

Anchoring as Grounding: On Epstein's The Ant Trap

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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 sketching both Epstein's grounding-anchoring-framing (*GAF*) view and my preferred grounding-only (*GO*) alternative. 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, just as the background rules of chess determine what counts as a checkmate. Then there are foreground social moves that count as social outcomes, just as a particular movement of a plastic figure may count as a checkmate.

Thus consider the example (drawn from Searle 1995) of why a given piece of paper, Billy, counts as a United States dollar (USD). One relevant consideration involves the operative rules. There might have been a rule on which all and only seashells are USDs, or a rule on which all and only things printed in my office are USDs. But instead there is a rule on which—simplifying—all and only things printed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) are USDs.¹ That rule sets the background conditions for what counts as a USD. 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 counts as a USD.

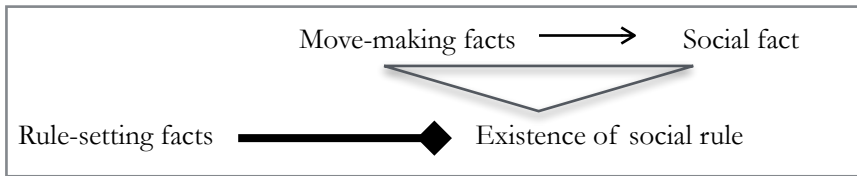
The question is how best to understand the metaphysics behind these “rules-and-moves” operations, by which something “counts as” a social entity.

1.1 *The grounding-anchoring-framing view*

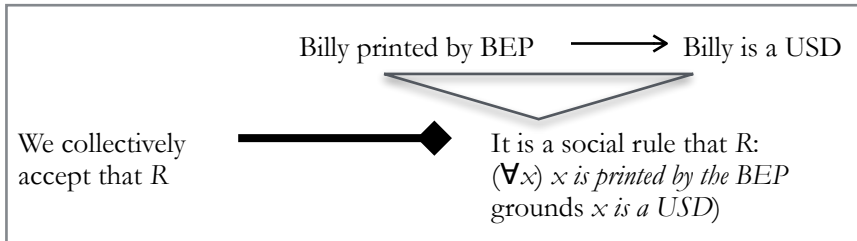
Epstein (2015: 82–5) offers a grounding-anchoring-framing (*GAF*) view, with the move-making facts in the foreground generating some given social fact, and the rule-setting facts in the background framing the whole situation. Here is the general model as I understand it, and its application to the example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

¹ In fact the BEP produces all US paper money (coins are produced by the US Mint), US postage stamps, and various awards certificates and government ID cards.

GAF



GAF, USD



There are three relations of interest in *GAF*. First, there is the thin arrow on the top 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 obtains. So Epstein would say that Billy’s being printed by the BEP grounds Billy’s being a USD.

Secondly, there is the thick diamond-headed arrow at the bottom 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 a USD, anchors the existence of the social rule that being printed by the BEP grounds being A USD. 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.

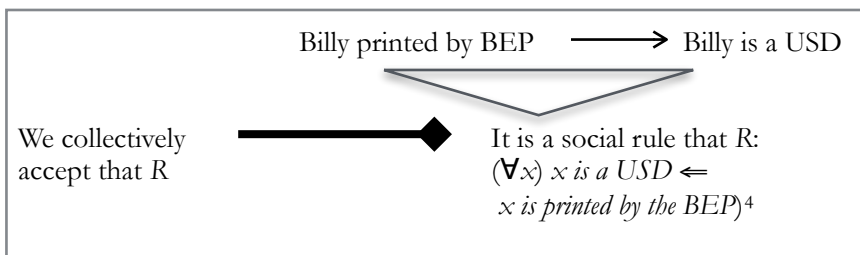
Thirdly, there is the inverted triangle in the middle pointing up from the existence of the social rule to the grounding complex. This is Epstein’s framing relation, which I take to relate a rule to a grounding fact. So the USD rule frames the grounding fact [Billy’s being printed by the BEP grounds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

