

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE NOTION OF FUNDAMENTALITY WITH A
DEVELOPED APPLICATION TO PHENOMENOLOGY**

by

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Abstract

In this paper I examine various notions and contexts of fundamentality. This exploration of fundamentality is intended to map out some of its more unfamiliar notions and observe how our understanding of what is fundamental shifts in different contexts. In the first chapter, the contexts I examine fundamentality in include the metaphysical context and conceptual context, from which I map out the different notions of fundamentality that appear in each context. In the second chapter, these contexts and notions are explored through the works of various philosophers beginning with analytical philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Theodore Sider, and ending with non-analytic philosophers, particularly the French philosophers Henri Bergson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The third chapter utilizes the understanding of how the notions and contexts of fundamentality shift throughout different philosophical works to apply it to Merleau-ponty's phenomenological worldview, mainly working off the philosophy from his book **Phenomenology Of Perception**. This chapter concludes with mapping out a novel notion of fundamentality that allows us to understand and posit what is fundamental within the context of phenomenology that Merleau-Ponty presents, granting a novel understanding to how fundamentality works with his worldview.

Chapter 1: Metaphysical and Conceptual Fundamentality

Introduction

What is fundamentality? This paper will begin with an examination of fundamentality within various worldviews to understand how it is applied in metaphysical contexts and how it can be applied within the context of concepts and conceptual schemes. In contemporary analytic metaphysics, fundamentality is a central notion which allows philosophers to sketch out a view of the world where reality or existence is partitioned into distinct levels. Things can have a fundamental existence, and these fundamental things have a significance apart from the things that exist non-fundamentally. The significance typically entails something like the non-fundamental things depending on the fundamental things and thus being emergent. Ideas of fundamentality within the metaphysical sphere have been developed to account for relations such as cause and effect, as well as accounting for what things can constitute other things and what emergent things can be reduced to.

The notion of metaphysical fundamentality has been vastly examined with many examples of things that can be considered fundamental, as well as distinct notions of what fundamentality looks like — leaving different answers to what the fundamental things can be and whether the emergent things can truly be reduced to the fundamental things. However, when we move towards understanding fundamentality as it relates to the mind and mental activities such as conceptualization, we do not encounter the same array of examples as we have with the metaphysical notions. Notions of fundamentality as it exists in our concepts and how we develop conceptual schemes have not been as fleshed out in the literature. Through the literature on

metaphysical fundamentality I aim to articulate some examples of what conceptually fundamental things can look like and flesh out conceptual fundamentality in relation to metaphysical fundamentality. The goal will be to articulate and develop some notions of conceptual fundamentality, understanding the contrasts these notions have with metaphysical fundamentality as well as the comparisons.

The metaphysical and conceptual contexts grant a way to understand fundamentality as it applies to mind and mental constructs, as well as bodily and worldly constructs. This distinction is vital to understanding its evolution from the analytic philosophers like Wittgenstein all the way to non-analytic philosophers like Merleau-Ponty and Henri Bergson, as the view of mind-body connection becomes vastly reframed with the latter. Navigating this evolution will help us understand how what is considered to be “fundamental” evolves through distinct worldviews.

Finally, my examination will be used to apply fundamentality to Merleau-Ponty’s writing, as Merleau-Ponty writes from a phenomenological standpoint and contains a worldview where the world does not exist independently from our experience and perception of it. Using the metaphysical and conceptual notions of fundamentality as they are applied or could be applied to other philosophers, I intend to sketch out a view where we can link a notion of fundamentality to Merleau-Ponty’s ontology, an ontology which involves an intertwining of mind and physical reality. I will interpret the implications from his ontology and phenomenological views and develop them to understand what kinds of things are fundamental and how the general notion of fundamentality is evolved under his phenomenological stance.

This first chapter will begin with examining the metaphysical notions of fundamentality which have consistently appeared in analytical philosophy, and then sketching out notions of conceptual fundamentality that I will develop and contrast with the metaphysical notions. From

there I will bring up examples of analytical philosophers, specifically Ludwig Wittgenstein and Theodore Sider and examine what is fundamental in their worldviews, tying in what their worldviews might consider as conceptually fundamental when I insert the notions of conceptual fundamentality that I have sketched out.

Metaphysical fundamentality

Exploring different variations of fundamentality, we will see themes of independence and basic-ness reappear, for example some things being reducible to the most basic fundamental things. One notable variety is unrestricted independence, where the independence characteristic is applied to the full extent. Under this notion, fundamentality is applicable to those elements which don't depend on other components across all relevant metaphysical dependence relations. With these components being independent across all of these relations, their sense of independence becomes absolute. This notion of fundamentality shows how relevant independence is to fundamentality, as anything that is independent to the absolute extent does not bottom out to anything else but any other non-fundamental component may bottom out to it.¹

Restricted independence:

Restricted independence poses a form of fundamentality that is applied to one or more types of metaphysical dependence. To remain as restricted independence, it requires that whatever is fundamental (in the restricted independence sense) is not fundamental across all

¹ **Wilson, J.** (2014). Fundamentality. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition). <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/fundamentality/>

metaphysical dependence relations, as that is what restricts it. Thus, across one or multiple metaphysical relations, the fundamental entities do not depend on anything in the dependence chain, however within the other dependence relations they may depend and be affected by the non-fundamental entities. One example could be with fundamental physical particles like subatomic particles. They might not depend on any other physical particles and instead be the building blocks of things like atoms, being independent within this restricted domain. However, outside of their relationship with other particles, they may be constrained by laws of nature or metaphysical truths and be dependent in that sense. They also may still depend on each other in any dependence relation, but the important thing is that across at least one metaphysical relation, their dependence does not bottom out to something further down the chain.

In the case of restricted independence there may be one fundamental entity or there can be multiple. There may also be one set of fundamental entities across one or multiple (but not all dependence relations), and another set of fundamental entities across a different set of dependence relations. There is a question of whether these sets may both overlap across one or multiple dependence relations, and that poses further questions in terms of whether that overlap means there are distinct entities belonging to distinct sets within the same metaphysical dependence relation, or whether one or multiple fundamental entities can belong to two distinct sets. This could be answered by whether the overlapping dependence relation in question may bottom out to another dependence relation, which would cut out the overlapping dependence relation.

One example of the overlap is with explanatory fundamentality and compositional fundamentality, where the former refers to a chain of grounding relations where the fundamental entities are the ungrounded entities that every grounded entity bottoms out to. The

latter refers to mereological dependence, which can run from part to whole or from whole to part for the converse. Where these respective dependence relations are distinct, there may be overlap of the fundamental entities across both where a pluralist approach to compositional fundamentality (whole depending on parts) could have the fundamental entities also be the fundamental independent ungrounded entities, yet the grounding relations and the mereological relations up the chain of dependence remain distinct.

Another dependence relation that will help flesh out the nature of the restricted independence view is causality. If A is the independent entity, its independence relative to causal relations, A may or may not cause B but B may not cause A. As A comes out at the bottom of this dependence relation and is not caused by anything else, it holds the characteristic of something that cannot be reduced to any other entity within this relation, marking it as fundamental.

CMB (Complete Minimal Basis):

With a complete minimal basis notion of fundamentality, everything in reality that is emergent can be reduced completely just to the fundamental entities. This minimality would imply that with the fundamental entities themselves, if one is taken out of the picture, reality could not be fully fleshed out. In this sense, the whole collection of non-fundamental components of reality must supervene on the whole collection of fundamental entities as that is their basis. The fundamental entities themselves provide the full complete basis of reality, and do not depend on the non-fundamental components to do so, while the non-fundamental components rely on the fundamental components as the basis and can be reduced to them.

CMB may also allow there to be multiple sets of fundamental entities to provide a complete basis of reality, which implies that the same reality can emerge through distinct subsets. Multiple sets of entities also affects the status of those fundamental entities in terms of how they everything else in reality, as there being multiple sorts of things that can bring about the same reality does not seem to allow either set of fundamental things to play an active role in determining anything in that reality, which limits what those fundamental things can be.

Primitivism:

Primitivism is a strong version of fundamentality which will likely not be relevant to conceptual fundamentality due to its nature. The idea behind it is that fundamentality itself is a primitive notion, a notion which cannot be analyzed any further, and so what it means to be fundamental is difficult to grasp as there is no frame of reference to understand it within. However, certain characterizations of fundamentality such as CMB may give us ideas of what entities might be fundamental, allowing us to grasp the entities that are fundamental. While fundamentality itself is not as capable of being defined under the primitivism view, it is possible that we can gather understandings of what kinds of things are fundamental and have a consistent way to recognize those fundamental entities. Because they are the building blocks that make up the non-fundamental things, the existence of the non-fundamental things are characterized through the primitive entities. As such, things are defined through those basic primitives, which leaves us without a definition for the primitives.

This is potentially troublesome as a candidate for conceptual fundamentality as concepts are defined in very interdependent ways without a clear hierarchy, and it is very difficult to bog

down what route would take us to a primitive concept. One potential way we could get to a sort of concept that can start as an undefined meaning is where its definition actually emerges through the non-fundamental concepts, and the emergent definition actually reveals the true nature of the concept which goes beyond that definition. Or, perhaps there is no definition that emerges at all, but its nature is revealed through the non fundamental things. This would entail a multidimensional view of concept where truly getting a sense of it requires layers, with an articulate definition only being one of those layers hovering above deeper layers of the distinct existence of the concept. This view highlights a very complicated set of relationships that concepts could have with each other.

