Abstracts

The 5th meeting of the Nordic Network in Metaphysics
12-13 November 2021, Lund

In alphabetic order:

- Åsa Burman (Stockholm University): **A Taxonomy of Social Facts**

How many types of social facts are there? The purpose of this talk is to develop a taxonomy of social facts to answer that question. I start by giving a more comprehensive account of social power, the power view, than has hitherto been offered in contemporary social ontology. My account of social power relies on a fundamental distinction: social power that is directly dependent on the intentionality of agents and social power that is indirectly dependent on the intentionality of agents to exist. *Telic power* and *deontic power* are direct forms of social power. Two indirect forms of social power are introduced and defined: *spillover power* and *structural power*. I show how these forms of social power can accommodate central social phenomena, such as an opaque gender and class structure. An important implication of the power view, with its four categories of social power, is that it can be used as a basis for a taxonomy of social facts. The key idea is that social power is the central social concept and nearly all the social facts in which we are interested contain one form of social power or another. Hence, I offer a taxonomy of social facts in virtue of social power.

- Jani Hakkarainen (Tampere University): **Metaphysics without Metaphysical Realism, Mostly**

Nowadays it is typical for the metaphysicians to assume that (general) metaphysics or ontology studies entities that are, roughly, mind-independent in their existence, nature and ground (I set aside social ontology as a special metaphysics). For example, their fundamentality structure is independent from our conceptualizations trying to capture it. I call this assumption metaphysical realism about metaphysics.

I think that beginning from this assumption is a mistake only playing to the hand of the sceptic. My more positive argument is that the main problem-setting of metaphysics is neutral on metaphysical realism about metaphysics. This question-setting consists of being as being, its features (e.g. unitarity and plurality) and principles (e.g. the principle of non-contradiction) when we are talking about *general metaphysics*. In *ontology*, as a branch of metaphysics, the main problem is, what is there and on what ground? It is only when being is qualified as mind-independent being in a metaphysical study that metaphysical realism about metaphysics comes into play. This happens for example in an ontological problem whether there are mathematical objects as Platonic universals or whether there are laws of nature as universals. The point is, though, that the main general metaphysical and ontological questions can be set, and their consideration initiated without presuming metaphysical realism about metaphysics.

- Eve Kitsik (University of Cologne): **An Ethical Case for Ethics-First Social Metaphysics**

This talk is about the methodology of "social metaphysics" in the sense of socially significant metaphysics. This is not quite the same as the metaphysics of social entities or kinds. For example, whether robots can be conscious is a question of "social metaphysics" in the relevant sense, although a robot is presumably no more a "social" entity than a human individual. The question is: should inquiry into social(ly significant) metaphysics be untainted by considering the potential upshots for social practices? I call the approach that answers this question affirmatively the "metaphysics-first" approach. According to the contrasting, "ethics-first" approach, we should consider the practical consequences of the metaphysical verdict (for example, of recognizing robot consciousness or group agency or of accepting a certain account of gender) in the course of reaching the metaphysical verdict. I also distinguish between second-order metaphysics-first and ethics-first approaches to defending either of the first-order approaches. On the second-order metaphysics-first approach, the relevant grounds concern metaphysics: we should take either the ethics-first or the metaphysics-first approach because this is required for doing metaphysics well, for getting the metaphysics right. On the contrasting, second-order ethics-first approach, either of the first-order approaches is motivated by ethical considerations. The aim of the talk is to further flesh out these distinctions and to defend the ethics-first approach to social metaphysics, by also taking a second-order ethics-first approach to the defence.