² 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.” So perhaps Epstein would not endorse *GAF* but only *GA* (grounding-anchoring). That said, I do think he needs a framing relation. He believes in background social rules, and he believes in these foreground grounding complexes, and surely these are not unrelated phenomena! Indeed I think that the situation is perfectly parallel to the situation with *laws of nature*, where one needs to connect the background law of nature (“It is a law that all *F*s are *G*s”) to the particular instance (“if *Fa* then *Ga*”)—what van Fraassen (1980) speaks of as “the inference problem.” (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 the relation between laws and instances is nothing metaphysically.) In any case I focus primarily on anchoring, and my objections apply to *GAF* and *GA* equally.

Many of the details in *GAF, USD* are optional, and included only for a more definite application. (It is the structure that matters.) For instance, 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 definiteness, and I follow suit.³

The friend of *GAF* is also not committed to the rules taking the form of universally generalized grounding claims that Epstein (2015: 76–7) provides, and indeed I think she should reject the idea. For she wants the USD rule not merely to set positive conditions for counting as a USD, but also to set negative conditions for not counting as a USD, so as to entail for instance that my son’s latest drawing of an anglerfish is not a USD. The rule “ $(\forall x) x \text{ is printed by the BEP} \text{ grounds } x \text{ is a USD}$ ” fails to set any negative condition, and falls silent on my son’s drawing. The rules thus should not be one-way conditionals but something more like biconditionals, or better: counterfactually robust *functions* giving a directed mapping from whether or not a given thing is printed by the BEP, to whether or not it is a USD. This would lead to:

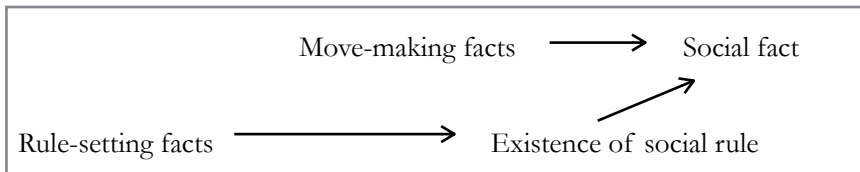
GAF, USD v.2



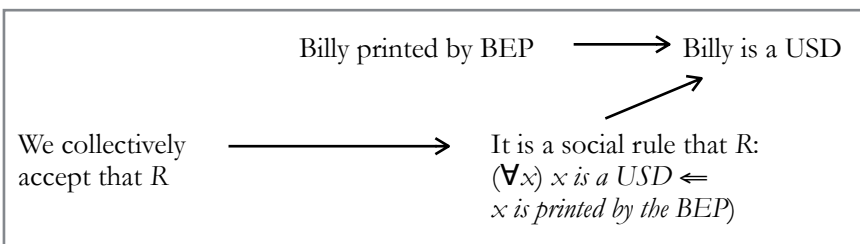
1.2 *The Grounding-Only View*

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

GO



GO, USD



³ Epstein (*personal communication*) in fact rejects viewing the rule-setting facts as collective acceptances. There are many alternatives, including patterns of coordinated behavior, and the dictates of the authorities. This is not at issue here.

⁴ *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 fits the general treatment of grounding via structural equation models that I advocate elsewhere (Schaffer 2016).

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 uniformly 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.⁵ These might seem like small differences, but—as I argue in §2—the question of whether all of the arrows are grounding arrows or not makes a major difference to social ontology, to underwrite the roles of rules and free social ontology from obscurity.

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 and Searle 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—and crucially for considering Epstein’s objections (§3)—*GO* does not say that there is no difference between rule-setting and move-making, but only says that they have something in common: both are grounding relations. *Compare*: there is a difference between baking and breaking, but both are still causative 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* is not committed to the implausibly strong claim that rule-setting and move-making are identical, but just to the weaker and more plausible claim that both are forms of grounding.