Conceptual Fundamentality: Semantic, Epistemic and Structural fundamentality

To understand how fundamentality would work conceptually, I will explore some possibilities for its application in the context of a conceptual scheme. A conceptual scheme is a particular framework or scheme of related concepts, the concepts and their relations setting up a framework that interprets some particular domain of the world or our experience. The conceptual scheme allows us to organize our understanding of that domain, framing distinct meanings or knowledge as particular concepts. Similar to metaphysical fundamentality, there might be some parts of a conceptual scheme that take a particular privilege in building our knowledge or the semantics of that scheme, whereas other parts of the scheme may be more dependent or emergent in some way. Fundamentality can then also be applied to a conceptual scheme, with some concepts or conceptual relations more fundamental than others. However, it is not as established what this fundamentality can look like within concepts as it is with metaphysical contexts, and so

this next section will explore some potential notions of fundamentality as they could relate to a conceptual scheme. Going through these will help in examining how fundamentality is effected when we move from a metaphysical context to a more mental one, allowing us to have a broader overview of it.

As we transition from metaphysical fundamentality to conceptual fundamentality, there are three distinct notions of conceptual fundamentality that, while not exhaustive of the different kinds of possible notions, will be relevant to a conceptual scheme: semantic fundamentality, epistemic fundamentality, and structural fundamentality. These three different senses of fundamentality respectively mark some different notions of what is fundamental in a conceptual scheme, and these notions of fundamentality itself will be examined in relation to the notions of metaphysical fundamentality. One possible relation that conceptual fundamentality has with the metaphysical notions is how it might work under the CMB view. In terms of conceptual fundamentality, the fundamental entities of CMB would provide all the content necessary for any non-fundamental concept to be defined or have their meaning given by. The complete description implies either that any concept has a given point or set of points within the boundaries of that field, or at least that any concept must remain within that field even if the concept can change. This would imply that any non-fundamental concept could be defined and have its meaning given strictly from all the fundamental ones, and no new concepts can emerge past the fundamental that could not have already been known. So at some point, even if a concept itself can change within the field, there could not be a dynamic change to the conceptual field where a new concept is added (when all fundamental concepts are accounted for). As such, it seems that the meaning of any concept is limited, and meanings then must be fixed in some sense. That is one example of how a metaphysical notion of fundamentality can be applied to

conceptual fundamentality, and as we go through the examples of semantic, epistemic and structural fundamentality we will have more narrowed contexts where it could be applied.

Semantic fundamentality:

Semantic fundamentality looks at what grounds the semantic content of a conceptual scheme, a ground which may set the foundation for how concepts can be defined, what they will mean, or what meanings may emerge. The components of a conceptual scheme that ground its semantic content may fix the meanings of concepts themselves and also how concepts interact with each other. This includes what concepts refer to, and the nature of the thing that a concept is meant to latch onto or represent. In a conceptual scheme, if each concept is meant to latch onto its own distinct meaning, what is semantically fundamental will then also determine what kinds of concepts can exist, as every new concept will be correlated to a new meaning and that meaning is grounded by the fundamental.

The kinds of things that may hold the position of being semantically fundamental would, in some way, need to latch onto the mechanism of which a concept can represent meaningful content with. That mechanism could be related to how a concept is able to represent distinct individual components or individual instances of a singular type or theme, or to how a concept is able to represent distinct types or themes.

Epistemic fundamentality:

Epistemic fundamentality is a sort of fundamentality that refers to the fundamental aspects of our knowledge — what the fundamental bits or aspects of knowledge are that ground the rest of our knowledge within a conceptual scheme. One example of epistemic fundamentality is immediate direct access knowledge, which can include the world we immediately have access to through sensation or our perceptual beliefs, as well as a priori knowledge that could be logical rules we can access directly. These direct sensations or rules can serve as the building blocks for the expansion of our knowledge, as they are used to judge and validate further content that enters our scheme.

Epistemic fundamentality is the notion of what is fundamental to our capacity for knowledge, which can include what fundamental things set up the basis for how further knowledge is built. It is important to note the direction that knowledge expands in is not perfectly linear. Gaining knowledge and new information helps us revise old beliefs about concepts we knew prior, and we can revise them in ways such as where we see distinct concepts as being nested within the same concept or we can see more distinct parts to one concept (or a set of concepts) we had prior. The revision allows us to privilege some beliefs as being valid and some as inaccurate or incorrect. As such, fundamentality in the epistemic sense is tied to how we validate our knowledge, which then allows us to build further knowledge off of what is valid. One form of epistemic fundamentality could be this knowledge that is judged to be most epistemically secure, as that is the knowledge that we opt to build the rest of our knowledge off of. Something like $1+1=2$ is secure which allows us to build other mathematical formulas from. Whether knowledge that is most epistemically secure directly plays a role in building or helps to

validate further knowledge, since it is the most secure it could also have a relativized independence in relation to knowledge that is not as secure and requires validation by knowledge that is more secure.

Another example of epistemic fundamentality could be that of what lays the foundation of our knowledge. The foundation of our knowledge would include the inherent components that we rely on to build our knowledge from, even if these components do not make up a part of that knowledge itself but rather the foundation. This could include our capacity to differentiate meanings, distinguish between instances and individuals, or fields and scales that we use to relate things to each other and make connections between things. Or, whether there is a certain way that we string components together that helps us understand things more — a sort of inherent language or structure of our thinking that sets the foundation for our thinking as we build our conceptual schemes.

One last form of epistemic fundamentality that we will look at is an epistemic starting point, what begins our process of being able to build knowledge. The starting point to our knowledge could involve the point where we are able to ask a question and open a pathway to further knowledge. It could also be positioned at the point where we are able to label particular parts of a conceptual scheme, and thus be able to start constructing the scheme. Examples of this could include a category, where we begin with a category which allows us to compartmentalize new content into and then evolve that category and build the scheme. It is also possible that the starting point loops back to itself which could be the point at which it evolves, such as starting at a category which evolves and has us return to a complexified category, which allows us some new area to add novel content into.

Structural fundamentality:

Moving to the third form of conceptual fundamentality we will look at, structural fundamentality entails that there are certain components of conceptual scheme which help shape the scheme and ultimately give it its particular structure. Examples of these structures that can serve as a foundational layer include logical and mereological structures. Mereological conceptual structure can play the role of being structurally fundamental as it relates to how the parts of a conceptual scheme come together and what counts as a whole scheme versus what plays a partial role. That will help determine which kinds of concepts build to create the whole of the scheme, and what that whole scheme will look like overall. Under this view, there could be the thought that we conceptualize individual components first and then decide what category they may fit into afterward, rather than a whole category being prior which a component immediately is slotted into.

On the other hand, there could be a view where the whole is prior to the parts, and the parts play a different sort of role. This could entail a view such that our conceptual schemes begin with categories pre-determined. Based on what the view is, mereological structure plays a role in dictating the process of how the entire scheme is laid out, what parts or what whole comes first and then what comes after. For example, if I am trying to understand the different parts within a tree, perhaps I have to understand it as being a tree first, and then I can understand what a leaf is — the leaf has meaning for me through its relationship with the whole tree. If the mereological view has the parts come first, perhaps I would only understand what a tree is if I first understand the leaves, the trunk, and the roots, and by relating them to each other I constitute the concept of the tree.

Another notion of something that is structurally fundamental would be logic. Logic is a system of symbols and rules which constrict what kinds of things are valid and thus what can follow from what, allowing us to constrict what concepts or what structuring of concepts is valid.

Logic as fundamental does not mean for all cases that it cannot be doubted, and if it is un-doubtable it does not have to remain as the only form of undoubtable knowledge, and does not have to be the layer of knowledge that is relatively most immune to revision. This would separate it from epistemic fundamentality as epistemic fundamentality seems to entail a direction of how revisable the fundamental layer is, as that is crucial to how fixed the layer of knowledge is and how much it fixes the non-fundamental knowledge. The fundamental layer according to the notion of epistemic fundamentality could be the least revisable in that it is the most independent layer of knowledge that least has its validity depend on other layers, but it could also be seen that the fundamental layer is the most revisable layer of knowledge in that it is the knowledge that we change the most, thus there is a possibility that it is a part of our conceptual scheme that we are most aimed to change through gaining of knowledge. With it being the aim, it fixes how we gain and revise other aspects of knowledge so that we can ultimately revise that layer, making those other aspects of knowledge functionally dependent on this aim. This ties it to the notion of fundamentality through the aspect of fixation and the bottoming out of the functional dependence relation.

For structural fundamentality, one example where logic being fundamental could work is with Quine's web of belief, where what affects how knowledge expands is the changing experience we have. This experience can revise belief all the way closer to the center where our logical rules are more likely to lie, and so our logic can change and be doubted as an effect of our experience. However, logical rules still remain the most fixed part of the scheme, and if there is a

logical rule that remains unrevisable, that is equivalent to our constantly changing experience at the perimeter of the web itself also being equally unrevisable as that serves the foundation for revising the rest of the web. In this example, our experience cannot be doubted and the logic is doubttable (yet not the most doubttable), yet the logic can be seen as more fundamental in one way because it changes less than the experience, if we are to use the notion of fixation as being relevant to fundamentality.

