a social fact *include* the anchors” so that “every social fact has two different kinds of grounds.”

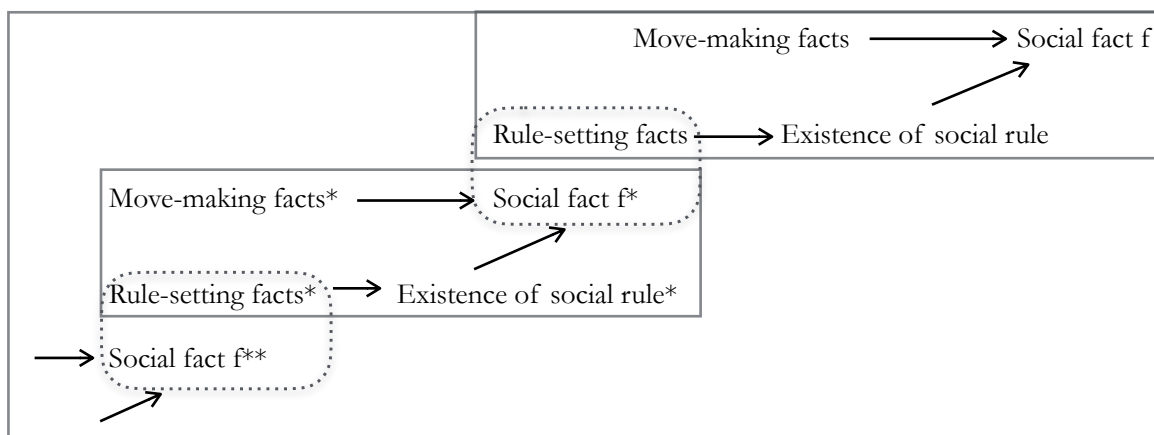
<sup>6</sup> An alternative view, found in Fine (2001) is that grounding is not a relation at all, but is best regimented as an operator over sentences.

<sup>7</sup> My thanks to Ronald Sundstrom for discussion of these issues.

Thirdly, I am focusing on one of many of the examples Epstein discusses, namely that of how a pre-social object (a piece of paper) gets imbued with a social property (being money) by satisfying a general rule (involving being printed by the BEP). Epstein (2015: 74) says that “all social facts” arise through this pattern, but it is not obvious to me that this is right. For instance, if two dictators point at a river and agree “let this be the border between us,” then it seems that they have created a new social object (a border), without detouring through a general rule for counting as a border.<sup>8</sup> Or if the rule had been that all and only seashells are money, then it seems that no further move-making facts are needed to make money—seashells are “ready-made” currency. Why think that all of social reality is amenable to a single metaphysical model, always with a splash of rule-setting and a dash of move-making?

Indeed, given that at least some of the rule-setting facts will themselves be social facts (e.g., collective acceptances), then both *GAF* and *GO* are in danger of generating an infinite backwards regression, unless a social fact can ground out in some other way. Otherwise each individual rule-setting fact which is social would need to be generated by its own rules and moves, and its own rules would themselves need to be set by further rules and moves, *ad infinitum*. To illustrate the backward regress for *GO*:

*GO, regress*



The upper-right box is the image of the original *GO*, the dotted circles connect a plurality of rule-setting facts to an individual social fact amongst them, and the illustration depicts how the model then recurses. (The same point holds for *GAF*: its rule-setting facts would include individual social facts that *GAF* re-applies to.)

There are several possible “escapes” from the regress but it seems to me that the best option is to allow some social facts to arise directly from non-social facts, without needing to be backed by any deeper social fact. For instance, if the rule-setting facts are collective acceptances, one very natural option would be to allow the collective acceptances to ground out non-socially, in individual psychological facts. But this escape requires allowing at least one sort of a social fact—namely a collective acceptance—to be grounded by a different pattern.

So I think that an adequate treatment of social reality may need to include a wider range of models, including separable (grounding-only!) models of rule-setting and move-making, as well as rules for agglomerating these models in hybrid cases such as the case of making money. Perhaps still other models are needed as well. By my lights Epstein and I are debating how best to model certain specific *composite rule-move aspects* of social reality. But it is common ground between Epstein and myself that the money case has what I am calling rule-move structure, so I focus here on the question of how best to model cases of this sort, leaving open how representative they are.

<sup>8</sup> I thank Asya Passinsky for this point.

