Book Reviews

Jacobsen, Michael Hviid, *The Anthem Companion to Zygmunt Bauman*.
London: Anthem Press, 2023, pp. 220.

Zygmunt Bauman's legacy as a leading thinker on modernity and its discontents
is explored with new insights in Michael Hviid Jacobsen's edited volume, *The
Anthem Companion to Zygmunt Bauman*. This review delves into how well the book
captures the essence of Bauman's thought across different stages of his career.

Undoubtedly, Bauman represented one of the most influential representa-
tives of contemporary sociological thought. Born in Poznań on 19 November
1925 to Jewish parents, in 1939, following the Nazi invasion of Poland, he was
forced to flee to the Soviet occupation zone where he enlisted in a Soviet military
unit. From the end of the conflict to 1948, he took part in some operational tasks
for Soviet military espionage. After the war, he began studying and eventually
teaching sociology at the University of Warsaw. In 1968, the incessant rise of anti-
Semitism among the various levels of Polish society, pushed many Polish Jews to
emigrate abroad, including Bauman. He therefore emigrated first to Israel, where
he taught at Tel Aviv University, and later accepted a professorship of sociology
at the University of Leeds, where he taught from 1971 to 1990. A resident of Leeds
ever since, Bauman passed away on 9 January 2017 at the age of 91.

Scholarly rooted in the great European intellectual tradition of the second
half of the 20th century, Bauman's thought can be contextualized in the frame of
the theorizations of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Antonio Gramsci, Émile Durk-
heim, Max Weber, Georg Lukács, and Georg Simmel. Generally, Bauman be-
longed to the tradition of the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory. He gained inter-
national fame thanks to his studies regarding the connection between the culture
of modernity and totalitarianism, particularly in the case of Nazism and the Hol-
ocaust. Also, among his innumerable research interests, he focused on the transi-
tion from modernity to postmodernity and the related ethical issues. Notably, he
compared the concept of modernity and postmodernity to the solid and liquid
state of society respectively, underscoring that while in the modern age everything
was given as a solid construction, the post-modern (or late-modern) "liquid" so-
ciety was characterized by no clear outlines and certainties, giving space to inse-
curity and fear.

In this frame, *The Anthem Companion to Zygmunt Bauman* represents a valua-
ble edited book comprising most of the key facets of Bauman's sociological
thought, which are introduced by the authors in an all-encompassing, wide-rang-
ing, and well-nuanced perspective. Specifically, ten chapters organize the book,
covering different themes of Bauman's thinking and work, each focusing on top-
ics and ideas that were characteristic of Bauman's way of doing and writing soci-
ology. In its thorough analysis, the book retraces the four key phases of Bauman's
sociological thought, namely the Marxist phase (1960s-1970s), the critique of mo-
dernity phase (late 1980s), the post-modern phase (1990s), and the liquid-modern
phase (early 2000s)—with its focus on the conception of "liquid modernity". As
highlighted in the introductory section of the book, all the main themes of Bau-
man's sociological endeavours are scrutinized throughout the work, including the
concepts of modernity, post-modernity, liquid modernity, morality, ethics, cul-
ture, the Holocaust, Jewish identity, freedom, religion, poverty, inequality, uto-
pia, "retrotopia", nostalgia, "adiaphorization", consumerism, identity, globaliza-
tion, love, fear, security, ambivalence, suffering, the working class, the stranger,

the "other", the migrant, and death. Given the vastity of Bauman's scholarship and the variety of its themes of research, in addition to highlighting Bauman's central themes, the volume also examines the more neglected areas of his work. From a methodological perspective, the book reconstructs Bauman's thinking using the sociologist's primary literature, the classical sociological and philosophical literature that had influenced his theorizations, and the coeval and successive secondary scholarly literature and debates built around his works.

