BENJAMIN LEV PUEO BRAST-MCKIE

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EDUCATION

University of Oxford	*August 2020*	**Brandeis University**	*May 2012*
D.Phil in Philosophy		B.A. in Philosophy (*magna cum laude*)	
University of Oxford	*June 2016*	B.A. in Mathematics	
B.Phil in Philosophy		Minor in Quantum Physics	

Theses

· D.Phil Thesis: "Towards a Logic of Essence and Ground" (*no corrections*)
— Supervised by Timothy Williamson and James Studd
· B.Phil Thesis: "Metasemantics in the Theory of Ground" (*distinction*)
— Supervised by Timothy Williamson
· B.A. Thesis: "Against Structural Realism" (*high honours*)
— Supervised by Brett Sherman

RESEARCH

Areas of Expertise	**Areas of Competence**	**Areas of Interest**
· Metaphysics	· Philosophy of Language	· Indian Philosophy
· Philosophical Logic	· Mathematical Logic	· Social Ontology
	· History of Modal Logic	· AI Safety

Publications

[1] (2021) "Identity and Aboutness," *The Journal of Philosophical Logic*

— *This paper develops a theory of propositional identity which distinguishes necessarily equivalent propositions that differ in subject-matter. Rather than forming a Boolean lattice as in extensional and intensional semantic theories, the space of propositions forms a non-interlaced bilattice. After motivating a departure from tradition by way of a number of plausible principles for subject-matter, I will provide a Finean state semantics for a novel theory of propositions, presenting arguments against the convexity and nonvacuity constraints which Fine (2016, 2017a,b) introduces. I will then move to compare the resulting logic of propositional identity (PI^1) with Correia's (2016) logic of generalised identity (GI), as well as the first degree fragment of Angell's (1989) logic of analytic containment (AC). The paper concludes by extending PI^1 to include axioms and rules for a subject-matter operator, providing a much broader theory of subject-matter than the collection of principles with which I will begin.*

[2] (*R&R*) "A Complete Logic of Ground I: Unilateral Propositions," *The Review of Symbolic Logic*

— *A proposition is* specific *just in case there is exactly one way for that proposition to obtain, and one proposition provides a* unilateral ground *for another just in case every way for the former to obtain is a way for the latter to obtain. This paper provides a first-degree proof system for a propositional language with operators for unilateral ground, specificity, and the truth-functions, establishing soundness and completeness over a state semantics in which propositions are sets of states closed under finite fusion.*

[3] (*R&R*) "A Complete Logic of Ground II: Bilateral Propositions," *The Review of Symbolic Logic*

— *Having established soundness and completeness for a unilateral logic of ground with a specificity operator in part I, this paper extends these results to a bilateral logic where propositions are ordered pairs of sets of states closed under infinite fusion. By contrast with the Boolean lattices described by extensional and intensional logics, the space of bilateral propositions forms a non-interlaced bilattice. I will conclude by defining the bilateral notions of essence and ground in terms of unilateral ground.*

In Progress

[4] "The Varieties of Constitutive Explanation"

— *Constitutive explanations play important roles throughout many domains of inquiry. What is necessary for an atom to be gold? What is sufficient for an action to be wrong? What is it for a number to be prime? These are good question with good answers. Instead of defending particular constitutive explanations, this paper provides an account of constitutive explanatory readings of 'necessary for', 'sufficient for', and 'what it is for', arguing that modal regimentations of these locutions fail to track the explanatory relationships that these locutions are typically intended to express. Rather, I will present a logic for constitutive explanation which includes operators for essence and ground in addition to the modal operators and truth-functions. In support of these developments, the majority of the paper will be devoted to clarifying the theoretical roles which the different forms of constitutive explanation play, as well as comparing the present treatment to related accounts in the literature.*

[5] "A State Semantics for the Logic of Constitutive Explanation"

— *Having defended a logic for constitutive explanation which includes modal operators (CE) in other work, the present paper establishes the soundness of CE over an extension of Kit Fine's state semantics. Rather than appealing to intuitions about which principles to include in CE, I will motivate a definition of logical consequence by which to better survey the space of valid principles. In particular, I will present intuitively compelling counterexamples which show that although disjunction is monotonic over grounding, and conjunction is monotonic over essence, disjunction is not monotonic over essence, and conjunction is not monotonic over ground. Since the monotonicity principles are derivable from supplementation principles of the kind defended by Lovett (2020), these counterexamples put pressure on the intuitions to which Lovett appeals.*

[6] "Fundamentality and the Self"

— *Some of the most important philosophical and religious claims cannot be articulated in quantified modal logics, motivating the development of logics with greater expressive power. This paper investigate the nature of the self, where I will seek to regiment the Upanishadic claim, 'sa eṣa neti netyātmā' (NA), which Olivelle (1998, p. 101) translates to, 'About this self (ātman), one can only say 'not—, not—'.' After reviewing the pitfalls faced by attempts to regiment NA in quantified modal languages, I will employ a higher-order language with an operator for grounding in order to provide an adequate regimentation of NA which corresponds to the informal reading: there is no distinct property which is sufficient for being what one is. It follows that the self is fundamental on account of failing to have any strict grounds. I will conclude by examining the relationship between the fundamentality of the self and the Absolute. In particular, it follows from the assumption that everything is grounded in the Absolute that the self is identical to the Absolute, where such claims may be found throughout the Upanishads.*