Fourthly, as mentioned above, I endorse Epstein's insight that at least some social facts are generated through mixtures of rule-setting and move-making. All that is in dispute here is how to model these operations metaphysically. But I should add that Epstein's insight helps me to enrich my own ideas about social construction (Schaffer *forthcoming*; cf. Griffith *forthcoming*). I had said that social construction is a case of grounding, but left a "distinctive" placeholder, because not everything that is grounded in social patterns is socially constructed. (The social patterns ground not only the socially constructed facts, but also facts about sets such as the fact that there is a set of social patterns, and existential facts such as the fact that there exist social patterns, *inter alia*.) I hereby adopt Epstein's view of the rules-and-moves structure of at least this corner of social reality, and now say that at least one way to be socially constructed is to be grounded *via mixtures of rules-and-moves operations* from social patterns.<sup>9</sup> This is one of many ways in which I find Epstein's work enriching, and worth building on.

## 2. Three Arguments for the Grounding-Only View

There are several points of difference between Epstein's grounding-anchoring-framing view (*GAF*) and my preferred grounding-only view (*GO*), and ever so many further options. But since the primary point of dispute is whether the relation between the rule-setting facts and the existence of the social rules—the relation Epstein labels "anchoring"—is a form of grounding, I will focus on the claim that anchoring is a form of grounding. (On route I will also explain why framing is a form of grounding too, though it is not clear to me whether or not Epstein would dispute this further claim: §1.1.)

Epstein has arguments that anchoring is not a form of grounding, which I consider in §3. But first I build the positive case for the opposite verdict, arguing that treating anchoring as grounding is needed to underwrite the roles of rules and free social ontology from obscure *sui generis* relations.

### 2.1 *Anchoring (and framing) do as grounding does*

My main argument for treating anchoring and framing as forms of grounding is that anchoring and framing do as grounding does. Friends of grounding—including myself (Schaffer 2009, 2016)—posit grounding because it is useful, and the usefulness of grounding comes in making sense of matters such as:

- *Non-fundamentality*: The grounded output is less fundamental than the grounding inputs
- *Generation*: The grounded output is non-causally generated by the grounding inputs
- *Dependence*: The grounded fact counterfactually co-varies with the grounding facts
- *Explanation*: The grounded fact obtains because of the grounding facts

For instance, the biological state of the system is non-fundamental, and non-causally generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of its physical state. Grounding is the relation by which the less fundamental output is generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of the more fundamental inputs. In this vein—in the course of recommending viewing social construction as a form of grounding—I (Schaffer *forthcoming*: §2.1) wrote:

*Role, grounding*: The grounded is non-fundamental, and is generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of the grounds.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This is a two-fold revision for me: I am moving the "distinctive" placeholder from the social patterns to the way of grounding, and then following Epstein in thinking that the distinctive way in which social facts are grounded is via mixtures of rules-and-moves operations.

<sup>10</sup> Epstein (2015: 69) speaks of grounding as the "metaphysical reasons" relation, and in earlier work (2014) speaks of grounding in terms of "building," "a metaphysical basis," "in virtue of," "covariance," and an idea of "dependence" that supersedes supervenience.

I will now argue that anchoring does as grounding does, in playing *Role, grounding*. To begin with, there is a social rule, and it is clearly *non-fundamental* (as are all aspects of social reality; whatever particles or fields might constitute fundamental reality, no social matters are to be found at the bottom). But in order to say that the social rule is non-fundamental, one must identify its grounds. And what but the collective acceptances (or whatever one takes to be the source of the rules) could serve as the ground?

The social rule does not come from nowhere, but is rather *generated* by the rule-setting facts, just in a constitutive rather than causal manner. They are the metaphysical source of the rule, the determining basis, and the inputs for which it is the output.

Moreover, the social rule is *dependent* on the rule-setting facts. If the collective acceptance were to be lost, the rule would no longer exist. And if the collective acceptance were varied in various ways (e.g., if we were to collectively accept that all and only seashells are money), the rule would vary in various corresponding ways. Wiggle the rule-setting facts, and one wiggles the rule.

Finally, the social rule is *explicable* on the basis of the rule-setting facts. If one wonders why all and only things printed by the BEP are money, then finding out that this is what is collectively accepted can dispel this wonderment, and provide a basis for understanding, in the way characteristic of explanation. Epstein himself (2015: 69-70) introduces grounding as the “‘metaphysical reasons’ relation,” and it is not hard to think that the metaphysical reason why the rule holds is to be found in the rule-setting facts. Very few relations have the power to back explanation (perhaps causation is the only other relation with thus power), so non-causal explanation is a very telling sign.<sup>11</sup>

Putting this together, treating anchoring as a form of grounding fits and underwrites its connection to non-fundamentality, and its generational, counterfactual, and explanatory roles. Thus:

*Anchoring does as grounding does:* The existence of the social rule is non-fundamental, and is generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of the rule-setting facts.