In the first chapter "Zygmunt Bauman: Weberian Marxist?", Peter Beilharz analyses the influence of Marx and Weber in Bauman. The chapter first discusses the notion of "Weberian Marxism" and then, in separate sections, examines indepth the influence of respectively Marx and Weber in Bauman's sociological theory. Specifically, the chapter deepens Bauman's analysis of social classes and elites through scrutinizing his works *Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement. A Sociological Study* (1972), *Officialdom, and Class: Bases of Inequality in Socialist Society* (1974), and *Memories of Class: The Pre-History and After-Life of Class* (1982). Here, Marx and Weber appear as two paramount references in Bauman's theoretical posture, contributing to building some of the sociologist's paradigmatic assumptions linked to class identity, inequality, consumerism, and bureaucratization. Special attention is given to the concept of "modern" rationalization, a *Meistermotif* of Bauman's understanding of "solid" modernity. As modern incarnations of Prometheus and Sisyphus respectively, Marx and Weber embody the principles of revolution and repetition, change and stasis—which Bauman reconnects to the unfolding of modern society and its transition to post-modernity.

The second chapter "A Freudian without Psychology: The Influence of Sigmund Freud on Zygmunt Bauman's Sociology" by Matt Dawson highlights the sociological elements in Freud's works and how they affected Bauman. The author suggests that Bauman makes use of Freud's insights in five specific areas: the Freudian conflictual pendulum between freedom and security, in which Bauman highlights society's trade-off between uncertain freedom and restricting security; the relation between reality and the pleasure principle, that is core to the transition from solid to liquid modernity; the concepts of ambivalence and death, the former seen as the element that rational modernity has sought to remove from its well-ordered "social garden" also through expunging the latter; the construction of the identity of the stranger and the idea of community based on exclusivist, anti-Kantian understandings of the "others"; and the shifting forms of narcissism, considered as a widespread tendency in the hyper-individualistic liquid modern life.

Turning to the third chapter "Modernity and the Holocaust: Exploring Zygmunt Bauman's Contribution to the Sociology of the Holocaust", Adele Valeria Messina deals with the fundamental Baumanian topic of the uncanny relationship between modernity and the Jewish *Shoah*. Naturally, the key reference for the chapter's analysis is Bauman's eminent masterpiece *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), in which the sociologist provocatively asks whether the massive slaughter of Europe's Jews represented a return to a barbaric past or a nasty aspect of modernity. Bauman's core argument vis-à-vis the Holocaust rested on the idea that the extermination of the Jews was an outcome of the concepts of modern rationality and bureaucracy. In this respect, the chapter's author reports an exhaustive review of both historical and sociological scholarly literature on Bauman's fundamental book. Unlike the sociological secondary literature, the historical one is affected by the novelties following the opening of the archives after the demise of

the socialist bloc. Generally, this literature review unveils a core critique towards Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, i.e., the underestimation of the role of anti-Semitism in Germany (and elsewhere in Europe) because of the belief in the genocidal potential of any modern nation-state. Echoing Hannah Arendt's ideas of "desk murderer" (*Schreibtischtäter*)—an impersonal bureaucrat performing administrative functions in rational mode without regard to moral consequences—and "banality of evil"—a concept, as highlighted by the literature,[1] originally conceived by Everett C. Hughes[2]—Bauman believed that the Holocaust had been possible because of the process of rationality in modern bureaucracy. Thus, Auschwitz was conceived as an example of "murderous Fordism", that, while producing largescale death, resembled the mass production of goods typical of modern industrial society.

Instead, in chapter four "Zygmunt Bauman and the Continental Divide in Social Theory" Stjepan G. Meštrović, Michael Ohsfeldt, and Jacob Hardy explore how Bauman's sociology is deeply rooted in European rather than American sociological tradition in terms of attitudes, origins, values, and even prejudices. Unlike American sociology, which is markedly optimistic, pragmatic, and empirical, Bauman's social theory—in line with the writings of Marx, the critical theorists, European existentialists, and philosophers—is pessimistic, unempirical, idealistic, and sceptic towards progress.

Consistent with the previous, chapter five "Zygmunt Bauman on the West: Re-Treading Some Forking Paths of Bauman's Sociology" by Jack Palmer deals with the issue of sociology's "Eurocentrism". Here, Bauman's reflections on colonialism and decolonization, the Jewish question, the interpretation of modernity, and the communist project in central-eastern Europe are clarified, showing how Bauman understood the contemporary discussion about Eurocentrism in sociology and underscored the importance of "decolonizing" its canons and operative concepts. Also, the chapter highlights Bauman's so-called "cultural turn", i.e., his humanist revision of Marxism and the elaboration of a cultural sociology hinging on semiotics and hermeneutics.