1.3 Common ground

Before proceeding to the dispute, it is worth clarifying what is not at issue. First, Epstein limits *GAF* to relations among facts, because he takes grounding to be a relation that only relates facts (cf. Rosen 2010).⁶ But—as Epstein (2015: 74–75) is well aware—there are other types of social entities, including social objects (dollars), social properties (being a dollar), and social events (earning a dollar). *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 *GO* 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. I beg no questions against Epstein this way.

Secondly, Epstein and I are both looking at models of metaphysical structure *at a given time*. The way something is at a given time may well be historically loaded (as is the case with properties like *being a USD*), or future-directed (*being the vanguard party*). But what I mean is that these models do not include temporally extended causal processes 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 things like social feedback loops and account for certain forms of social change.⁷ Both *GAF* and *GO* are equally compatible with any manner of temporally extended causal processes. (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

⁵ *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.”

⁶ 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.

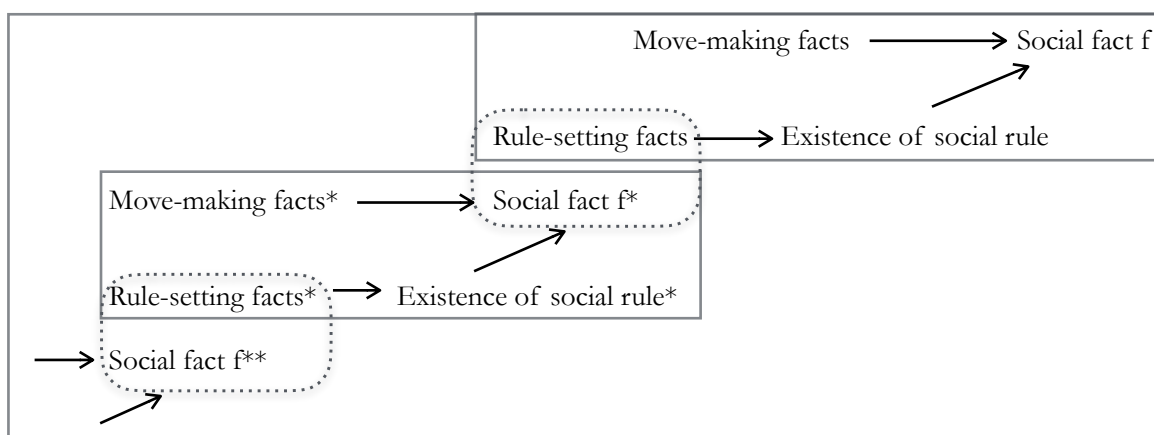
⁷ My thanks to Ronald Sundstrom for discussion of these issues.

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.

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 a USD) by satisfying a rule (the “printed by the BEP” rule). Epstein (2015: 74) says that “all social facts” arise through this pattern, but I think that there are exceptions. 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.⁸ 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 fits one 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 I think 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 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 social fact—namely a collective acceptance—to be grounded by a different pattern.

So I think that an adequate treatment of social reality should 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 case of Billy the dollar

⁸ I thank Asya Passinsky for this point.

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.

That said, these composite rule-move structures seem pervasive, and present in some of the most politically important cases of social construction, such as gender, race, and sexuality. For instance, a given human organism, Bobby, might count in current US society as—say—a woman, black, and lesbian. Focusing on gender, the social constructionist story for why Bobby counts as a woman presumably involves certain background rules of current US society for what it takes to count as a woman. Against this background, there are certain facts about Bobby—perhaps complex facts involving her perceived role in reproduction, or her own self-identification—that make it the case that Bobby thereby counts as a woman.^{9,10}

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.)

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. Grounding is posited as a relation of “non-causal constitution” that plays certain roles, with respect to notions such as fundamentality, generation, dependence, and explanation (Schaffer 2009, 2016). For instance, the claim that the biological is grounded in the physical underwrites various claims about the physical-biological relationship, such as that the biological state is non-fundamental, and non-causally generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of its physical state. Thus—in the course of recommending viewing social construction as a form of grounding—I (Schaffer 2017: 2454) wrote:

Role, grounding: The grounded is non-fundamental, and is generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of the grounds.¹¹

⁹ See Haslinger 2000 and Ásta 2008 for some of the leading views on the social construction of gender.