- Anna-Sofia Maurin (Gothenburg University): **The Anatomy of Metaphysical Explanation**

In this presentation I argue, first, that an account of the nature of metaphysical explanation should *start* with metaphysical explanation and *not* with grounding. I argue, second, that once grounding and metaphysical explanation have been properly disentangled, both what I call *worldly unionism* and what I call *representational unionism* come across as really rather unattractive and that, therefore, explanation is most likely best understood along separatist lines. In the literature, almost all focus has been on what I call *worldly separatism*. Once grounding and metaphysical explanation have been properly disentangled, however, we can see more clearly that there exists yet another kind of separatism that deserves our attention:*representational separatism*. Representational separatism is the view that metaphysical explanations are representational states tracking (other) representational/non-worldly relational states. Just like representational unionism, representational separatism is hence anti-realist about explanation. Anti-realism about explanation is an increasingly popular view these days. According to some, a point in anti-realism's favor is that it's cheap. I argue, finally, that if the best version of anti-realism about metaphysical explanation is representational separatist, we 'owe' an account of the representational structures such explanations track. *Pace* those who think anti-realism is cheap this is a cost that whoever defends the account must be able to pay. Whether it is a cost equal to that holding a realist view on the nature of metaphysical explanation incurs is a question I will leave for another occasion.

- Johanna Seibt (Aarhus University): **Ontological Explanation, Metaphysical Explanation, and Being as Dynamic**

Armstrong's interpretation of truthmaking (2000) has led many to follow Schaffer (2007) and to embrace the idea that ontological explanations consist in determining which "facts" 'ground' which other "facts", where the modality of grounding is taken to be "metaphysical necessity", tracing "real essences." However, as shown by Maurin (2019), it is far from clear that 'grounding' has any explanatory force at all. Most recently, ontologists are waking up from the dogmatic slumbers of pre-Kantian "metaphysics" and rediscover that truth-making is neither grounding nor correspondence (Saenz 2020, Heil 2021, Audi 2021). I discuss these recent proposals and compare them to the original understanding of truthmaking ("truth grounds", "ontological assays" etc.) in the heydays of analytical ontology during the 20th century. As I reconstruct this past conception, a 'truth-maker' (ontological correlate) is related to a *true* L-sentence (or true proposition) p—it does not establish or justify the truth of p, but reclassifies what p is about, in relation to p's inferential role. Or more briefly: the structural domain descriptions of ontology ("set-up") do not explain *why* a sentence is true but *what we can rationally take ourselves to be referring to* when we state that p. Ontological descriptions are both reconstructive and (potentially) informative: so-called "revisionary" ontologies reveal possibilities for conceptual linkages. I argue against the current practice of equating "ontology" and "metaphysics", and suggest that metaphysics provides meta-ontological reflections on the limitations of ontology in the context of a (self-applicatory) philosophical theory of cognition. Metaphysical explanations thus endorse and supplement ontological explanations from the wider angle of a comprehensive philosophical theory of reality. The last fourth of the talk is spent on illustrating a metaphysical explanation: if we want to take seriously ontological characterizations of entities as "dynamic" (e.g., powers, processes etc.), we need to abandon three methodological principles that guide ontological research since Descartes: (1) extensionalism; (2) particularism; (3) determinatism. I sketch the dynamic nature of being as described in the process metaphysical extension of GPT (General Process Theory): being as "unzipping.

- Bram Vaassen (Umeå University): **Absence and Abnormality**

Many authors take abnormality to shed light on causation by absences (e.g., Thomson, 2003; Clarke et al., 2015; Willemsen, 2018). McGrath (2005) proposed to delimit the absences that are causes by relying on (ab)normality and an increasing amount of evidence has been collected for the 'categorical' hypothesis that only abnormal absences can be causes (cf., Henne et al., 2017). This article raises some worries for such normativity approaches to absence causation by focusing on so-called 'double prevention mechanisms'. In such mechanisms, one event causes another by preventing one of its preventers from occurring (cf., Schaffer 2004). A closer look at some of these mechanisms reveals that absences can be causes by doing exactly what they are supposed to do. I argue this feature indicates that (i) the categorical hypothesis is false, (ii) the categorical hypothesis does not follow from McGrath's original proposal, and (iii) McGrath's original proposal is false as well.