Furthermore, in chapter six "Death as a Social Construct: Zygmunt Bauman and the Changing Meanings of Mortality" Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Nicklas Runge evaluate Bauman's main work on the theme of death and its meanings to humans and societies *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992). Bauman applied the specific notion of "deconstruction" to describe how society in different ways seek to turn death and immortality into manageable or acceptable concepts that can keep people occupied and engaged as a distraction from real death ("death proper"), which remains an unsolvable mystery. In this vein, Bauman analytically distinguished between modern society's "deconstruction of mortality" and postmodern society's "deconstruction of immortality", both serving the purpose of making life meaningful despite the inevitability of death.

Then, chapter seven "Zygmunt Bauman and the 'Nostalgic Turn'" by Dariusz Brzeziński focuses on Bauman's vision of "retrotropia", which is described as a multidimensional process of turning to the past as a reaction to the increasing uncertainty and unpredictability of contemporary conjunctures. In this sense, the author scrutinizes Bauman's late work *Retrotopia* (2017), underlining the main

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[1] Messina, A.V. 2020, "New Perspectives on Everett C. Hughes's Sociological Works about the Holocaust, 1930s–1980s", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 19 (3), 337-361.

[2] Hughes, E.C. 1962., "Good People and Dirty Work", *Social Problems*, 10 (1), 3-11.

ideas behind the concept in the context of liquid modernity. "Retrotopia" is considered a consequence of nostalgia, which tends to reappear as a defence mechanism in times of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals. Recent examples of nostalgic turns comprise Donald Trump's presidential campaign (with the slogan "Make America Great Again"), Brexit, Russia's neo-imperial posture vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine, and post-Covid-19 "defensive" social reactions. Per Bauman, post-modern nostalgic society would be characterized by a resurgence of violence due to distrust towards individuals and institutions ("back to Hobbes"), tribal forms of solidarity ("back to tribes"), rampant socioeconomic inequalities ("back to inequality"), and self-centered reaffirmation that places security above freedom.

Moving to chapter eight "Bauman on Borders: The Role of *Our* Door in the Construction of the Stranger", Shaun Best describes Bauman's complex understanding of how the stranger as a distinctive analytical, social, and cultural category comes into being in contemporary sociological discourse. According to the sociologist, in current liquid modernity the stranger appears in various forms, including the poor, the flawed consumer, the unwanted foreigner, the forced refugee, and the reluctant migrant. In this context, the concept of border is paramount by "constructing" and "deconstructing" the stranger. Moreover, while in solid modernity the stranger was seen predominantly as an element that spoiled the harmony of the "social garden" or "garden state", compelling the authorities to correct, repair, assimilate or ultimately exterminate him, in liquid modernity the stranger ignites fear and insecurity, making individuals adopt a defensive mechanism. Crucially, due to the hyper-individualistic, post-liberal tendencies and the lack of forms of communitarianism, in liquid modernity any other person beyond the individual is a potential stranger.

The next contribution in chapter nine "Seeking Windows in a World of Mirrors: Zygmunt Bauman's Difficult Art of Conversation" by Mark Davis and Elena Álvarez-Álvarez introduces Bauman's last books, which are structured in the form of conversations. Here, some fundamental aspects of liquid society are assessed, including the concepts of "liquid evil" and "adiaphorization" (i.e., the cancellation or denial of moral impulse through mounting social indifference and the loss of collective solidarity). Special attention is dedicated to the analysis of the features of contemporary social medias, which enhance a "world of noise", discarding real communication. The central importance given by liquid modernity to social media and virtual networks validates the need to rediscover the importance of conversations and dialogues in the frame of mutual respect and understanding.

Finally, chapter ten "Ambivalence (Not Love) is All Around: Zygmunt Bauman and the (Ineradicable) Ambivalence of Being" by Michael Hviid Jacobsen highlights Bauman's reflexions on ambivalence—expressed chiefly in the work *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991)—which is considered a fundamental condition of human existence and social life. Originally conceived by the psychological and psychiatric literature, the notion of ambivalence in post-modernity indicates that individuals are increasingly confronted with an unprecedented number of choices and an equally unprecedented range of contradictions, leading to chaos, uncertainty, and insecurity. Historically, ambivalence and ambiguity have been overcome either through incorporation and assimilation ("anthropophagic" strategy) or expulsion and destruction ("anthropoemic" strategy) of the deviant, the

strange, the alien, and the ambiguous. Still, paradoxically, order could not exist without ambivalence since it manifests as a reaction to it.