The role of experience is also relevant to epistemic fundamentality, and its relation to that fundamentality will depend on how the notion of that fundamentality is tied to the notion of being “fixed”, as our experience is constantly changing.

For epistemic and semantic fundamentality, there could be a hard distinction (where they do not share any alignment) between epistemic fundamentality and semantic fundamentality if we can build our knowledge without having to know the semantics of a system or having to know the things that the semantic meanings fix for us — then what grounds semantics and what grounds knowledge can come apart. However, this would seem to stray knowledge away from content, and it seems that what would be left is the structure of a conceptual scheme, and thus a hard separation of epistemic fundamentality and semantic fundamentality would seem to align epistemic fundamentality to structural fundamentality. A helpful distinction to distinguish epistemic fundamentality and semantic fundamentality may be where one can gain knowledge in a conceptual scheme without gaining any new meanings or changing meanings whatsoever, such as where a belief can be expanded upon or where one is able to connect or apply more beliefs together without adding any new beliefs — assuming that doing that without adding any new beliefs is possible. Or, if every new belief is not necessarily a new meaning, the option could also be where new beliefs are added without adding new meanings.

Now that we have examined some examples of what conceptual fundamentality looks like, I will present some examples of analytic philosophers whose worldviews invoke notions of metaphysical fundamentality. As these worldviews are navigated, I will insert how conceptual fundamentality is expressed or what it might look like in relation to their metaphysical views.

Example views: Wittgenstein and Sider

Wittgenstein:

Wittgenstein's **Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus** presents a thesis that language reflects the structure of reality, and that meaningful instances of language have logical structure that represents the logical structure of the world. The world encompasses the states of affairs occurring between simple objects, and a fact represents the logical form of a state of affairs. There are atomic facts, which are the most basic combinations of objects in the world which cannot be broken down any further, and thus represent the most basic state of the world that can build up to non-atomic facts. Language can talk about the world accurately or inaccurately, with sentences that express propositions — a logical form representing what is true and false about the states of affairs. The atomic propositions are what directly correlate to or “picture” the atomic facts. Wittgenstein's idea of language is that it has a limit to what can be meaningfully spoken. There are the atomic sentences that express atomic propositions, propositions which are contingent and have their truth value dependent on the state of the world, directly representing the world. All other expressed propositions are truth functions of the atomic propositions. These

non-atomic propositions which are truth functions of the atomic proportions are true or false in a trivial manner such as being tautologies, they do not actually express anything about the world itself. Wittgenstein considers these propositions senseless, and any sentence that is not constructed as a truth function of the atomic sentences is nonsense.²

As the world itself emerges from states of affairs which are arrangements between objects, objects are what limit what kinds of states of affairs can emerge. Additionally, objects themselves are indivisible into smaller constituents, making them the metaphysical foundation of the world Wittgenstein talks about.

For language, propositions represent what is true and false through logical form to represent the facts that make up the world, and any proposition is built off of the elementary or atomic propositions — propositions which directly represent the state of affairs in the world, or the atomic facts. The world contains all facts which are built off the atomic facts. As such, language shares logical form with the world, and thus can mirror its form which models reality for us. This modeling that language does of reality is picturing it, as Wittgenstein puts it, and propositions help us picture the facts of the world, creating a picture of reality. All elementary propositions with truth values that reflect the state of affairs would reflect the totality of states of affairs as they truly exist, and thus all we can speak of the world is determined by these elementary propositions — anything that isn't determined by these elementary propositions is not of the world, and because the world is what gives propositions a corresponding structure, anything that language speaks of that is not of the world also lacks a logical structure and is meaningless. Propositions which arrange the facts of the world in any possible way cannot go beyond these elementary propositions, and anything we know about the world can be known

² Wittgenstein, L. (1922). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (C. K. Ogden, Trans.). Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1921)

through a full scope of the elementary propositions themselves, leaving the propositions to be truth functions of the elementary propositions. We can still learn about the world through propositions, but it is not knowledge directly through the proposition, but rather what the proposition implies of the elementary propositions which directly reflect the state of affairs. Thus, what we know through language is not directly laid in the words which make up the propositions themselves, but in the structure of language, because that structure mirrors the structure of the world. And so when it comes to the fundamentals of the world, those are reflected by the fundamentals of language, which in this case is represented by the elementary propositions.

Metaphysical fundamentality and conceptual fundamentality have many similarities for Wittgenstein, as the way we think about and conceptualize things, with elementary propositions in language being the foundation for that, mirror the metaphysical. For both cases, we have a form of fundamentality which has a foundation that sets a limit for the emergent structure. These elementary propositions set a complete minimal basis for meaningful language, because any meaningful proposition is described through some arrangement of the direct facts of the world, and can only exist as being such. Those direct atomic facts set the complete basis of the world which all non-atomic facts supervene on, and so the atomic propositions are the complete minimal basis of meaningful and sensical language — all sensical sentences can be broken down to the atomic ones. The atomic/elementary propositions form a complete representation of the world, and by referring to the facts in the world which cannot be conceptualized any further, they reach the boundary in terms of how much world which can be represented. Further propositions, being truth values which supervene on the truth values of elementary propositions, can be completely categorized within this minimal basis.

These elementary propositions can describe the facts of the world directly through the states of affairs that do and don't exist, and since the world mirrors the structure of the correct truth values of all elementary propositions, any event or occurrence in the world can be found to supervene on the atomic facts. As language and the world mirror each other, the structure of fundamentality also corresponds. Language reflects the world through its logical structure, and so if the structure of this language includes a Complete Minimal Basis structure of fundamentality, the structure of the world would follow the same structure of fundamentality. The atomic facts set a CMB for the metaphysical structure, with each atomic fact also being completely independent from the others. Language mirrors this — with atomic propositions setting a CMB for the conceptual structure of what we can meaningfully conceive of, and those atomic propositions being completely independent from each other. These atomic propositions thus also contain the characteristic of restricted independence since each stands on its own and does not constrict whether any other proposition holds — mirroring the same kind of independence that the atomic facts hold.

Wittgenstein's notion of conceptual fundamentality aligns structural and semantic fundamentality, as the language that is meaningful correlates to what is true, since that structure aligns to what occurs in the world. With a CMB notion, the minimal basis can be used to know everything else, and with the restricted independence notion any atomic proposition remains logically independent from the others, making each proposition as well as the entire minimal basis epistemically fundamental.

What Wittgenstein's notion of language shows is that if our concepts can perfectly mirror the world, the structure of the world will share that structure with how we build our concepts. Thus, the meaning, structure, and understanding of concepts can come together when concepts

reflect the state of the world, because then the concepts have an aligned representation of a given structure, and if concepts reference an external structure where the reference is pointed towards something external and not back into concepts themselves, than that structure also determines the meaning of the concepts. Language referencing the world requires that the given structure of the world (which is what the reference is oriented/pointed towards and thus depends on for its own structure) that language points to is what makes up the content of its reference. This kind of reference given by Wittgenstein's scheme that is pointed towards the world pulls together logical structure with semantic meaning, which then aligns to all possible knowledge, showing that the notion of conceptual fundamentality relates to what the reference is oriented towards or how it is oriented.

Sider:

Structure is fundamental for Sider in both the metaphysical and conceptual aspect. In his work **Writing the Book of the World**, Sider envisions that what structures reality cannot be reduced to anything else in an ontological sense as it sets up the ontological ground for other metaphysical components to be grounded in (which then make up the higher layers of the ontological hierarchy). The fundamental structure of reality is primitive, and so Sider follows a more primitivist notion of fundamentality.

Sider argues for this primitivist notion of fundamentality to have an account of fundamentality that does not itself rely on non-fundamental definitions and notions, which ultimately according to him do not actually explain fundamentality. To have fundamentality itself be primitive and not further analyzable allows Sider to avoid explanatory regress when

attempting to explain fundamentality, where his explanation does not presuppose fundamentality to describe it.³

If fundamentality is primitive, then he does not rely on explaining what it is through anything else. If it could be explained by something else, it begs that fundamentality is something that can be explained. If this is so, then fundamentality can be grounded in some explanation, then our idea of fundamentality has been pushed back to the explanation itself. And if it can be explained, there becomes an ongoing question of what makes that explanation fundamental, and any further explanation can be subject to the same question creating the explanatory regress that doesn't end at any clear point. Sider's move to make fundamentality primitive and not analyzable to something more basic allows him to block the regress from the start.

He defends structure as being fundamental, even if he cannot define what exactly fundamentality is, because structure can be put forth as a posit which furthers understanding of objective similarities (and thus also genuine distinctions) through carving out correct categories which hold things that share the same intrinsic properties, and of reference with what we are truly referring to.