¹⁰ In my earlier discussions of social construction (Schaffer 2017: 2454–55; compare Griffith *forthcoming*) I said that social construction is a case of grounding in social patterns *in a distinctive way*, but left the notion of “distinctive” as a place-holder. (I said this because the social patterns ground not only the socially constructed facts, but also various non-socially-constructed facts, such as the set-theoretic fact that there is a set of social patterns, and existential facts such as the fact that there exist social patterns, *inter alia*.) It seems to me now that what is distinctive about social construction may be understood in terms of rule-move structures.

¹¹ Likewise 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 am saying that all of this talk applies to anchoring (and framing too). Epstein (2015: 72) also offers a variety of forms of evidence for full-grounding relations, including (i) the metaphysical sufficiency of the full ground, (ii) the grounded as nothing over and above the full grounds, and (iii) non-causal counterfactual covariation of the grounded on the full grounds, expressed via supervenience. I am saying that Epstein’s conception of the full grounds for social facts does not pass his own tests. Only by including the anchors (and framers) as grounds does one reach a conception of the full grounds that passes Epstein’s own tests.

I will now argue that anchoring does as grounding does, in playing *Role, grounding*. The core idea is that the relation between the rule-setting facts and the existence of the social rule is a relation of “non-causal constitution,” which underwrites all the claims that grounding is posited to underwrite. To begin with, there is a social rule, and it is clearly *non-fundamental* (as are all aspects of social reality). But in order to say that the social rule is non-fundamental, one must identify its grounds. And what but the rule-setting facts (e.g., the collective acceptances) 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 acceptances were to be lost (e.g., if we no longer collectively accepted anything about USDs), the rule would no longer exist. And if the collective acceptances were varied in various ways (e.g., if we were to collectively that being a USD is determined by being a seashell), 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 USDs, 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. The “metaphysical reason” (to use Epstein’s own language for grounding) why the rule exists surely involves the rule-setting facts. Very few relations have the power to back explanation (perhaps causation is the only other relation with this power), so non-causal explanation is indeed a telling sign.¹²

Putting this together, treating anchoring as a form of grounding 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.

Of course, for each of these roles, Epstein could either deny that the rule-setting facts play this role, or maintain that anchoring can also underwrite this role. But that seems incredible across the board.

Compare: Imagine a wild “baking specialist,” who maintained that baking was not a causal relation but a distinct *sui generis* relation. How could one argue otherwise? Surely one good argument for baking being causal is that *baking does as causation does*. That is, there are parallel roles for causation involving generation, dependence, and explanation, and the baked is generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of the baking (e.g. there are cookies in the kitchen because I baked them). Of course, for each of these roles, the baking specialist could either deny that baking plays this role, or maintain that baking can also underwrite this role. For instance with explanation, the baking specialist could deny that there is any explanation for the presence of the cookies, or she could say that baking just so happens to back explanation too (she would thus say that we should replace talk of “causal explanation” with talk of “causal or baking explanation”). Her position would not be inconsistent but merely incredible. My argument against the “anchoring specialist” is parallel to this style of argument against the baking specialist.

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.

¹² In this vein Audi (2012: 104) says: “The reason we must countenance grounding is that it is indispensable to certain important explanations.”

To illustrate, if the dollar rule were varied in various ways, then Billy's status as a USD would vary as well: if the rule were that being a USD is determined by being a seashell, then Billy would no longer be a USD). Likewise part of the reason why Billy is a USD 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 a USD; her wonderment could then be dispelled by teaching her about the rule, which surely is part of the metaphysical reason why Billy is a USD.

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. In short: anchoring paddles, waddles, and quacks like a grounding relation (and framing does too).