In conclusion, given its multifaceted nature and variegated perspectives, the volume represents a thorough and clear compendium of Zygmunt Bauman's sociological thought. The book's main merit lies in the analysis of the more overlooked concepts of Bauman's sociology, while also including its mainstream themes. Generally, the book is clear, refined, and well-written, arousing interest and curiosity in the reader. In terms of its scope and readership, the study can be considered a precious—albeit auxiliary—tool for researchers and scholars whose fields of research embrace sociology, political science, political theory, and philosophy, as well as for a broader audience willing to engage in key elements of Bauman's sociology.

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Kitcher, Philip, *Moral Progress.*
New York: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. xix + 200

What criteria can we appeal to for qualifying a change in what we believe and do as an instance of moral progress? Do these criteria necessarily presuppose a reference to a universal and objective moral truth? And how can we promote progressive moral changes? These are the fundamental questions that Philip Kitcher's latest book, *Moral Progress*, tackles.

The book presents, in written form, the text of the first *Munich Lectures in Ethics* that Kitcher delivered at LMU in 2019. As often happens with this type of publication, the organization of the content is less than optimal, the argumentation is sometimes a bit rough, and the comparison with the literature on the subject limited. But the text, on the other hand, maintains some of the pleasant intellectual agility usually associated with lectures of this sort and level. Moreover, it is accompanied and complemented by three sets of excellent replies from three outstanding philosophers, namely Amia Srinivasan, Susan Neiman, and Rahel Jaeggi.

The first chapter of Kitcher's text provides an overview of his pragmatist and anti-realist theory of moral progress. The two following chapters deal with specific issues related to this theory although, in doing so, they add much more than just a few finishing touches. The second part, dedicated to the problem that the phenomenon of false consciousness represents for Kitcher's theory, actually does much more than proposing a solution it, as we will see. The third and final part is dedicated to clarifying the limited and quite specific ways in which this pragmatist theory allows us to frame the notion of progress in terms of "truth" and

"moral knowledge". The readers with little interest or sympathy for the pragmatist tradition—within which the conceptualization of truth is notoriously a long-standing issue—will be pleased to discover that they can skip this part without missing out on much.

For reasons that will be clear in a minute, a good place to start outlining the contours of Kitcher's theory of moral progress is his evolutionary account of morality itself, which he offers in part II. According to Kitcher, morality represents a bio-cultural innovation specific to the species Homo sapiens and it emerged in the late Paleolithic (49). According to Kitcher, "the best available picture of pre-moral hominin—and human—life portrays our predecessors as possessing a capacity for identifying the desires and intentions of their fellow band members and for adjusting their behavior so as to engage in joint projects with others" (50). For social creatures whose survival depends on the group to which they belong, this ability, which Kitcher refers to as "responsiveness" (50) is somewhat necessary to ensure some degree of cooperation within the group, and thus the survival of the group itself.

This limited responsiveness, for Kitcher, was likely shared by the first sapiens, who spent the vast majority of their stay on planet Earth (which began around 300,000 years ago) organized in small bands of hunter-gatherers. This limited responsiveness constituted a limit to intra-group cooperation and, thus, to the maximum size a group could hope to reach (51-52). Morality, against this background, functionally presents itself as a social technology that allowed us to overcome this impasse and increase the responsiveness of our species' members, enabling the formation of larger and more cohesive groups. What mechanisms allowed its emergence? Kitcher provides only a few details on this matter, and the reader who wants to know more will have to return to the first four chapters of *The Ethical Project* to which Kitcher's current account remains substantially faithful.[1]

How does the theme of moral progress fit into these views of our evolutionary past? Just as in *The Ethical Project* (2011, chap. 6), Kitcher establishes the continuity between the two themes through a functionalist perspective. On such a perspective, the evolutionary understanding of the original function of morality allows us to define what moral progress consists of. More specifically, if the original function of the moral device is to compensate for the limits of human responsiveness, i.e., to correct and amplify their limited ability to adopt others' perspectives, needs, interests, and desires, then moral progress is primarily "a matter, if you like, of improving this device, the responsiveness amplifier" (148). Historical cases such as the abolition of slavery, the emancipation of women, and the acceptance of homosexual relationships are interpreted by Kitcher in these terms.