The structure of reality can be carved out by language that discerns the correct patterns of reality, which do not describe what is fundamental itself but describe the general shape they take on — which is the structure that is fundamental for Sider. According to Sider, it is still possible to be mistaken about reality while having beliefs that are true. We could have a belief that gets something correct about the world, but it doesn't get the general shape of the world right. We could then still have a pattern that does not track the true structure of the world and impose incorrect assumptions on what the structure of the world truly is, even though our particular

3 Sider, T. (2011). *Writing the book of the world*. Oxford University Press.

belief was correct. The judgments they use for these categories could hold true according to their own standards, as they are not making incorrect assumptions about what the fundamental categories are — they just have additional categories which are not the fundamental ones. In this case, the beliefs can be true, yet be utilizing the incorrect concepts. For Sider, there is a privileged way to use language which refers to the structure of reality as it more genuinely exists. The way that the structure of the world genuinely exists privileges words that carve up that structure as they are more well-suited to referencing the world and accounting for the proper similarities and distinctions. Meaningful language for Sider is anchored by the fundamental structure of reality, which is similar to Wittgenstein's view of meaningful language being that which mirrors the logical form of the atomic facts of the world.

However, for Sider, language does not clearly divide into sensical versus nonsensical language. As we saw before, one can have true beliefs involving non-joint-carving concepts, leaving space for concepts that can more accurately carve reality at its joints. For Sider, language doesn't just help us mirror facts of the world, it can track and carve out the deeper structure of reality, and so there seems to be more of a degree of accuracy that can be maintained. There is language that can accurately carve out the structure of reality, language that might be about logical and mathematical truths. Language may also be used to express truths about the world that are accurate even if they do not carve out the structure itself, such as being able to point to a correct fact about something being in a particular position without understanding the relation it has to the things around it. For example, one may correctly point out that the Earth revolves around the Sun, without expressing the deeper structure of the Earth moving in a particular orbit due to gravity. This would have a degree of accuracy, but a truth that carves out the structure of Earth, the Sun, and all the relations involved would accurately carve out the structure that grants

understanding to the relations between facts that are true, helping understand them more deeply. These truths help us understand what exists on a more fundamental level and grants more meaning to our understanding, as the deeper structured relations between facts are carved out rather than just understanding a fact itself.

Things like logical and mathematical truths, where they align to the world's structure, would then hold meaningful content even if they do not represent particular facts about the world, which is a requirement on Wittgenstein's end for them to hold meaning. For Sider, these kinds of truths, along with laws of physics hold an especially privileged place in referring to the fundamental structure of reality and thus hold a lot of empirical and semantic value, one reason being that they allow us to carve into concepts that are quite universal and get to intrinsic properties of a broad swath of things, which gives us statements that are not only true but utilize concepts that are more likely to align to the true structure of reality.

For Sider's conceptual schemes, semantic fundamentality is then related to the correct concepts that carve out the structure of reality and thus anchor reference and meaning within language, and so the structure of reality plays a big role in semantics although it doesn't necessarily cover everything such as individual instances of events. Epistemic fundamentality is also aligned to structure, as that structure provides an objectively real insight to reality. For epistemic fundamentality we could also look at what ways of looking at the world allows us to access particular concepts or patterns across concepts which mobilize our conceptual schemes to explore and build upon the more objectively accurate concepts — particular patterns which guide us not only to the fundamental structure of reality but how to reliably track it. Structural fundamentality would perhaps most directly align to the deeper structure of reality, by providing the correct way to carve out concepts. The fundamental structure of reality could also provide

how we form our conceptual schemes by fixing how we tie our concepts together. Things like logic and math are keys to getting at the structure of reality for Sider, and something like logic would play a structural role in conceptual fundamentality.

Chapter 2: Fundamentality across Philosophical Traditions

Introduction

What is fundamental? This chapter will take us through examples of worldviews that incorporate certain fundamental things. As we go through these next few philosophers we will also see how the notions of fundamentality that they use change. Starting from the metaphysical philosophies from analytical philosophers, I will examine different examples of what kinds of things are metaphysically fundamental, contrasting opposing worldviews. I will then move onto worldviews from philosophers who are not primarily focused on the metaphysical, but bring the aspect of mind and the subject into their worldview and put them on a similar plane of existence as the metaphysical, leading to examples where the metaphysical things are not the only fundamental things and where the subject or subjective experience can also be fundamental. By going through the examples in this order, I will examine how notions of fundamentality gradually evolve from views that focus on the metaphysical to the more non-analytical views where the boundary between the metaphysical and the conceptual is not as rigid. This will help to further develop the comparisons and contrasts of metaphysical and conceptual fundamentality and provide further articulation for what conceptual fundamentality looks like. Additionally, what will be explored is how the notion of fundamentality evolves generally where it does not fit into just a metaphysical or just a conceptual category, but what it may look like where both contexts are brought together.

David Lewis

Beginning with David Lewis we have a metaphysical worldview which is cautious about imposing strong necessary connections, allowing us to understand what the fundamental level of reality looks like when the relationships between entities are not as modally robust.

Lewis is a defender of Humean supervenience. Fundamentally, there are no necessary connections, causation, or laws in the world, but rather only a mosaic of local qualities that arrange themselves in proximity with each other in a spatiotemporal system — known as the “Humean Mosaic”. These fundamental Humean properties themselves require nothing more than a spatiotemporal point to be instantiated at, and this instantiation has no bearing on the instantiation of other fundamental properties — they do not have any necessary relationships with each other and thus there are other possible worlds where the properties are arranged in a completely different way. This means there are no necessary connections between the fundamental properties, where one necessarily constrains another. All other non-fundamental properties are contingent on these properties in a way that if all the fundamental properties are fixed, all the non-fundamental properties will also be fixed.⁴

These local qualities are natural intrinsic properties which are fundamental to the world — they cannot be reduced to anything further. Lewis identifies some examples of these properties as being values of gravitational and electromagnetic fields at particular points. All other properties of reality besides these local fundamental properties which make up the mosaic supervene on these local properties. Lewis takes the Humean account of supervenience where the non-fundamental properties supervene on the fundamental ones, where the non-fundamental properties are constrained by the fundamental mosaic. This constraining is not where the

⁴ Lewis, D. (1986). *On the plurality of worlds*. Blackwell.

fundamental properties directly constrain the non-fundamental properties under a law of nature. For Lewis, following the Humean account of Supervenience means that instead of necessary connections what we have instead is regularities, patterns of the mosaic which particular non-Humean accounts may take to be necessary laws.

It does hold that if there are certain fundamental facts where there is a certain pattern of properties in the Humean mosaic, you will necessarily have a certain emergent fact. Causal facts supervene on a set of neighboring possible worlds with similar mosaics, where those Humean mosaics lead to a certain regularity and thus that regularity is strengthened to being a causal fact in the world. The non-fundamental properties are thus fully reducible to the fundamental properties, and they do not add anything extra. Thus, they supervene on the fundamental properties. Lewis has an account of laws that help us understand the patterns and regularities that give way to the components that supervene on the fundamental properties, and these laws are his Best System Account, representing a way to describe the regularities in ways that are the most simple, have the most explanatory power, and retain the best fit along the probability distribution of the regularity — that is, they have the best statistical fit. Along this description of laws, we see that the laws are not fundamental and necessary connections, but rather descriptions representing the regularities of the Humean Mosaic that reduce to patterns of arrangements between the local fundamental properties.⁵

The things that are fundamental for Lewis are these fundamental properties and the spacetime continuum they exist in which is what divides one mosaic from a world that has a different mosaic, all of which seem to follow the restricted independence view of fundamentality. Each fundamental property exists at the spatiotemporal point it is instantiated at,

⁵ Lewis, D. (1973). Causation. In *Philosophical papers* (Vol. 2, pp. 159–213). Oxford University Press. (Original work published in *Journal of Philosophy*)

without placing any constraints on the instantiation of a different fundamental property existing at a different spatiotemporal point. The fundamental properties are thus independent from each other, although there may be some dependence that they have on the spacetime they reside within which could possibly place constraints such as constraining the properties to be 4 dimensional properties rather than 5 dimensional properties. Additionally, every non-fundamental component can be reduced to these fundamental properties, as they lay the foundation that everything supervenes on. As such, everything supervenes on the fundamental properties, with the properties being the independent basis that cannot be reduced to anything else. This independence is still restricted since the examples given for fundamental properties by Lewis can still be affected by non-fundamental components in other ways. The examples such as values of gravitational and electromagnetic fields are values that can fluctuate in virtue of how certain non-fundamental facts change, and so certain aspects of these properties may remain dependent along certain metaphysical relations, affected by things like gravitational fields. There may be an emergent property, a cluster of properties that eventually arranged into a “baseball”, and in this case the existential aspect of the fundamental properties is categorized existentially under the emergent property of “baseball”, their existential identity depending on “baseball”.

Due to these factors, Lewis’s account of fundamentality fits under the restricted independence view of metaphysical fundamentality. The other view of fundamentality that Lewis’ account shares similarities with is the Complete Minimal Basis view. Since everything reduces to the fundamental properties and does not add anything else, the fundamental properties provide the minimal basis for all of reality. However, Lewis also poses additional possible worlds, worlds where the mosaic could be arranged differently, which would then also change what regularities or laws arise from the mosaic. Because there are additional possible worlds, it

is not clear that a fundamental mosaic composes a complete basis of reality, since the mosaic itself could be composed differently and provide a different picture of reality that is not reducible to a prior or different version of the mosaic.