To be fair, Epstein considers a related argument from the counterfactual dependence patterns (2015: 118–20), allows (2015: 117) that it “seems like a slam-dunk argument,” but replies (2015: 120) that his account of anchoring predicts this as well, so that in the end “the counterfactual is not evidence one way or another. It is compatible with both views, and cannot be used to decide between them.” I am saying that even if the counterfactual relations may be compatible with both views, it still favors the grounding view, since it is only via what looks to me like a more complicated revised account of counterfactuals (with anchoring playing a new and dedicated role) that Epstein is able to match the natural predictions of the grounding view. It is likewise open to Epstein to offer a more complicated revised account of other matters such as explanation, so that anchoring could play a role there too (namely the very role that grounding plays). But such maneuvers strike me as highly artificial.

Imagine someone who denied that baking was a causative relation. How would one argue otherwise? I am saying that one good argument for baking being causative would be that *baking does as causation does* (it also supports generational, counterfactual, and explanatory connections). A dedicated “baking-specialist” could however cook up a more complicated revised account of counterfactuals in which baking played a new and dedicated role, designed to replicate the baking-as-causal predictions. She could go on to offer a more complicated account of other matters such as explanation, so that baking could play a role there too (namely the very role that causation plays). But this seems deeply implausible, and I think the same implausibility attaches to attempts to defend “anchor-specialism.”

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<sup>11</sup> In this vein Audi (2012: 104) says: “The reason we must countenance grounding is that it is indispensable to certain important explanations.”

As things go for anchoring, so they go for framing—or more precisely, so they go for the relation between the social rule and the social fact:

*Framing does as grounding does:* The social fact is non-fundamental, and is partly generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of the existence of the social rule.

To illustrate, if the money rule varied in various ways, then Billy's status as money (and the amount of money Billy counts as) would vary as well; and part of the reason why Billy is money involves this rule. Someone who knew that Billy was printed by the BEP but did not know about the operative social rules might *wonder* why Billy counts as money; her wonderment could then be dispelled by teaching her about the rule, which surely is part of the metaphysical reason why Billy is money.

*GO* but not *GAF* can thus claim to underwrite the roles of rules, and to make sense of the kind of explanations that social ontologists want to deliver. Anchoring and framing both paddle, waddle, and quack like grounding relations.

## 2.2 Modality and chaining

My second reason for treating anchoring and framing as forms of grounding is that the alternatives look to violate the modal implications of grounding, and make a mystery of the chained indirect dependency of the social fact on the rule-setting facts. Starting with modality, while the exact grounding-modal connections are a matter of controversy, it is widely agreed that the full grounds get somewhere in the vicinity of *necessitating* what they ground. One natural formulation of this (Skiles 2015: 718) runs as follows:

*Grounding necessitation:* If the facts  $\Gamma$  ground the fact  $f$ , then necessarily, if the facts  $\Gamma$  obtain then  $f$  obtains.

There is dispute over *Grounding necessitation*, with some going for the even stronger view that replaces the consequent in *Grounding necessitation* with “if the facts  $\Gamma$  obtain then  $\Gamma$  grounds  $f$ ,” and others (including myself; cf. Skiles 2015: 738) going for the weaker view that grounded facts merely supervene on but are not necessitated by their grounds.

Regardless of the exact grounding-modal connection, it can be readily seen that *GAF* cannot preserve anything remotely close to *Grounding necessitation* or any other going option. For—at least on Epstein's treatment—Billy's being printed by the BEP fully grounds Billy's being money. Yet it should be clear that any connection between Billy's being printed by the BEP and Billy's being money is highly contingent, and in particular is contingent upon what the social rules happen to be, even though the friend of *GAF* refuses to include the existence of the social rule as a ground.<sup>12</sup>

By treating framing as grounding, *GO* locates an additional ground for Billy's being money, and so regains necessitation (/supervenience, etc.) For it is only when the social rule is included that anything sufficient for fixing Billy's monetary status comes into view.