2.2 Modality and chaining

My second and third 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 Γ fully ground the fact f , then necessarily, if the facts Γ 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 Γ obtain then Γ grounds f ," and others (including myself; cf. Skiles 2015: 738) going for the weaker view that grounded facts merely metaphysically supervene on but are not necessitated by their full grounds.¹³

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, such as supervenience. Indeed *GAF* makes the relationship between the full grounds and what they ground highly contingent (upon the frame in place). It likewise makes the fully grounds metaphysically insufficient. To illustrate this point, recall that Epstein holds that Billy's being printed by the BEP *fully* grounds Billy's being a USD. Yet it should be clear that any connection between Billy's being printed by the BEP and Billy's being a USD 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 an additional ground. As such *GAF* offers a full ground that does not fit the modal implications of grounding.¹⁴

So while *GAF* does not fit the modal implications of grounding, *GO* locates an additional ground for Billy's being money in the social rule. This claim of an additional ground is exactly what is needed to regain necessitation (/supervenience, etc.) for the full grounds. It is only when the social rule is included in the grounds that anything sufficient for fixing Billy's monetary status comes into view.

As a third argument—turning to chaining—it is widely agreed that grounding relations chain. One simple formulation of this idea runs as follows (sticking to the singular case for ease):

¹³ Epstein himself endorses the idea that the full ground is metaphysically sufficient for, and subvenient to, the grounded (see note 11).

¹⁴ Mikkola (2015: 791) makes the point that the fact that Billy was printed by the BEP does not necessitate the fact that he is a USD. For her this is an objection to grounding-based accounts. I reply (Schaffer 2017: 2462) that the whole ground also needs to include the social rule linking being printed by the BEP to being a USD. This is a reply that only a *GO*-er can endorse.

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 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.¹⁵

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—to connect back to the argument from the roles of grounding (§2.1)—it bears all of the hallmarks of itself being a grounding relation:

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 were varied in various ways, then Billy's status as money 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 fourth reason for treating anchoring and framing as forms of grounding—which complements the observations above (§§2.1–2.2) 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 in with a general picture of “*interlevel metaphysics*.”

Bringing in grounding—which is one of Epstein's major advances in social ontology—constitutes progress, since 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 the metaphysics of 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

¹⁵ 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. I am making the same style of argument for the unity of move-making and rule-setting as forms of grounding.

metaphysics of primitive social construction relations remains in this respect obscure. I am saying that the grounding-anchoring view is equally obscure.¹⁶

As a second comparison—one drawing on Epstein’s (2015: ch. 1) motivating idea of “warding off spirits”—consider the “Hegelian” dualist who starts with the spooky idea of “the Spirit of Society,” but then trades in her “Spirit of Society” for a novel relation of “spiritualization” found only in the social realm. She says that social reality is constituted partly by grounding relations, but also partly by her new primitive relation of spiritualization. Whatever else she may have accomplished by this trade, her view remains spooky. She has just traded in a dualism of substances for a dualism of relations. I am saying that anchoring is just as objectionable as spiritualization, from the perspective of integrating social reality into a general metaphysics.

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.¹⁷ 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. (Epstein (*personal communication*) tells me that he hopes to develop such a view.) Perhaps in the end this would yield an improved vision of inter-level metaphysics generally. That would be welcomed. But all I can say for now is that, if *GAF* can be assimilated in with a general picture of interlevel metaphysics, Epstein has not yet shown it.

For now, 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 in with a more general pattern. Given the role grounding is usually thought to play in interlevel metaphysics, and given that anchoring and framing do as grounding does, assimilating anchoring and framing to grounding relations strikes me as the way forward.

3. Objections Considered

Epstein (2015: 115) says that his 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

¹⁶ In Schaffer (2017: 2452) 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.

¹⁷ 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.

ground.”¹⁸ So he offers three objections—of which the third is labelled (Epstein 2015: 123–4) “the fundamental reason for rejecting conjunctivism.” I conclude by discussing these objections.

3.1 *Intuitions of difference, and versions of individualism*

One objection 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 psychological facts—from “anchor individualism”—the thesis that the rule-setting facts ground out in individual psychological facts.¹⁹ 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 are 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.