However, if we take into account a set of neighboring possible worlds, we could have a counterfactual of an emergent thing that would hold in similar humean mosaics as well as the antecedents of the counterfactual holding. Causation is determined accordingly, where that particular set of nearby mosaics will then determine whether one kind of thing is consistently the determinant of another kind of thing, in all scenarios within the set of worlds. The CMB view would need to account for all possible views, where we have not only all fundamental properties and their spacetime containers but also every possible arrangement of those properties. We don't have a complete basis through the fundamental properties alone but the possible arrangements of the properties and the spacetime containers are necessary to giving the complete and minimal picture, making it so that all these things together fall under a different notion of fundamentality than just the fundamental properties alone. Lewis's account falls more so under the restricted independence view of fundamentality, overlapping with the complete minimal basis view where our notion of fundamentality encompasses the fundamental properties of all possible worlds in addition to the spacetime containers they reside in.

Anti-Humeanism

Anti-Humeanism gives us a view in which there are laws or certain modal connections present in the world at the fundamental level, and so this will help us understand how the notion of fundamentality shifts when these modal connections are introduced that go beyond the

Humean properties. These modal connections that can be imposed onto regularities are known as natural necessities — necessities that may still depend on the type of world that one lives in, but can place some constraint on the nature of that world. They are not necessarily something that can be reasoned about in isolation from the world around them, so they are typically a-posteriori connections. Depending on the view of nature and the strength of the necessary connections within it, there are many examples of these a posteriori connections that can be posited.⁶

One of these views is primitivism about laws. This view, posited by the likes of Maudlin, states that the laws we have in the world are primitive to nature. They are fundamental in a sense that they are responsible for the structure of nature, and so the way the world evolves is governed by them. It is not merely particular things that they govern but more so the evolution as a whole. As such, they cannot be reduced or analyzed down to any particular thing or structure because these laws are what give that structure in the first place, placing them as primitive truths or primitive entities governing truths.⁷

Another view is Nancy Cartwright's view of causal powers. This is a more localized view of the necessary connections of nature, where they do not belong to the universe as a whole or exist outside of nature. Rather, this view posits that there are particular capacities to enact something which unfolds as the regularities that we see. These capacities are things like the capacity of mass to gravitationally attract other masses, or a magnetic field's capacity to attract and repel. These capacities, which are responsible for regularities such as the fact that we consistently will see an apple fall down everytime we throw it up in the air, are not strict absolute necessities for Cartwright. Rather, these patterns represent the imposing of causal powers that can be possessed by certain entities. Because they are causal powers, what we might pose as a

⁶ Hildebrand, T. (2013). Non-Humean theories of natural necessity. *Philosophy Compass*, 8(10), 955–963.

⁷ Maudlin, T. (2007). *The metaphysics within physics*. Oxford University Press.

necessary connection in nature can instead be thought of as a particular causal power that has the power to enact itself in every location that it has been enacted. But because Cartwright does not treat these as absolute, it is more the case that we can view it that a causal power has not been overridden by another causal power when we see it be enacted, which leaves possibilities open for there to be novel causal capacities when something does not fit the regularities we have observed. This open possibility leaves Cartwright's account flexible in terms of the scientific models that we ascribe to the world.⁸

Another form of necessary connection that takes a step beyond simple regularities, while not imposing strict absolute laws, is that of Marc Lange. Lange speaks of subjunctive facts, which are conditional facts allowing us to constrain the possibilities of something rather than arriving at a regularity after it happens. These facts tell us what would end up being the case if we begin with a certain fact. For example, if the temperature is below 32 degrees, water will freeze. We know that this will happen everytime, and so from this subjunctive fact point of view we can posit that water freezing will be the case, anytime the temperature is below 32 degrees. This counterfactual statement is universally applicable and thus sets up a framework for us to understand causal relationships, but it does not go beyond conditionals themselves and implies a deeper reason for why water freezes. It simply states that it will be the case, and so when it comes to denoting necessities in the world around us and using such conditionals to analyze nature, we are analyzing how the regularities of nature satisfy particular conditionals.

There is also a view where we have fundamental essence properties innate to certain objects, essence properties which govern how that particular object must behave and interact with the world. For any possible world an entity is in, since its essence is fundamental to the

⁸ Mumford, S. (2004). Causal powers: What are they? Why do we need them? What can be done with them and what cannot? *Philosophical Quarterly*, 54(215), 337–352.

entity and is thus what governs what connections it will have to the world, whatever its essence implies about how it interacts with the world will determine the regularities that arise from such an entity. And so these essential connections have a property of belonging to particular entities, which means our sense of natural necessities in the world are not abstract truths that govern things and structures, but rather essential properties to things themselves which are then responsible for the regularities that emerge. One example is that of fire — it has the essence of heat, and if it did not, it would not be fire. Because it has this essence, anytime there is fire, there will also be heat exuded from it. So on this view where fire has this fundamental essence property, we will always observe heat which determines how fire will interact with the properties around it in every case, establishing a necessary connection from the essence itself. Further necessary connections such as causal laws themselves are necessary regularities between one entity to the next that could be reduced to what the fundamental essence of each entity is, those essences which constrain the entity to interact in a certain way and thus constrain a relationship it will have with another entity retains its own fundamental essence. These connections are necessary not due to another law, but to the essences themselves since the essences themselves do not depend on and change because of anything else, they are necessary to the entity they belong to.

The last kind of natural necessity that will be looked at here is Armstrong's account of metaphysically contingent laws. This account represents laws that are universal and physically necessary, but not metaphysically necessary in that they do not have to apply to every possible kind of world. These laws represent a physically necessary relationship between things that are universal, entities or kinds of things existing throughout nature. These are different from the fundamental essences account because they imply that what is responsible for the regularities

that we see in nature is not anything fundamental to entities individually, but rather what holds an entity in relationship to another. These physically necessary relationships posed by Armstrongs take the likes of things like gravity, which can be seen as a necessary relationship between mass and spatial distance. Essentially, anytime we change the relation between a particular span of space and a particular amount of mass in that space (increase one or the other), there is a force of gravity that will shift proportionally. So the relation cannot change without it changing an additional thing between them, and so this other relationship between mass and spatial distance becomes a necessary relationship between them that always holds. This kind of necessary relationship accounts for how entities interact with others since interactions are shifts in the relations between things, and so Armstrong's laws account for how interactions will evolve. A regular pattern of events that unfolds can thus be understood through the necessary relationships of the entities involved, rather than a happenstance, and so that necessary relationship becomes a governing law of nature. These necessary relations are necessary in nature, but are not metaphysically necessary and are not independent of broader metaphysical truths and thus can change depending on the world where the relationships might be different between the same kinds of entities.⁹

The modal facts posited by the anti-Humean allow for an explanation of why certain regularities occur, giving the anti-humena more explanatory power. These natural necessities help us understand the relationships and interactions one sort of thing will have with other sorts of things, explaining why they tend to do certain things and what sorts of things must arise from an interaction. If we have an idea of why an apple falls from a tree rather than just seeing it as a regularity that apples regularly fall from trees, we also do not just gain new facts — we can also

⁹ Loewer, B. (1996). Armstrong on probabilistic laws of nature. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 74(3), 368–376.

gain new sorts of things that exist in the world, and new sorts of layers to the existence of other things. The ontology of the world seems more rich with the anti-humean view, where we go beyond just what relationships are or what they may be, but things that may underlie relationships. But besides ontology, explanatory power is an obvious motivating factor for the anti-humean.

David Chalmers

Moving on from the metaphysical examples, with Chalmer's examination of panpsychism we gain a worldview where the aspect of mind or a subject shares a fundamental level of existence with certain metaphysical properties. Navigating this worldview, we see how what is fundamental is no longer just physical things or mental things but some combination of both, as well as properties that are not exactly either. These additions bring in a new dimension to fundamentality and what it means.¹⁰

In David Chalmers' article "Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism" Chalmers navigates Panpsychism and theories that have branched out from it, attempting to defend it and posit it as a promising theory which can contain the strengths of Materialism and Dualism without succumbing to their respective weaknesses. For his article, Materialism and Dualism fall in respect to the hard problem of consciousness, which is the problem of how physical elements and subjective experiences can be explained in how they exist in relation to each other. A subjective experience is a mental state — it means something to be "like" that thing in particular. Materialism in respect to consciousness is the theory that everything, including all subjective

¹⁰ **Chalmers, D. J.** (2016). Panpsychism and panprotopsychism. In G. Brüntrup & L. Jaskolla (Eds.), *Panpsychism: Contemporary perspectives* (pp. 19–47). Oxford University Press.

experiences, can be reduced to physical processes — all fundamental things are physical according to this view, and so everything that is true about consciousness (also known as phenomenal truths) is grounded by things that are true about the physical world. In Dualism, phenomenal truths are not entirely grounded in physical truths, and so there is the possibility of experience existing which cannot be reduced to fundamental physical things. Both materialism and dualism falter with explaining the subject/object gap. Materialism does not sufficiently explain how physical things can give rise to phenomena or experience, as it requires that everything can be reduced to physical processes and thus are entailed by those physical processes which at some uncertain point become mental. Dualism does not sufficiently explain how physical things and phenomenal things can interact with each other. It requires that neither is reducible to the other, and thus the fundamental level for both the physical and the phenomenal are already distinct from each other. There is a challenge from this to conceive of exactly where the respective fundamental properties and entities may give rise to entities and properties which can reach a common ground in some sense and interact with each other, and dualism does not have a clear account for how or why this interaction occurs.