Also, turning to chaining, it is widely agreed that grounding relations chain. One natural formulation of this idea runs as follows (sticking to the singular case for ease):

*Transitivity of grounding:* If the fact  $f$  grounds the fact  $g$ , and the fact  $g$  grounds the fact  $h$ , then the fact  $f$  grounds the fact  $h$

There is dispute over *Transitivity of grounds*, with some (including myself; Schaffer 2012; though see Litland 2013 for a reply defending transitivity) going for nearby chaining principles. Hence *GO*—since it treats both

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<sup>12</sup> Mikkola (2015: 791) makes the converse point, which is that the social rule alone is not necessitating. Thus I reply (Schaffer *forthcoming*: §3.3) that the whole ground needs to include all of these relevant factors.



anchoring and framing as grounding relations—predicts that there is a grounding chain running from the rule-setting facts to the social fact, via the existence of the social rule as a middle link.

Regardless of the exact chaining rule, it can be readily seen that *GAF* does not predict any chaining. By the lights of *GAF*, anchoring and framing look like two distinct relations, and arbitrary distinct relations do not tend to chain in any interesting ways.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the chained relation from the rule-setting facts (through the social rule) to the social fact not only looks like a dependency relation, but it bears all of the hallmarks of itself being a grounding relation (§2.1):

*Anchoring-Framing chains do as grounding does:* The social fact is non fundamental, and is partly generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of the rule-setting facts.

For instance, if the collective acceptances varied in various ways, then Billy's status as money (and the amount of money Billy counts as) would vary as well; and part of the reason why Billy is money involves what is collectively accepted about what counts for money. *GO* thus provides the best explanation for the indirect dependency, and overall it best explains why anchoring, framing, and anchoring-framing sequences all do what grounding does.

### 2.3 *Obscure AF*

My third reason for treating anchoring and framing as forms of grounding—which complements the observations above that anchoring, framing, and anchoring-framing chains all do as grounding does—is that by treating all of these as grounding relations one thereby frees social ontology from obscure *sui generis* relations. Social reality is not magical, nor is it plausible to think that there are *sui generis* metaphysical relations triggered only in the social realm. Part of the core task of social ontology, as Epstein himself (2015: 17) usefully clarifies, is to assimilate the individual-social relationship to a general picture of “*interlevel metaphysics*.”

Bringing in grounding—which is one of the major advances in Epstein 2015—has the potential to constitute progress insofar as grounding is a general metaphysical relation integrated into a general account of how reality is structured. *GO* sustains this progress by bringing in nothing else. But *GAF* undoes this progress by then distinguishing a further relation of anchoring, which is a *sui generis* relation known only to social ontology. (Similar complaints would apply to framing, if treated as a distinct third relation.)

By way of comparison, consider the debate over the metaphysics of social construction. Mallon (2013: §1.3) rightly complains that social construction remains obscure. But imagine Sam the social constructionist saying, “I posit grounding but also a distinct primitive metaphysical relation of *social construction*. I say that social patterns stand in the primitive social construction relation to race, gender, sexuality, and other socially constructed matters.” Whatever else Sam may or may not have achieved, he has failed to integrate social construction into a general account of how reality is structured, and so his metaphysics of primitive social construction relations remains in this respect obscure. I am saying that the grounding-anchoring view is equally obscure.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Berker (*manuscript*) uses a comparable chaining argument to defend the unity of grounding. For instance, he claims that if this natural fact grounds that normative fact, and that normative fact grounds a disjunctive fact, then this natural fact grounds the disjunctive fact. He concludes from this that normative and logical grounding are best regarded as unified.

<sup>14</sup> In Schaffer (*forthcoming*) I argue that treating social construction as a form of grounding avoids “treating social construction as magic, or as some *sui generis* relationship known only to social ontology,” but instead successfully “integrates social construction into a systematic account of how reality is structured.” I am here saying that the grounding-anchoring view would undo these advances.

As a second comparison, consider the grounding-friendly “Hegelian” dualist who trades in her “Spirit of Society” for a novel relation of “spiritualization” found only in the social realm. When it gets to social reality she denies that grounding can do all the work, and insists on including primitive spiritualizations in the picture too. This is spooky. I am saying that anchoring is just as objectionable as spiritualization, from the perspective of integrating social reality into a general metaphysics.<sup>15</sup>

I pause to clarify what I am not saying. I am not saying that the posit of grounding is free of any obscurities. That is a matter of dispute.<sup>16</sup> But in any case the matter is irrelevant to the present dispute, since *GAF* and *GO* both invoke grounding and so are tied with respect to any obscurities this involves. I am saying that the addition of anchoring adds on a specific sort of obscurity, namely the invocation of a *sui generis* relation known only to social ontology.