Compare. 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

¹⁸ Epstein does not cite anyone as holding this “dominant view,” though he does (2015: 115) invoke “many followers of Searle.” Searle himself does not speak of grounding or anything like it, and I am not sure who among his followers does. But I hereby take up the banner of the view, even if I march alone.

¹⁹ *Clarification.* Epstein himself rejects both ground individualism and anchor individualism. His point, which I agree with, is just that they are separable theses, and one needs the tools to distinguish them.

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.²⁰

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. But the “thereby” is a *non sequitur*. The confusion is in treating these as competing causal 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 (2015: 121) that the 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 offer two independent replies, the first of which grants *arguendo* Epstein’s formulation of the rules as including the term ‘grounds’, but holds out that ‘grounds’ in the rule can be interpreted as meaning *partially grounds* (which is how *GO* has it, and what the modal implications of grounding demand: §2.2). Indeed it should be evident that we cannot possibly collectively accept could not be the full grounding conditions for facts such as that Billy is a USD, simply because we need not collectively accept anything about Billy.²¹ So Epstein’s demand on the rules cannot possibly be right. 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 more fundamental reply to Epstein’s first argument, which is that I think that Epstein has mis-stated the rule in the first place, and that ‘grounds’ should 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

²⁰ 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 *GO* plus collapse theorist might also accept. Thanks to Robbie Williams for helpful discussion.

²¹ 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 USD, it should be obvious that there need not be any collective acceptance of anything pertaining to Billy. Billy can still be a USD 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.

formulation of these principles involves dependence functions. Thus the dollar rule is best thought of as the structural equation:

Dollar rule: $(\forall x) x \text{ is a USD} \Leftarrow x \text{ is printed by the BEP}$

Dollar rule says how the value of the *being a USD* 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 *Dollar rule* does not use ‘grounds’ at all, Epstein’s objections do not arise.²²

3.3 Exporting the rules

Finally, Epstein (2015: 123–4) presents, as “the fundamental reason for rejecting conjunctivism,” an objection 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:

1. Anchoring exports across times, places, and possibilities.
2. If anchoring is grounding, then anchoring would not export across times, places, and possibilities.
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.”

²² Searle (1995: 28) holds the schematic view that ‘z is Y’ is grounded in ‘z is X’ and ‘we collectively accept that Xs count as Ys in context C.’ For Searle the rule uses ‘count as.’ Passinsky (2016: 79) offers a *recognition-dependent* account on which Billy is a USD “(partly or fully) in virtue of being publicly recognized as [being a USD] 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.

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 that preclude treating anchoring as grounding.

I offer two independent replies, the first of which rejects 2, and the second—my preferred reply—rejects 1. As far as 2, I think Epstein is just wrong that grounding cannot export to other places and times. You have the property (in your “here” and “now”) of reading a sentence written in my apartment in 2017. Part of the grounds for you having that property involve the goings-on in my apartment in 2017. Likewise part of the grounds for your being a member of *homo sapiens* involves evolutionary facts from the distant past, perhaps part of the grounds for you being *you* might involve past facts about the sperm and ovum you came from, and part of the grounds for you being mortal involves future facts about your fate.

So let us imagine that the USD rule comes into existence in Washington DC in 1875 (when the BEP actually began operation), and ceases to exist in 2019 (when Trump declares that Trump steaks are the new US currency). That rule still covers all things without restriction to space and time, and so it covers the Paleolithic cave paintings at Lascaux, the pieces of paper folded in my wallet now, and any future twenty-fifth century holographic imprints. That rule simply asks, was it printed by the BEP? This has the consequence that being a USD is an extrinsic, relational feature of a thing (just as the examples of the previous paragraph), but that strikes me as clearly the right result. Part of why Billy is a USD has to do with the wider world.