The other important thing to consider with Chalmers' argument is the difference between categorical properties and structural properties, which roughly speaking refer to intrinsic versus extrinsic properties. Structural properties deal with the interactions between things — what role a property may play in its relation to other properties and its disposition to behave in a particular manner. These roles and dispositions help determine a collective structure that will arise from the interactions amongst different entities. Categorical properties deal with the intrinsic nature of a thing, what it is. This property will tell us what kind of thing plays a certain role, whereas a purely structural view may see all the roles as simple placeholders which no particular thing fills.

For example, along the categorical role, a human in particular may play the role of something that wants to find an objective truth. With the structural view, there is simply the disposition to find objective truth that humans happen to occupy.

Chalmers brings up quiddities as fundamental categorical properties which can play fundamental physical roles, yet still have intrinsic properties and be distinct from the physical roles themselves. This distinction of them being categorical versus purely structural allows them to play a physical role, while being a non-physical property — opening up a view where quiddities can be fundamentally phenomenal properties which play fundamentally physical roles, meaning that phenomenal properties can exist as the intrinsic nature of certain physical dispositions — quarks or protons could be a fundamentally phenomenal property which are playing the role of a quark or proton.

This takes us to what Chalmers posits as panpsychism: a theory which avoids the challenges of both materialism and dualism as his view of panpsychism ascribes that there are at least some fundamental physical entities which have mental/phenomenal states. Although the view can take some getting used to, off the bat it dodges the issue in materialism where conscious entities have to emerge from purely physical ones, since at least some of the fundamental physical entities are already conscious in some sense. Also, because fundamental entities are conscious, there is no fundamental distinction between physical and phenomenal entities, which helps avoid the challenge with dualism needing to solve what point the physical and phenomenal can finally interact. There is still a challenge in exactly how the consciousness of fundamental physical things is transformed or gives rise to the consciousness of more complex systems like sentient life, which is similar to the challenge of dualism with how the phenomenal can have an effect on the physical world or even other phenomena. Chalmer's navigates this

challenge through different iterations from panpsychism to proto-panpsychism to pan-qualityism. In order to flesh out this evolution of the panpsychist view further, it is important to understand the correspondence between fundamental/non-fundamental entities and fundamental/non-fundamental phenomenal states. Chalmer's describes the fundamental as "micro", and the non-fundamental as "macro". A fundamental mental state is a "microexperience" while a non-fundamental mental state is a "macroexperience".

Under Chalmer's view, a microphysical entity is capable of having micro experience as a conscious experience, while some macrophysical entities like human beings are said to have the conscious experience known as a macroexperience. A macroexperience like the experience that humans have involves macrophenomenal properties such as representational thought and understanding of qualities to the extent of comparing qualities together. A microexperience is hard to classify in the extent of what it is like, and the panpsychist may be able argue that the nature of our macroexperience being so distinct from micro experience is exactly why we cannot put ourselves in the shoes of a fundamental physical particle and say what it is like to experience phenomena at that level. In this way, the ineffability of what microexperience is in this sense may not be a flaw to the panpsychist's theory.

Chalmer's proposes a constitutive Russelian panprotopsychism to navigate the challenges of dualism and materialism. This proposal states that some quiddities are neither structural nor phenomenal properties, and thus are categorical properties that can play roles for both physical and mental entities. In this view, the way they play mental roles is slightly different than with classic panpsychism, as it is not a direct role. Instead, some quiddities can be these non-structural and non-phenomenal properties where one quiddity in particular may not be a phenomenal property, but if you take multiple of these quiddities they can combine to constitute a

phenomenal property. In this sense, these are proto-phenomenal properties — they are not phenomenal properties themselves but have the capacity to arrange into phenomenal properties. Due to this aspect, they allow a fallback for phenomenal properties which do not have to be reduced entirely to the physical (as with materialism), but are also not left with a fundamental gap between the phenomenal and the physical (as with dualism). In essence, we have a sort of bridge.

However, this view does come with its own issues — namely the “Combination Problem” which Chalmers derives from William James and William Seager. This problem captures the issue with how non-phenomenal things can combine to phenomenal properties that are experienced by a subject. Chalmers poses this as the issue where if you have proto-phenomenal properties that may combine into phenomenal properties, there could equally be conceived a world where those proto-phenomenal properties combined into the same structural and physical arrangement yet do not combine into any phenomenal properties and furthermore a subject experiencing those properties. The subject then becomes a “zombie”, having the same structure and physical arrangement as a subject with consciousness but lacking the phenomenal properties. Without a defined bridge from the non-phenomenal to the phenomenal, there is no valid backing to why we wouldn’t end up with something like the zombie example. We are still left with a gap between the non-phenomenal + non-subject combining to the phenomenal + subject.

There is a final theory that Chalmers finishes the paper off with, something that may help address this gap — a theory named panqualityism. Panqualityism makes a distinction that seems similar to the distinction made by panprotopsychoism in that it instantiates qualities as properties that are not structural or physical properties, but not phenomenal either. The fine

distinction is in the fact that phenomenal properties always involve a subject while qualities do not necessarily involve a subject. If I experience redness, my awareness of the redness is a phenomenal property, and the redness itself is a quality. Panqualityism follows roughly the same framework as panprotopsychism and still encounters many of the same issues, as we are still left with a non-subject/subject gap with how qualities themselves may arrange into something like a subject that experiences phenomenal properties. That issue also implies the problem of how qualities can exist outside of a subject, while simultaneously also making up the very phenomenal framework that characterizes a subject's experience. More or less it gives us a finer layer between the structural or physical and the phenomenal that could be part of a larger framework that bridges both.

As Chalmer navigates these theories, a major argument against synthesizing non-phenomenal properties and non-subjects into subjects with phenomenal properties is that subjects themselves are fundamental. He further parses metaphysical fundamentality and conceptual fundamentality here, where if subjects are thought to be metaphysically fundamental then no other fundamental physical entity that exists means that subjects must necessarily exist. If they are conceptually fundamental, then there are no other entities they can be conceptually grounded in and thus are not necessarily entailed in their existence by other fundamental entities. The particular notions of metaphysical and conceptual fundamentality here are not exactly clear, but it seems that Chalmer's heavily entertains the notion of subject as being metaphysically and conceptually fundamental. At least, he posits that views requiring subjects to not be fundamental and be an arrangement of other things such as proto-phenomenal properties still fall into the non-subject/subject gap and do not solve it, tipping the seesaw in the direction of subjects being classified as fundamental rather than not — there has been a lack of valid reason to reduce them

to anything else. Subjects as fundamental entertain a possibility of something that can be characterized as both conceptually and metaphysically fundamental. Even if subjects do not exactly fit the bill, something that can be characterized as both metaphysically and conceptually fundamental gives way to something that can have a particular instance of its existence (its existence within a world) be both conceptually and metaphysically fundamental within that world, perhaps helping bridge those notions together into an encompassing framework of both concept/mental and physical—which itself is a key to understanding what can bridge the epistemic gaps which plague the aforementioned theories of panpsychism. This will be explored as further sections in this article dive into phenomenon and our experience itself.

Henri Bergson

Bergson was a French philosopher whose philosophy bridges from analytic philosophy to continental philosophy that has more of an existential emphasis. As such, his philosophy involves a fundamental level of existence that, similar to Panpsychism, does not simply reduce to certain physical things or metaphysical relations. His incorporation of existential philosophy into his ontology parses him from the analytic examples pertaining to Humean and some Anti-Humean worldviews. For him, we cannot simply analyze something and reduce its individual existence to something that is more fundamental. This opens up a worldview markedly different from the previous examples which does not just involve the subject at the fundamental level, but the existential aspects of a subject's will and experience become crucial to what fundamentality

looks like for Bergson. This section will examine how that constrains what sort of thing can be considered fundamental.¹¹

In his work “Time and Free Will”, he argues for the notion of free will, which comes along with explaining why arguments for metaphysical causality are confused with the true nature of time. This true nature of time is what Bergson calls “duration”, and duration is the essence of our conscious and lived experience, its essence going directly against strict causality and thus opening up the possibility of free will.

Bergson frames duration as being a “qualitative multiplicity”. It is multiple in that duration has extension that continues onwards, but it is not a pure unidimensional extension that we can pit to one direction. Its direction does not move to any particular point, and especially not a point that can be quantified. Rather, the direction is given by the very things that are enduring, and this is where Bergson latches the idea of free will to duration. Duration is not pre-given, but understood after the fact through the expanse that the individuals who are enduring have traversed. The decisions made by the individuals are thus not pre-given by any causal fact, and rather determined by themselves. The direction of duration is their own direction, a product of their own will. This cannot be quantified in any sense, and so this characterization of duration is qualitative for Bergson. We thus cannot understand this kind of duration in any quantitative sense, nor may we compartmentalize it in any way. The urge of the intellect to compartmentalize it takes us away from true understanding of duration since duration itself has an essence of constantly opening and enduring, it loses its meaning when it is reduced and the aspects that are reduced are also lost in their relationship to the world around them, since that relationship is given through duration. For Bergson, we do not understand anything purely through intellectual

11 **Bergson, H.** (1910). *Time and free will: An essay on the immediate data of consciousness* (F. L. Pogson, Trans.). George Allen & Unwin. (Original work published 1889)

conceptualizations of things which tend to reduce to quantities or impose particular fixed points at which things meet at. These conceptual reductions are reductions of duration, and our experience of duration is necessary for grasping anything that our concepts attempt to latch onto. Even when something is quantified, that is also given through our understanding of duration.