As anticipated, Kitcher characterizes this conception of moral progress as essentially pragmatic and anti-teleological, contrasting it from the outset with the realist conception that sees moral progress as an approximation to moral truth, a progressive activity of discovering previously ignored bits of moral knowledge (15). Instead of seeing moral progress as an alignment of our beliefs with reality based on epistemic standards, we should see it as the solution to practical problems afflicting the moral architecture of society: not progress *towards* truth or correct moral beliefs, but progress *from*, based on overcoming limitations and problematic situations (25).

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[1] Kitcher, P., 2011, *The Ethical Project*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Conceiving moral progress in these terms, Kitcher argues, has several advantages. A very important advantage is that, starting from this pragmatic conception, we can have a better understanding of what happens when a society progresses morally, and use this understanding to outline a method that helps us in identifying morally problematic situations and ways to resolve them for the best.

The development of this method is the fundamental contribution of the volume. It is articulated in a long series of steps that occupy much of the first and second chapter. Simplifying, we can summarize it as follows. First, if an individual or a group complains about a situation despite the current moral code allowing it, this situation is to be considered prima facie problematic and is to be further examined to evaluate the actual justification of the initial complaint (34-36). How should this examination be conducted? Kitcher appeals here to the regulatory model of an "ideal conversation"—an ideal that leads him to label his view as "democratic contractualism" (57-58). According to this model, problematic situations are those that a society would see as such if representatives of all involved viewpoints, having to deliberate together based on justified factual beliefs and in conditions of deep mutual respect and sympathy, would agree on their problematic character (37). The same model then comes into play in defining the standard that makes a change a progress. A proposal is a justified resolution of a problematic situation only if the transition from the problematic situation to the proposed one would be accepted in an ideal conversation where the perspectives of all stakeholders are represented (38).

What should be done in cases where a situation is objectively problematic but no one complains about it, perhaps because they have internalized the prejudices of a given culture despite being victims of it? In the second chapter of the book (aptly titled "Problems of False Consciousness"), the proposed method is integrated to address these cases. Even in the absence of actual challenges, Kitcher clarifies, "societies should periodically check whether the restrictions they impose on the range of appropriate self-models for a certain subgroup can be justified" (67). The kind of social experimentation proposed by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor in their time to question the validity of Victorian prejudices about gender remains for Kitcher the principal tool for this purpose (68).

This proposal will not sound extremely original to those who have been following the debate for some years. Peter Railton and, more recently, Elizabeth Anderson have advanced similar and influential ideas, and it is a pity that Kitcher does not spend more resources clarifying how his position differs from theirs, especially from Anderson's, who share with Kitcher a broadly pragmatist view.[2]

Additionally, there are several problems that Kitcher's text leaves open or does not address entirely satisfactorily. For example, one might wonder if the theoretical framework offered by Kitcher truly does away with notions such as "moral truth". In fact, the appeal to an ideal deliberation procedure characterized by sympathy and mutual respect seems to presuppose and embody, in some way, the idea that at least the judgment "everyone has an equal right to participate in

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[2] See Railton, P., 1986, "Moral realism", *Philosophical Review*, 95 (2), 163-207; Anderson, E., *Social movements, experiments in living, and moral progress: Case studies from Britain's abolition of slavery.* The Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas, https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/14787; Anderson, E., 2015, "Moral bias and corrective practices: A pragmatist perspective", *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association,* 89, 21-47.

this conversation" is true in a strong and non-pragmatic sense. And what is this if not a moral judgment? Furthermore, one cannot but wonder whether his methodological proposal for fostering progress presupposes an overly rationalist view of the phenomenon, underestimating the importance of volitional obstacles, rather than cognitive ones, that it must overcome. After all, many people in many circumstances know what would be morally right to do, but this is often insufficient to motivate them to do it. How can the ideal conversation (or some institutional embodiment of it) address this problem? Kitcher, as I have said, leaves these and other questions unanswered.

Nevertheless, for the clarity and the degree of detail with which it is articulated, his contribution remains a highly recommended read for anyone interested in the theme of moral progress.