I am also not complaining that the anchoring relation is underdeveloped. It is true that there are far better developed formalisms for understanding grounding (cf. Fine 2012, Schaffer 2016) than for anchoring, but in principle it is open to the friend of *GAF* to develop a fuller formalism, and I grant her the opportunity. Nor am I making a parsimony complaint. It is true that *GAF* is less parsimonious than *GO*, but the friend of the *GAF* can reply that the multiplication of relations is needed. My point is not that *GAF* multiplies relations but that it includes an especially problematic one. (I would equally object to a more parsimonious anchoring-only view.)

I am saying that *GAF* treats anchoring as an obscure *sui generis* relation, while *GO* happily assimilates anchoring (and framing) to grounding. This fits the general picture of “interlevel metaphysics” as concerning grounding structure.

It is open to Epstein to extend *GAF* beyond social reality, to a general two-relations view of how reality is structured overall. Perhaps in the end this would yield an improved vision of inter-level metaphysics generally. That would be welcomed. But barring such a development, I cannot but regard the invocation of a distinct “anchoring” relation as involving just the sort of *sui generis* obscurity in social ontology that cries out for assimilation to a more general pattern. Given the role grounding is usually thought to play in inter-level metaphysics, and given that anchoring and framing do as grounding does, assimilating anchoring and framing to grounding relations strikes me as the natural way forward.

### 3. Objections Considered

Epstein (2015: 115) says that the grounding-anchoring view represents “a sharp break from the prevailing orthodoxy,” and so proposes to “confront the dominant view” on which anchors “are just another kind of ground.” He acknowledges the appeal of the counterfactual dependence test for the grounding-only view (§2), but offers three arguments for preferring the grounding-anchoring view, which I conclude by discussing.

#### 3.1 Intuitions of difference, and versions of individualism

One argument which Epstein offers is that there is intuitive and theoretical value in distinguishing grounding from anchoring. At the level of intuitions he (2015: 115) speaks of the distinction between grounding and anchoring as “natural,” and claims (2015: 82) to have presented “an intuitive case.” At the level of theory he (2015: 125–26) points out that it is useful to be able to state different versions of individualism, and to distinguish “grounding individualism”—the thesis that the move-making facts ground out in individual

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<sup>15</sup> Epstein (2015: 17–18) commends ontological individualism for warding off spirits, just as materialist conceptions of the mind ward off Cartesian dualism. I am saying that *GAF* involves a spooky dualism at the level of relations.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Hofweber (2009: 268) calls grounding “esoteric.” I reply in Schaffer (2016: 92) by pointing out that first-year undergraduates readily understand the *Euthyphro* dilemma, and that it is readily understood that the chemical depends on the physical.

psychological facts—from “anchor individualism”—the thesis that the rule-setting facts ground out in individual psychological facts.<sup>17</sup> He (2015: 125) charges that *GO* precludes distinguishing these individualisms:

Is ontological individualism then a thesis about *both* grounds and anchors? That is, about how frame principles can possibly be anchored *and* about how social facts can possibly be grounded in any frame? That is the position the conjunctivist must take. I have argued that it is an error to collapse anchors into grounds.

I agree with Epstein that there is an intuitive and theoretically valuable distinction between rule-setting and move-making. But—as mentioned in §1.2—*GO* does not deny that there is a distinction between rule-setting and move-making. It merely says that they have something in common, namely that both count as grounding relations. Everyone should agree that rule-setting and move making have commonalities (for instance, both are relations). And everyone should agree that there are differences. Once it is agreed that there are differences, that is all one needs to respect intuitions of difference, and to state different versions of individualism. So (*pace* Epstein) the conjunctivist does not need to regard ontological individualism as a thesis about both ground and anchors, but can happily distinguish “rule-setting individualism” from “move-making individualism” as important and separable theses.

Likewise everyone should agree that baking and breaking have both commonalities and differences. None of that settles the question of whether baking and breaking are both causal relations. (By my lights that is to be settled by seeing that both baking and breaking have the inferential signature of causation with respect to matters like generation, dependence, and explanation: §2.1). And the person who says that baking and breaking are both causal relations is hardly unable to state different principles for baking than for breaking, and hardly at risk of thereby collapsing the theory of baking into a theory of both baking and breaking. I am saying exactly the same thing about rule-setting and move-making.