Bergson gives an example with music — when we hear the rhythmic beat of a song, we do not just hear each spike of the beat in isolation. If that was the case, we would not be able to perceive the rhythm of the music as it is playing — we would have to take all the isolated beats and synthesize them afterwards. But if we were to actually attempt this, all we have is each beat in isolation, and not the relationships between them, and we have no way to construct the rhythm artificially after the fact. We must understand the rhythm itself, the succession from one beat to the next, not just each spike of the beat. This means we cannot discretize from one beat to the next, we must constantly experience the duration between, latching onto the change of that duration as it courses through each beat ultimately giving us the rhythmic experience of music. Quantifying the amount of beats, and even trying to quantify the distances between them in an attempt to recreate the sound still yet gives us discrete units, which isn't experienced as song until we can have an experience that accumulates over time, an experience doesn't just traverse us from one unit into the next with no remnant of the past. No matter what we quantify, our latching to its duration comes prior to any discretizing of it, otherwise we would not be able to experience it as any distinct thing to reference at all — all we would be left with is the abstract units themselves and nothing beyond that they are meant to represent.

This goes for anything that we conceptualize, wherever quantity is applied to something, that “something” is understood through duration. If I measure the table in front of me to try to define its parameters, I still have an understanding of it as a table, and its quantitative extension

only takes place in the world around it where those units are simply relative to each other. We do not understand an inch through a number, because the very numbers that make it up can be divided infinitely. It is rather a unit that extends a certain amount in space, keeping a stable position amongst the things around it. This extension is quantified after the fact, with the reference point for the numbers not belonging to the numbers themselves, but to something very tangible which is known as a reference point only in its relation to the things around it. If a reference point for a measure is something like 1 basketball, and that measure is classified as a foot, we have an idea of how long this measure truly is because we understand the relative size difference between a basketball and other objects. The size difference is always relative, our capacity to quantify something as a certain amount of units bigger than a basketball or “double” a basketball only comes after we understand the continuous change from the expanse of a basketball to something else, the continuous spatial expanse which allows us to relate things to each other and use the same abstract measure like an “inch” from one place to another. As such, this continuous expanse of duration is primitive to all use of quantity, and thus to understanding anything as a distinct identity since understanding something as its own identity is quantifying it as a unit amongst other identities. All conceptualization deals with identifying certain things which require a discrete separation from other things, and so all conceptualization relies on duration.

Thus, we can say that understanding of this “duration” is fundamental to any conceptual scheme in respect with Bergson’s argument, the understanding which is latched onto by our intuition. Our way of understanding the world is not an intellectual scheme purely made of concepts that can quantify and reduce things into other things, because the more we try to reduce things into specific concepts, the more we miss out on their true nature. Taking the implication

given by Bergson even further, if we really were to try to have some fundamental concept or concepts that we could reduce and compartmentalize non-fundamental things to, we would just end up having infinite fundamental concepts since each fundamental conceptualization would merely be a part of an uncountable whole process that characterizes the existence of every non-fundamental thing — that process being duration. In this sense, there are no fundamental things within our conceptual scheme that are responsible for laying out a proper scheme of the world, because to truly understand the world is to let go of our concepts. If there are certain things that are fundamental in a conceptual scheme, they would only be illusory schemes. So what is truly conceptually fundamental for Bergson actually does not lie within our concepts. For him, what grounds our schemes is our understanding of duration. This understanding is not a concept because the very nature of duration is not reducible in any way — duration is not merely a thing but an act, it is to endure. Even though duration represents time for Bergson, he carefully parses this from any conceptualization of time by calling it “lived time”. Whereas the time we might conceptualize off of a clock and measure from intervals is itself an artificial reduction of time.

This understanding of duration cannot be reached through intellectual measures that either try to analyze or synthesize, leaving it to be intuitive, which is in accordance with duration being understood through our very lived experience. The basis of our experience contains the essence of duration, and so by latching onto that we understand it, and this kind of instinct to understand how we naturally move through the world is an intuitive understanding, and it also allows us to understand everything else since everything else is merely a reduction of duration.

One of these reductions of the intellect involves the conception of causality, which is important to our understanding of physical relationships. Bergson’s argument against metaphysical causation does not deny it outright, but states that any assumption of a cause and

effect relationship is never a relationship involving the true essence of an object. He denies the determinist argument that denies free will due to our actions being effects of past causes by delving into the issues with the supposedly logical necessity of imposed cause and effect relationships.

While we may posit causes to particular objects, and that these causes whether they are physical laws or something else are their own particular thing, what we understand is a reduction of the objects and the laws which does not account for the entire existence of the things involved in the relationship. For Bergson, a cause and effect relationship involves the fact that to imply a logical necessity between cause and effect one must reduce time to discrete packets that have no true duration. To say one thing causes another is to imply particular objects exhibiting particular events within a moment of time which must be parsed away from the next succeeding moment. For Bergson, the very nature of time goes against this separation of an event as if the events are a single infinitesimal frame. Metaphysical causation seems to be a way we reduce the physical world within our conceptual schemes for Bergson, and although he doesn't fully deny the physical aspect of causation, his argument elaborates how the necessary steps to achieve an argument for causation involve reductions of our true consciousness, of our true experience of the world where we must neglect our deeper understanding of the world to achieve such a logical necessity. Bergson's argument implies that imposing causality for conscious beings is thus completely mistaken, and an unfinished reduction at best for the physical world. His argument for duration underlies both our experience and the stitching of the true physical world, so while we place intuition or our understanding as being conceptually fundamental, it seems like we can place duration as being metaphysically fundamental for Bergson. Duration involves the true passage of an object, it lays the path for an object's true essence which only exists through such

duration and not at any point in time, and nor does the object causally depend on any other object since causality is not sufficiently established. Due to these factors, Bergson would likely not prioritize any particular object, reduced aspect of an object, or any set of physical aspects such as laws to be metaphysically fundamental. What we are left with for Bergson is duration or “real time”, the only structure or dimension given by Bergson that accounts for the true essence of things. The nature of free will means that duration will not fit into a kind of CMB notion of metaphysical fundamentality, and that may also be an issue for it being classified as a restricted independence notion. It seems though that with the notion of free will which is vital to the understanding of duration, that ones will itself can change duration in some way. It also seems that duration exists not just within conscious experience, but as such lived experience, and that lived experience is necessary to provide such a basis of duration. The notion of duration does not easily fit into the given notions we have of metaphysical fundamentality, and it also crosses over to conceptual fundamentality, just as the notion of “subject” did for Chalmer’s. This will open up possibilities of distinguishing new notions that can bridge the metaphysical and fundamental, which I will further expand with the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Onto the next non-analytic philosopher, we have the work of Merleau-Ponty whose worldview comes from a phenomenological background. Merleau-Ponty’s view of fundamentality has a vast shift from the previous examples due to the existence and nature of our experience being more deeply infused in his metaphysical worldview. Such a worldview goes against views that see there as being certain things or facts that other things can reduce to,

opening up a vastly different notion of what kinds of things are fundamental versus what things aren't. As I go through this example I will show how our common notions of fundamentality — such as fundamentality being related to independence — must be reworked to make way for a notion of fundamentality that fits his worldview.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty focused mainly on phenomenology, elaborating views on the content, structure, and nature of our experience. In his book “Phenomenology of Perception”, Merleau-Ponty explores our perception and explains it as something that is not a separated observer from the world, going against intellectualism and empiricism. He argued that intellectualism reduced the meaning of things to abstractions within the mind, neglecting the embodiments that things reside as. Empiricism, on the other hand, he viewed as tending towards reducing the content of our mind to tangible stimuli, raw data which removes subjectivity and intentionality from the picture.¹²

Merleau-Ponty's view essentially was that meaning is embodied, and so any object we think of does not solely exist as an object, nor a representation of something else. Its tangible embodiment involves its own intentional carving out of reality — not necessarily abiding by a pre-reflective law, nor a random occurrence that was simply physically affected by something else. In “Phenomenology of Perception”, Merleau-Ponty mentions how we as humans intentionally carve out the world through our interactions with the world around us, interactions which don't prioritize one end as “seer” and the other as “seen”, but that for us to perceive things we are simultaneously being received and seen by something else. Interactions are reciprocal on both ends, and so Merleau-Ponty's view does not leave much room for hierarchical structures of relations. Instead, the reciprocity of our interactions with reality poses forth Merleau-Ponty's

12 Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception* (D. A. Landes, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1945)

view of intersubjectivity, a view that posits embodiments that are neither solely objects nor subjects, but active co-constituters of the world, not as separate from the world but constituting it through interactions. Perception is not a passive receiver of information, but active and in engagement with the body, cohereing our action in the world and our understanding of things in the world as a unified process instead of separate things. Merleau-Ponty's merging of subject and object also merges body and mind through embodiment — where intention is intertwined with our bodies and both structure each other, and thus what physically constrains us and what mentally constrains us is also intertwined. Thus, what is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty also seems to be something that is not just metaphysically or conceptually fundamental, but a connection of both. Merleau-Ponty's intersubjective view is also one that finds issue with mere descriptions of things as revealing their nature, and so his view of fundamentality is not ascribed to any explicit thing or idea. He believes that existence is indeterminate within its own standpoint, since the active players of reality are constantly weaving its structure, and so its determination is not pre-given but fleshed out through time.