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McKenzie, Kerry, *Fundamentality and Grounding*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. 74.

Fundamentality and Grounding is an academic publication that stands out in the landscape of contemporary metaphysics. Its general intent is to assess some of the central issues that arise around the widely debated notion of "grounding", according to a naturalistic methodological viewpoint proper to the metaphysics of science. Such methodology aims at understanding what is possible to "import" from science to "update" or "inform" metaphysics and how to implement this task. Specifically, three issues are considered:

- What are the relationships between the notions of fundamentality and grounding?
- Is the notion of grounding used in the various philosophical discussions ambiguous? In other words, are there substantially different types of grounding?
- Should we exclude the possibility of infinite regress in the order of grounding?

McKenzie is clear from the outset in stating that the concepts of fundamentality and grounding are intimately linked. As it shall be clear, she regards "grounding" as a "level connecting explanation" (8) among facts or entities belonging to different metaphysical categories. Grounding bears interesting relationships to the notion of ontological priority, which is undoubtedly the most common way of thinking about fundamentality: x is fundamental if there is no y ontologically prioritized over x. The interest in grounding is motivated by its close connection with the concept of fundamentality, so conceived. The reason for this interest, McKenzie explains, arises from the fact that fundamentality plays a key role in the way metaphysics is often understood, namely, as the study of the fundamental.

In what follows, I critically review Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of *Fundamentality and Grounding*, the stated purpose of which is to naturalize the metaphysics of grounding, grounding being a relation often relegated to a priori metaphysical analysis

only. By naturalization, in this case, McKenzie means the reevaluation of some important features commonly attributed to the notion of grounding in light of what science, in the present case, physics, says. Two positions characterize McKenzie's philosophical stance. They emerge clearly in the third and fourth chapters:

- grounding is not a single relation, but various relations of grounding must be recognized;
- in science, infinite explanatory regressions, often deemed vicious by metaphysics, are permitted. Consequently, grounding relations, closely tied to the concept of metaphysical explanation, can be involved in such regressions without concern (as metaphysics must heed the insights from science.).

The second chapter is aimed at identifying how grounding should be understood. This task is particularly challenging due to the high complexity and multitude of positions expressed regarding this notion. Philosophers have tried to make sense of the following ideas:

- the world possesses a gradually *stratified* structure;
- such stratification obtains in virtue of the *explanatory determination* of one level over another;
- there exists a fundamental, i.e., ontologically prioritized level, which *explanatory determines* the others.

Capturing the specifics of such a determination required the introduction of a new notion, that of grounding, and the reasons behind this necessity are the following:

- causation is not the relationship of determination sought. Indeed, the concept of causation connects different temporal moments, while the notion of explanatory determination must be capable of establishing a hierarchy between levels (e.g., Schaffer 2012)[1];
- modal notions are inadequate to capture explanatory notions, such as that of explanatory determination (e.g., Sider 2020)[2];
- the notion of determination has quite different characteristics from those of ontological dependence, not the least of which is that it entertains a different relation to the notion of priority: to say that x depends, at least in part, ontologically on y implies that y has priority over x. If x depends on y, however, the existence of x also implies in a metaphysically necessary way that of y. From a standpoint of determination, therefore, x is prioritized over y.

The notion of grounding often appeals to the notion of *metaphysical explanation*. Remarkably, the "grounding school" divides into two main families, the unionist and the separatist. Unionists claim that the grounding relation coincides exactly with the metaphysical explanation, while separatists do not. The separatists claim that grounding relations are what *justify* or what *underly* explanations. There appears to be a good reason to avoid treating the notion of metaphysical explanation according to a single notion. In fact, a unifying approach runs the risk of slipping into unclear theoretical involutions. Among them, for example, one can find such questions as "what is the grounding of the notion of grounding?" According to

[1] Schaffer, J. 2012, "Grounding, Transitivity, and Contrastivity", in F. Correia and B. Schnieder (ed.), *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality*, Cambridge University Press, 122-138.
[2] Sider, T. 2020, "Ground Grounded", *Philosophical* Studies, 177 (3), 747-767.