I am more conflicted as to whether grounding can export to other worlds, due to modal properties. Perhaps part of the grounds for you being reasonable have to do with how relevant counterparts of you respond to reasons at other worlds. But even in this case I find it more natural to say that the grounds for you being reasonable are all actual grounds, and what makes these otherworldly creatures into relevant counterparts of you is similarity in these respects. And in any case, Billy’s being a USD does not seem modal in this way. So I am prepared to spot Epstein:

2*. If anchoring is grounding, then anchoring would not export across possibilities.

To re-generate the argument to 3, this may be paired with:

1*. Anchoring exports across possibilities.

But I spot Epstein 2* in part because I do not accept 1* anyway. If I did accept 1*, and then had to choose between 2* and 3, I am not sure what I would choose. I find the arguments of §2 that anchoring is a form of grounding to be compelling, so I would be placing on the scales:

<p><u>For anchoring as grounding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treating anchoring as grounding underwrites claims about non-fundamentality, generation, dependence, and explanation for anchoring• Treating anchoring as grounding respects standard views of the modal implications of full grounding• Treating anchoring as grounding explains chaining• Treating anchoring as grounding frees social ontology from obscure <i>sui generis</i> relations	<p><u>Against anchoring as grounding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treating anchoring as grounding means allowing grounding to export across possibilities (given the acceptance of 1*)
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I do not know that there is a principle way to weigh these options, but I would at least say that the claim of 2* that grounding cannot export across possibilities is no sacred principle, and that many weighty principles of grounding are pressing on the other side of the scale.

Fortunately I do not need to worry about comparing these positions, because 1* is implausible anyway. Anchoring does not export across possibilities, but in fact looks just like grounding standardly does in this regard. Here it is crucial to distinguish between cases involving the generation of social rules, and cases involving stipulative definitions of terms. If I say “Let ‘schmollar’ mean anything printed from my printer” then I have stipulatively defined ‘schmollar,’ and—if my stipulation is successful—I have thereby rendered it *analytic* what counts as a schmollar, holding in all conceptually possible situations irrespective of whether my stipulation or anything like it is found at those situations. In a conceptually possible situation which consists just of you printing sonnets on my printer (without any stipulations about ‘schmollar’ made within that situation), your sonnets are still schmollars. 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 being currency than for being a USD. 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; see also Mason 2016 for a useful overview). 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.)

I am setting up to say that anchoring relations do not cross worlds, but that when one find things crossing worlds, what one has found are definitions (or perhaps kind identities).²³

Here it is instructive to contrast Epstein’s leading example of Billy being a USD with his war criminal example. Taking the war criminal example first, I agree with Epstein that this crosses worlds, in that it makes sense to ask whether people are war criminals, even in imagined situations in which the ICC does not exist and the acts defining ‘war crimes’ are not found. For instance, if (let us imagine) Sally had led a war and massacred the civilians in an enemy city, 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 crimes’ becomes a universal tool, exactly as definitions do.²⁴

But the case of Billy being a USD is different. In this case—continuing the relevant possible scenarios are ones 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.²⁵ 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. So 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 a USD? I think it is

²³ I owe this way of separating the cases to David Chalmers.

²⁴ In fact, Article 8.2 of the Rome Statute begins: “For the purpose of this Statute, ‘war crimes’ means: ...” This is evidently stated as a definition.

²⁵ Crucially, this legislation does not offer a stipulative definition of the word ‘dollar’ but rather sets authorization conditions for the making of dollars. Thus the Second Legal Tender Act (1862) begins: “*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That the Secretary of the Treasury is hereby authorized to issue, in addition to the amounts heretofore authorized, on the credit of the United States, one hundred and fifty millions of dollars of United States notes, ...”

obvious in this scenario that Sally is holding the USD in her right hand. After all, if Sally wants to buy a cup of coffee priced at 1 USD, we know which hand she should use. What Sally holds in her left hand is not a USD and indeed not even money at all, but just an annoying parking ticket. I take this to show that being a USD does not export across worlds, but rather varies across worlds, as the rule-setting facts vary.

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

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 a USD). 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* fits into a better explanation than *GAF* for the differences between 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 many of his other considerable insights.²⁶

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