Framing might also be said to be intuitively different from grounding, in ways connected to how *GAF* and *GO* point the framing arrow differently (§1.2). For while *GO* treats framing as a relation to the social fact, *GAF* treats it as a relation to the complex grounding fact (the fact that the move-making facts ground the social fact). But these are actually compatible claims. The complex grounding fact is just another fact, and the question of what grounds that grounding fact is strictly independent from the question of whether the existence of the social rule grounds the social fact. One can consistently say that the existence of the social rule ground *both* the existence of the social fact, and the more complex grounding fact.<sup>18</sup>

This last point is relevant insofar as the rules function as something like structuring grounds of the social fact (§1.2). For one of the standing confusions in the literature on structuring causes is the idea that the structuring cause causes the more complex causal sequence of the triggering cause causing the effect, and thereby does not itself cause the effect. The confusion is in treating these as competing claims, when in fact the structuring cause can cause *both* the effect, and the more complex causal sequence.

### 3.2 Stating the rules

Epstein also argues that the friend of *GO* faces a problem concerning the precise statement of the social rules. Epstein considers two options. The first option (2015: 117, fig. 9A) has the rule as: “If *x* is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, that grounds the fact that *x* is a dollar.” He objects that the

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<sup>17</sup> *Clarification*: Epstein himself rejects both ground individualism and anchor individualism. His point, which I agree with, is just that there are separable theses that one needs to be able to distinguish.

<sup>18</sup> On the Bennett-deRosset collapse view (Bennett 2011, deRosset 2013), grounding fact generally are grounded in their grounds, so the the fact that the move-making facts ground the social fact is grounded in the move-making facts. But this too is consistent with saying that the social fact is also separately grounded in the existence of the social rule. That is just a further compatible grounding claim that a collapse theorist might also accept. Thanks to Robbie Williams for helpful discussion.

occurrence of ‘grounds’ in the rule needs to be interpreted as meaning *fully grounds*, but the grounding-only model so understood depicts the rule as merely a partial ground, so contradicting the very rule it would invoke. The second option (2015: 121, fig. 9B) has the rule being the collective acceptance itself: “People in the U.S. collectively accept that if  $x$  is a bill issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, that grounds the fact that  $x$  is a dollar.” Epstein offers a related objection, namely that the occurrence of ‘grounds’ in what is collectively accepted needs to be interpreted as meaning *fully grounds*, but the grounding-only model so understood depicts the rule as merely a partial ground, so rendering the content of what is collectively accepted false.

I do not agree that the occurrence of ‘grounds’ in either of the options Epstein considers needs to be interpreted as meaning *fully grounds*. He (2015: 121–23) thinks that if it meant *partially grounds*, then in order to correctly accept the correct full grounding conditions for facts such as that Billy is a dollar, we’d need to accept more (and then he generates a problematic regress for what that more might be). But I say that it means partial grounds. What we collectively accept could not be the full grounding conditions for facts such as that Billy is a dollar, simply because we need not collectively accept anything about Billy.<sup>19</sup> Rather what we collectively accept are merely *the full rule-setting grounds* for such facts, which are partial grounds because they omit the move-making grounds. And that is exactly as *GO* has it.

Of course, if *GO* entailed that one could not distinguish rule-setting from move-making, then it could not say in what respect the collective acceptances are full. So in this way Epstein’s first argument also seems to falsely presuppose that *GO* cannot draw any distinctions between rule-setting and move-making.

That said, I have a second and independent reply to Epstein’s first argument, which is that I think that Epstein has mis-stated the rule, and that ‘grounds’ need not occur inside the rule at all (§1.2), any more than ‘causes’ needs to appear inside a law of nature. In both cases the better formulation of these principles involves dependence functions. Thus the money rule is best thought of as the structural equation:

*Money rule:*  $(\forall x) x \text{ is money} \leftarrow x \text{ is printed by the BEP}$

*Money rule* says how the value of the *being money* variable is set as an output, based on the value of the *printed by the BEP* variable as input. What makes the existence of such rules grounds or anchors is not that the word ‘ground’ appears on the inside, but the role they play in the non-causal generation of the social facts. Since *Money rule* does not use ‘grounds’ at all, Epstein’s objections do not arise.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.3 Exporting the rules

Finally, Epstein (2015: 123–4) presents, as “the fundamental reason for rejecting conjunctivism,” an argument that it “gets the grounding conditions wrong” for social facts at times, places, and possible situations in which the social rules in question do not exist. I take the argument to run:

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<sup>19</sup> This is unfortunately obscured in Epstein’s presentation. Even though Epstein officially takes grounding to only relate facts, when he states the objection he (2015: 122) speaks of the grounds for “ $x$  being a dollar,” which is not a fact but a fact-schema. Once one fills in a value for  $x$  to reach the facts at issue, e.g. the fact that Billy is a dollar, it should be obvious that there need not be any collective acceptance of anything pertaining to Billy. Billy can still be a dollar even if he fell straight off the printing press into a crack on the floor and no one has ever been acquainted with him or had any attitude directed towards him, etc.