Wilson (2014)[3] and Koslicki (2015),[4] these envelopments of the notion of grounding have been dictated by an abuse of the a priori metaphysics approach, which seems to self-generate problems for itself, to the detriment of their relevance. The author's view looks favorably on the vision of a separatist grounding approach and argues that there are theoretical resources in elementary physics that push for such an approach, which she sets out to defend in the book.

In the third chapter McKenzie specifies how grounding can be understood as a *connector of levels*. After all, the author argues, there are two ways of connecting levels (and I believe this constitutes this book's major contribution to the existing literature on grounding). The first way connects levels belonging to the same category, which can be, for example, the category of physical objects, physical properties, physical laws, and so on. The second way, on the other hand, is to understand grounding as a connector between transcategorical levels, that is, as a connector of different categories. For McKenzie, the distinction between these two kinds of "connection between levels" is well founded in that it refers to two different kinds of metaphysical explanations. Levels that are connected by remaining within the same category are called "levels of nature" by McKenzie. In contrast, levels of the second kind, that is, levels between different categories, are called "levels of metaphysics".

As an example, within the category of "objects", it is possible to recognize the level of ordinary objects and the level of subatomic objects such as protons or electrons. Following McKenzie's analysis, these two levels are levels of science. The distinction between these two levels within the same category is attributed, according to McKenzie, to the recognition of a priority status of subatomic entities over ordinary ones. Such recognition pertains to the science. The category of "objects" is just one of the categories that one can introduce. Alongside it, it is possible to admit the existence of the categories of properties or even physical laws. Now, these different categories represent the various levels of metaphysics, and the priority relations among them belong to metaphysics and are obtained through the grounding relations between the different categories.

The distinction McKenzie outlines thus raises the following question: what relationship exists between the levels of science and the levels of metaphysics? Given the different relationships in each hierarchy, these questions have no obvious answers. Nonetheless, if one thing becomes clear from McKenzie's analysis, it is that to speak of "stratified" metaphysics acquires a specific meaning, since, as it turns out, one is faced with two different hierarchies, on the one hand that of the levels of nature and on the other that of the levels of metaphysics. By appealing to the Humean mosaic, McKenzie contends it is not possible to examine the levels of nature based on those of metaphysics and vice versa. The moral to be drawn from this, according to McKenzie, is that there are two notions of fundamentality, and thus priority, that are not inter-reducible. One is faced with a pluralist thesis about priority that favors a very specific insight: the levels of nature and those of metaphysics establish two different dimensions of priority. The hierarchical direction of the levels of nature is thus essentially different from the hierarchical direction of the levels of metaphysics. This "multi-dimensionality" aspect has, in the

[3] Wilson, J.M. 2014, "No Work for a Theory of Grounding", *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 57 (5-6), 535-579.
[4] Koslicki, K. 2015, "The Coarse-Grainedness of Grounding", *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, 9, 306-344.

author's view, been seldom the subject of philosophical debate and, indeed, often overlooked. Indeed, a considerable number of philosophers have often argued that the levels of metaphysics go deeper than the levels of physics as "metaphysics 'takes things a level deeper' than physics" (33). However, such a comparison implies a certain degree of commensurability between the two types of levels, which McKenzie excludes on the strength of her analysis. Ultimately, through the plurality of priority relations, one must recognize a plurality of relations of metaphysical explanation. Since grounding and metaphysical explanation are closely related (and often even identified), McKenzie's argument thus far reveals direct implications for the supposed "unity" of grounding.

In chapter four, McKenzie addresses the following question: is the grounding relationship well-founded? That is, must every grounding sequence (or chain) end at some point, a thesis known as foundationalism? If so the existence of every non-foundational entity is grounded in a set of foundational entities. McKenzie believes that discussing the foundationalism of grounding is important, if only to understand whether the definition of metaphysics as the study of the fundamental is, for all intents and purposes, acceptable. How should we characterize metaphysics in case a fundamental level doesn't exist? McKenzie argues that foundationalism is a thesis assumed almost at the axiomatic level, or at the level of metaphysical law, supported often more by mere intuition than by actual philosophical justification. McKenzie asks the following questions:

- what are the criteria for determining that a regression to infinity is vicious?
- do regressions to infinity of a sequence of grounding relations satisfy such criteria?
- does satisfying such criteria mean incurring some kind of metaphysical contradiction?