[**7**] "A State Semantics for Counterfactual Conditionals"

— *This paper extends Kit Fine's state semantics to include an accessibility relation between states that encodes the transitions between states— i.e., which tasks— are possible. After employing these resources to provide a semantics for counterfactual conditionals, the remainder of the paper will be devoted to defending the resulting counterfactual logic which includes Simplification of Disjunctive Antecedents while excluding Conditional Excluded Middle and Transitivity, though for different reasons than have traditionally been provided. The paper concludes by contrasting similarity and interventionist views.*

[**8**] "Causation, Counterfactual Conditionals, and Tense"

— *After presenting a state semantics for causation, this paper draws on the state semantics for counterfactual conditionals that I provide elsewhere in order to describe the precise relationship between operators for causation, counterfactual conditionals, and tense.*

[**9**] "A State Semantics for 'Reason For'"

— *Travelling abroad is a reason for John to take a Covid test, but only if John is permitted to travel abroad, and only if a Covid test reduces the risk of harming others. This project extends Kit Fine's state semantics by taking each context of evaluation to include an expected utility function, drawing on these resources in order to provide a semantics for a normative reading of 'reason for'. In addition to contrasting a semantic clause for teleological readings of 'reason for', I compare competing accounts of normative reasons in which reasons vary according to differences in conditions and modifiers.*

[**10**] "A Predicate Logic for Essence and Ground"

— *This paper provides a hyperintensional theory of properties and relations by which to interpret a language with predicates and constants in addition to operators for essence, ground, and the truth-functions. The paper concludes by surveying the problems faced by including first-order variables and quantifiers.*

Further Directions

[**11**] "Analysis, Reduction, and Identity"

— *Analysis— what the Scholastics called nominal definition— relates representations rather than the properties being represented. By contrast, reduction— what the Scholastics called real definition— relates properties, as does higher-order identity for properties. After contrasting the theoretical roles which analysis, reduction, and property identity are in a position to play, I will provide a logic of analysis, explaining its relationship to synonymy as well as both reduction and property identity. The paper will conclude by contrasting related accounts developed by Angell (2002) and Correia and Skiles (2019).*

[**12**] "Foundations for a Theory of Social Construction"

— *By drawing on the theories of reduction and analysis that I develop elsewhere, this paper contrasts a number of existing accounts of social construction. Whereas metaphysical views take social construction to be a matter of the relationships between properties, representational views take social construction to be in the first place a matter of the meanings of social kind terms. After showing that each of these views is inadequate on its own, I explore combined views which seek to avoid these demerits.*

[**13**] "Social Identity"

— *What is it to be oneself, and what are the terms with which one ought to regiment this question? This paper draws on the logic of constitutive explanation (CE) that I develop elsewhere in order to articulate an account of the construction of one's social identity.*

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Research References

· Timothy Williamson (Wykeham Professor of Logic, *New College, Oxford*)
  — `timothy.williamson@philosophy.ox.ac.uk`
  — Primary B.Phil and D.Phil supervisor
· Kit Fine (Silver Professor of Philosophy and Mathematics, *New York University*)
  — `kit.fine@nyu.edu`
  — External D.Phil examiner
· Ofra Magidor (Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy, *Magdalen College, Oxford*)
  — `ofra.magidor@philosophy.ox.ac.uk`
  — Internal D.Phil examiner

EVENTS

Talks

· "Fundamentality and the Self" (*upcoming*)
  The World Congress of Logic and Religion
  (Veranasi, India, 8.11.21 – 12.11.21)
· "Formal Foundations for the Logic of Essence and Ground"
  Wollheim Society (Berkeley, 21.9.18)
· "Philosophical Foundations for the Logic of Essence and Ground"
  Wollheim Society (Berkeley, 8.9.18)
· "Grounding and Dependence"
  Philiminality (Oxford, 4.5.18)
· "The Logic of Determination"
  D.Phil Seminar (Oxford, 5.5.17)
· "Reductionism About Ground"
  Theoretical Work in Progress (Oxford, 18.11.16)
· "Reductionism About Ground"
  Grounding Grounding (Alghero, 29.10.16)
· "Early Interpretations of the Barcan Formula"
  Women in Early Analytical Philosophy
  (Ghent, 5.10.15)
· "Getting Down to the Ground"
  Ockham Society (Oxford, 20.11.14)

Committees and Conferences

· Structure in Metaphysics Conference
  Co-organised with Annina Loets
  (Oxford, 30.5.15 – 1.6.15)
· Jowett Society (Oxford, 2015 – 2017)
  Co-organiser

Reading Groups

· Metaphysics, Logic/Language, Epistemology
  (Oxford, 2015 – 2018) *Co-organiser*
· Modal Logic as Metaphysics (Oxford, 2015)
  Co-organiser

TEACHING

Classes (*Primary Instructor*)

· Introduction to Logic (Fall, 2019)
· Philosophical Logic (Winter, 2018)
· Introduction to Logic (Fall, 2017)
· Philosophical Logic (Winter, 2017)

Tutorials (*Primary Instructor*)

· Knowledge and Reality (Spring, 2018)
· Metaphysics (Winter, 2018)
· Introduction to Logic (Fall, 2017)
· Philosophical Logic (Spring, 2017)