<sup>20</sup> Searle (1995: 28) holds the schematic view that ‘ $z$  is  $Y$ ’ is grounded in ‘ $z$  is  $X$ ’ and ‘we collectively accept that  $X$ s count as  $Y$ s in context  $C$ .’ For Searle the rule uses ‘count as.’ Passinsky (2016: 79) offers a *recognition-dependent* account on which Billy is money “(partly or fully) in virtue of being publicly recognized as [being money] by the relevant authorities under the appropriate conditions.” These proposals differ from mine in several respects, but agrees on the key matter of not using ‘grounds’ inside the content of the rule.

1. Anchoring exports universally.
2. If anchoring is grounding, then anchoring would not export universally.
3. Therefore anchoring is not grounding.

The idea behind 1 is that anchored social rules apply even to other times, places, and possible situations in which no relevant anchors are found. Thus Epstein (2015: 123) claims that social rules provide a “universal tool” that exports to all situations:

We can look back at ancient societies, and evaluate whether there are classes or castes, aristocrats or serfs. We might look for baristas in the Ottoman Empire or in seventeenth-century England, and variable annuities among the ancient Egyptians... Social kinds and social facts are applicable across a universe of different situations.

His claim is that the social rule can exist, even at times and possible situations in which the rule-setting facts do not exist. For instance, even though the rule-setting facts for *being a war criminal* might involve the International Criminal Court (ICC), one can still consider whether someone counts as a war criminal in times and possible situations without the court (2015: 124):

One is a war criminal if one has committed or conspired to commit any of a long list of crimes in association with armed conflict. We can sensibly ask whether Caligula was a war criminal, or whether Genghis Khan was, having killed over a million inhabitants of a single city. We can also consider a possibility in which some virtuous person instead committed terrible crimes, and sensibly ask whether that person would be a war criminal.

The idea behind 2 is that grounded outputs generally do not obtain where there grounding inputs (or some suitable replacements) do not exist. It is a commonplace among grounding theorists that if one takes away the grounds for a given grounded output, without replacing them with other grounds, the grounded output would not exist. For instance, if one takes away the physical state that grounds my biological state, without replacing it with an alternative physical realizer, my biological state would not exist—my biological state cannot “float free” of its physical grounds. And so treating anchoring as grounding would—as Epstein (2015: 124) makes clear—entail that the existence of the social rule could not “float free” of the rule-setting facts, but would instead require “the anchors involved in putting the conditions in place.”

And of course given 1 and 2, 3 follows. Epstein is in effect saying that anchored social rules can float free of the rule setting-facts, in ways the preclude treating anchoring as grounding.

In reply, I deny 1, and also deny 2 in the case of other times and places (but not other worlds). Indeed I’ll argue that anchoring has exactly the same modally but not temporally limited export powers as grounding, just as *GO* predicts. So I’ll claim that Epstein’s “fundamental reason for rejecting conjunctivism” is—when properly understood—really just further support for *GO*.

But first two distinctions are needed. First, one should distinguish *imperialist rules* ranging across all space and time, from *isolationist* rules holding only in a restricted zone. This is simply a matter of the content of the rule. Rules that universally quantify over all things without restriction to space and time are thereby imperialist, as is *Money rule* (§3.2). Such rules apply equally to the Paleolithic cave paintings at Lascaux, the pieces of paper folded in my wallet now, and (let us imagine) future twenty-fifth century holographic imprints. *Money rule* just asks, was it printed by the BEP? Rules that quantify over restricted zones are isolationist. For instance, one might consider a variant of *Money rule* restricted to a locale such as the United States, and a time span starting from 1875 (when the BEP began operation) until (let us imagine) 2019, when “Trump steaks” become the new American currency. That variant rule would simply *fall silent* on the status of things outside its zone.

I suspect that many social rules are in fact imperialist in content, simply because imperialist rules are more usefully opinionated. Imperialist rules do apply across space and time, and there is no problem

whatsoever in positing “non-local” grounding connections across space and time. Thus 2 is false in the case of other times and places. (Other worlds are a different matter.)