There are two theses that McKenzie proposes about the last questions:

1. first, there is no reason to think that an infinite sequence of grounding relations must necessarily be vicious;
2. second, it is argued that a form of "viciousness" is present in every regress to infinity known by means of scientific methods.

To justify thesis 1, McKenzie argues that regressions to infinity are not necessarily vicious for grounding. For them to be so, "what explains" (*explanans*) and "what is explained" (*explanandum*) must share the same "form" at each stage of the regress. For McKenzie, the viciousness of an infinite regress emerges as a "function of the explanatory interests" (54) we have along with the degree of abstraction of the *explanandum*. Since the degree of detail in science is highly refined and its aspirations are less abstract, there is no *a priori* reason to argue that infinite regressions don't arise in science. To justify thesis 2, McKenzie argues that even though there is not necessarily form invariance for the metaphysical explanations proposed by science, those involved in infinite chains nevertheless exhibit such uniformity. This is sufficient to label them as vicious. A case-study offered by a physical theory proves that infinite regressions exist in science, but this doesn't imply any form of contradiction. The theory in question is the "S-matrix", popular in the 1960s in high-energy physics. The aspect of interest here is that this theory posits a gunky world, that is, a world in which each object has a proper part. In fact, the S-matrix theory accepts the existence of hadrons and also claims that

each hadron in turn contains hadrons of each type, including additional specimens of its own type. The example offered by the S-matrix theory is illustrative, therefore, of the fact that science presents infinite regressions in which each successive step of the regression is characterized by the same form as the previous step, thus making the regression itself *homogeneous* in form. The case study examined here, McKenzie argues, is only a special case of a phenomenon that occurs within scientific theories: infinite regressions are always vicious. The reason for this derives from the fact that the form scientific explanations take is inevitably constrained by the basic postulates of the relevant theory, containing a certain number of predicates. In the case of infinite explanatory regression, therefore, the general framework and its stock of predicates remain the same even though the structure of determination never ends. Therefore, McKenzie argues, the resulting regressions are flawed in some substantive sense. Ultimately, McKenzie asserts that her analysis points in a very specific direction: foundationalism is false and should be consequently abandoned.

In the last instance, I would like to focus on McKenzie's analysis on foundationalism. Certainly, there are those, such as Schaffer (2010),[5] who have argued that *every grounding chain terminates*. However, this characterization of foundationalism, which McKenzie assumes, doesn't consider the theoretical developments that have taken place in recent years to make foundationalism more precise. There are those who, like Dixon (2016)[6] or Rabin and Rabern (2016),[7] have proposed to characterize foundationalism in terms of maximal grounding chains by requiring that "every maximal grounding chain terminates" (Pearson 2022: 1544),[8] whereby maximality of a grounding chain requires that there is no entity that is not a member of the chain and that partially grounds every member of the chain. But there are also those, such as Pearson 2022, who have proposed to capture the idea of foundationalism by appealing to the notion of inclusive grounding chain: "an inclusive grounding chain is a chain of grounding such that it is not the case that each member of the chain is grounded by a fact or facts that are not members of the chain" (Pearson 2022: 1542). Pearson redefines foundationalism so that "every grounded entity is a member of at least one inclusive full grounding chain and that every inclusive full grounding chain terminates" (Pearson 2022, 1546). It wouldn't be surprising if some of the objections in the naturalistic vein proposed by McKenzie could be resolved by adjusting the adopted definition of foundationalism, which has not been thoroughly investigated and remains formulated only in its most basic definition. If you aim to demonstrate that foundationalism is to be discarded, you must first show that every effort has been made to salvage it, and yet, despite these efforts, the sciences are indicating a wholly different direction. Consequently, the last word has not yet been said about grounding foundationalism, which I believe still enjoys a good reputation amongst philosophers.

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[5] Schaffer, J. 2010, "Monism the Priority of the Whole", *Philosophical Review*, 119, 31-76.
[6] Dixon, S. 2016, "What is the Well-Foundedness of Grounding?", *Mind*, 125, 439-468.
[7] Rabin, G., & Rabern, B. 2016, "Well Founding Grounding Grounding", *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 45, 349-375.
[8] Pearson, O. 2022, "Grounding, Well-Foundedness, and Terminating Chains", *Philosophia*, 51 (3), 1539-1554.