As a second distinction, one should distinguish cases involving the generation of social rules, from cases involving stipulative definitions of terms. If I say “Let ‘schmoney’ mean anything printed from my printer” then I have stipulatively defined ‘schmoney,’ and—if my stipulation is successful—I have thereby rendered it *analytic*, holding in all conceptually possible situations irrespective of whether my stipulation or anything like it is found at those situations, what counts as schmoney. In a conceptually possible situation which consists just of you printing love poems on my printer (without any stipulations about ‘schmoney’), those love poems are still schmoney. Definitions are thus a universal tool which do cross worlds.

(There may also be objective *kind* structure to social reality, independent of language. Such objective kind structure may then play a role in fixing the reference of social kind terms. This strikes me as more plausible for some aspects of social reality than others. By my lights it is more plausible for gender than for race, and more plausible for being currency than for being a US nickel. But given that there are at least some social kinds, there is also the question of what establishes social kinds. Not definitions obviously, because social kinds are objective and independent of language. But not anchoring either, because some objective social kinds—perhaps the Lumpenproletariat—were never set as social rules by collective acceptance or in any other way, and some objective social kinds never actually surface at all—perhaps there are social kinds that would have only surfaced under world communism. Perhaps kind structure in general has to do with the relative naturalness of certain higher level properties, or with “real definitions” (Epstein 2016: 166). But however the story goes as to the basis for higher level kind structure, I take it that the story should be independent of anchoring, and whether or not it is a form of grounding.)

So I say that—*contra* 1—anchors do not cross worlds. What does cross worlds are definitions (and perhaps kind identities). Indeed, I would say that the money case does not cross worlds, but Epstein’s war criminal case (above) does cross worlds, and that the best overall explanation for the difference is that the money case really is a case of anchoring-as-grounding, while the war criminal case isn’t a case of anchoring at all but one of definition.<sup>21</sup>

Starting with the money case, what is relevant are possible scenarios in which the various laws of 1862 and 1874 that began currency printing at the Treasury and which first recognized the BEP were not passed, nor was any alternative legislation put in place. Thus one might imagine scenarios in which the United States adopted Spanish dollars, or stuck with its original Continental Currency, or even adopted Wampum shells, as its official currency, where the BEP was established but instead authorized only to print parking violation tickets. Suppose that Sally—in a scenario in which Spanish dollars are the only currency of the United States—holds one Spanish dollar in her right hand, and one parking ticket in her left hand. Question: in which hand is Sally holding her money? I think it is obvious in this scenario that Sally is holding her money in her right hand (and an annoying parking ticket in her left), which is just as *GO* predicts. As the anchors shift across worlds, what counts as money shifts with them.

But Epstein—given his claim about anchors serving as a “universal tool”—seems committed to the idea that Sally would be holding her money in her left hand. For him Sally’s Spanish dollar (not being printed by the BEP) would still not be money, despite its imagined use in the United States as money. And for him Sally’s parking ticket (being printed by the BEP) would be money, despite its imagined function as a parking ticket. That strikes me as backwards. With money like that, Sally should hope to be poor!

Turning to the war criminals case, I agree with Epstein that we can ask whether people would be war criminals, even in imagined situations in which the ICC does not exist and the acts defining ‘war criminal’ are not found. For instance, if (let us imagine) Sally had led a war and massacred the civilians in an enemy city,

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<sup>21</sup> I owe this way of separating the cases to David Chalmers.

she would count as a war criminal even if the ICC does not exist in that scenario. But that is merely to say that the defined term ‘war criminal’ becomes a universal tool, exactly as definitions do.

So I say that all sides need to explain *the difference* between cases with modal exportation (being a war criminal), and without modal exportation (being money). And I say that *GO*—plus completely orthodox views of definition—can easily explain the difference, by treating the cases with exportation as definitions and the cases without exportation as grounding. But how can *GAF* explain the difference? By the lights of *GAF*, both definitions and anchorings export across worlds, so what tools remain to explain export barriers, where they arise? So overall I conclude that *GO* offers a better explanation than *GAF* for the range of cases.

All that aside, despite our disagreement over the best metaphysical model of how rules-and-moves operations generate social facts, Epstein and I are still near allies. We agree that grounding can shed light on social reality, and we agree that social reality can have the rules-and-moves structure he so clearly articulates. Indeed it is open to Epstein to accept *GO* while retaining virtually all of his other considerable insights.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Thanks especially to Brian Epstein, and also to David Chalmers, Janelle Derstine, Aaron Griffith, Rebecca Mason, Asya Passinsky, Mike Raven, Ronald Sundstrom, Robbie Williams, and audiences at the University of San Francisco, the University of Leeds, and the Pacific APA.

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