Time is vital to understanding what is fundamental in reality along Merleau-Ponty's view, as it will help us understand how he connects metaphysical fundamentality to experience, our access to the world from our subjective standpoint. Intersubjectivity posits that the individual shapes the world while being shaped by the world, and time allows us to understand the world through its change, not described at a fixed point where our idea of the world might be limited to imposing one particular thing as what imposes that reality. It allows us to compose our understanding of the world as itself something that is constantly in flux, just like time, leaving the determination of reality as not being a fixed, stagnant fact but something that occurs at every unfolding moment, with our embodiment being intentionally placed in while simultaneously

intending every further moment. Time for Merleau-Ponty is thus not something that can be reduced to something else — it is the structure for which reality becomes through, and it allows the determinants of that structure to not be pre-given but unfold at every moment. For things to come into existence at their moment and not be pre-determined opens up the possibility of a momentary intention to shape the world at that moment, and so time as a foundational dimension which involves physical change reconciles how intentional embodiment — one that unifies intentional mind and physical body — can be a foundational constrainer of reality. Time and embodied, intentional perception are thus foundational for the becoming of existence in Merleau-Ponty's view, which takes out pre-given truths or fixed structures as being fundamental. These candidates of fundamentality under his view are further examined in his unfinished work, "The Visible and the Invisible".

In "Phenomenology of Perception", Merleau-Ponty posits a kind of intersubjectivity where we do not just perceive but also are perceived in our interactions with the world, however his explicit description of these intentional, embodied things are still limited to humans. "The Visible and the Invisible" he revises his view of embodied, intentional perception and explicitly refers to the world as something that also has that quality. He elaborates on a deeper, more fundamental structure of reality which he calls "flesh", which does not just refer to human flesh but to an intertwining of subjecthood and objecthood as a reversible structure of the world, where things are constantly shaping each other through their embodied perception that receives just as much as it intends. As things are always acting and changing, the world is in a sense something that grows and unfolds through time, and is not just a given structure. This organic-like nature is the basis of understanding the fundamental structure of reality as "flesh". As flesh implies something that has its own intentionality and capacity for perception, through this Merleau-Ponty

implies some form of consciousness existing throughout reality, and not just in humans, taking the unification of mind and body even further. As such, this structure of flesh which seems to be fundamental for Merleau-Ponty cannot as easily be pit within either metaphysical or conceptual categories of fundamentality.¹³

This flesh is irreducible to anything else in Merleau-Ponty's ontology, yet it is never fully given at any fixed point in time. This intertwining structure requires that subject and object can intertwine into an intentional embodiment, one which implies the existence of separate, but interconnected entities. It also implies that reality is determined through the interactions of individuals with each other, which requires a multiplicity of individuals. This means that one individual cannot fundamentally make up reality, but it requires the interactions between individuals. Individuals are still necessary and foundational components to the unfolding structure of reality, but it is the consistent interactions between individuals that delineates that structure through the medium of flesh, aka structure of relationships. Flesh is a structure of relationships, which reflects internal and external world meeting, and as a field of relationships the field is a relational field. That connects the field itself to the components within the field into a broader category that encompasses field and component-in-field, where they are in dynamic interaction. Flesh does not directly provide semantic content for the individual subjects that interact through it since we can conceptualize things that we categorize off into subjective and objective perception while overlooking flesh, but is the necessary interweaving that allows meaningful content to emerge. Flesh is also not necessarily a foundation for our epistemic knowledge, as in Merleau-Ponty's view, perception holds a primacy in reality. That means that we do not receive the representational content of our perception, but rather enact and virtually

13 Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The visible and the invisible* (C. Lefort, Ed.; A. Lingis, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.

activate it, kickstart it. Epistemic foundations for Merleau-Ponty are also divided since objective thought is not representative of true reality or flesh, and what we experience is not necessarily knowledge but involves intentionality, and “knowledge” or knowing the real content of something settles in our perception after-the-fact. So what we think we know is not knowledge of what is a fixation of something that is constantly changing, and for how we actually receive true information in the world through our experience, that information becomes embodied as a way of acting in the world, and so knowledge is deeply known as possibility. Objective facts that we have a grasp of are fossilized remnants of possibilities that are re-orienting and re-intending in the world, the scope of changing possibilities and intentions representing the totality of how we may act, which is then the totality of what we may know. That is all knowledge is, and there is nothing we can extrapolate from there as something that is purely and wholly knowledge, as knowledge overlaps with intentionality and action.

From “Phenomenology of Perception” we gain embodied perception being fundamental for Merleau-Ponty, and in “The Visible and Invisible” he identifies a fundamental ontology of flesh as fundamental, as he furthers the concept of embodied perception as belonging to an encompassing structure that is flesh. Under the phenomenologist view from the likes of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, we get to the essence of what things are through what is intentionally revealed for us, and what is revealed itself is something that is cultivated after-the-fact rather than a pre-fixed existence. It is something that is not reached in a pure objective representation of knowledge but through our phenomenology. For Merleau-Ponty, the fundamental ontology of things is thus given not through what anything is independently of anything else, but in the intertwining of subject and object, which Merleau-Ponty elaborates as intersubjectivity. It is given through experience, where experience is not reduced to internal

mental activity but the active constitution of the world “as-it-is”, the phenomenological equivalent of the real world. A phenomenologist such as Merleau-Ponty does not pin the real world as being a set of facts that can be reduced to, but something ever evolving and not just in unveiling the facts but evolving on the deeper level of our experience — because we cannot know the true existence of something before our intentional experience of it, the existence of things is not something we can reach a priori. What is real and what truly exists is never fully known, because what will be real and what will be the existence of something (that is not in existence yet) is additionally something that will be placed within the field of flesh with everything else, trading intentions within the organic intertwining world with everything else. If everything is placed in this reciprocal field of intention that is flesh, it is difficult (if at all possible) to draw a bound where something's existence is complete. Phenomenology thus does not share the same structure of identifying what is fundamental as with stances such as realism or idealism, since everything that exists to some extent is also something that is interdependent with other things, and is interdependent down to the level of its very existence, not just interdependent along a specific metaphysical relationship such as causal dependence. As in, it is not simply my motion in spacetime that depends on other things, but my ontological existence. And with the existence of things, from their own standpoints and from the standpoints of others emerging after-the-fact, there is no structure or existence that things can be completely reduced to. “Ontology” for such a field is thus quite different. The way ontology is used in phenomenology is not exactly the same as with other fields, as the existence of something is not assumed, and existence itself is not divisible from experience. We are no longer following notions that are proximal to our notions of CMB or restricted independence, with the interdependence involving

experience, subject and object blurring what is metaphysically fundamental with what we collectively experience.

Chapter 3: The Fundamentality of Self within Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

Introduction

As we have gone through the examples above, going from Humeanism to Anti Humeanism has given us different notions of metaphysical fundamentality. Moving to Chalmers' panprotopsychism, we gain a view where subjects or the necessity of subjects are additionally involved as being fundamental on an equal footing with the fundamental aspects of the world. Moving up to Bergson, we get a view of the world where what is fundamental is not a fixed thing, but rather a qualitative process of real time, and the changing processes that make up real time can be organically stitched through subjects with free will. With Merleau-Ponty, we move beyond what is metaphysically fundamental being independent in any sense from our experience, where the constant intertwining of subject and object itself is responsible for the "flesh" — organic matter not referring to biological life but to the evolution of the world itself.

Through all of these, we gain an understanding of metaphysical fundamentality, and then how a subject or a sense of self can also be fundamental with the world, with Merleau-Ponty bringing that to a point where self and world are inherently intertwined. These views either present a view without subject, and when subject is introduced it is introduced with its capacity for experience. The idea of conceptual fundamentality is not as present within these views, yet it is also a major player when it comes to understanding an individual self and how an individual can navigate the world around it. What I will attempt to do in this chapter is to sketch a view

where we can introduce conceptual fundamentality with the self and the world under Merleau-Ponty's worldview, in an effort to understand how the interaction of all 3 of these components shifts our notion of fundamentality.

The view I will sketch will take the step of understanding fundamentality where it is intertwined with the self, the conceptual, and metaphysical — building off of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology where our experience and perception of the world is not internally representational but embodied and inhabiting the world.

Merleau-Ponty's bodily schema

The conceptual scheme missing from Merleau-Ponty's view was not a mistake from his point of view — his view entails that when it comes to things like intentional action, we do not conceptualize a goal first and then gather our whole body to move in that direction. His view of intentional embodiment implies that our bodies themselves have a motor intentionality, a way of intending in the world that does not include conceptual representations. This comes from his view of subject and object intertwined and shaping the world through their intentions — for Merleau-Ponty, the body is situated in the world not as an object within its fixed spatiotemporal position but as an orientation, a subject situated towards the carving of the world itself. The body is engaged with the world, in fact it is an engagement with the world and is not just placed inside of it. Since the world is carved and is not given before the fact, the way the body situates itself is orienting itself, which is where we get Merleau-Ponty's idea of motor intentionality from. This motor intentionality is the body's implicit understanding of its positionality and movement in the world, the possibilities for its motion. These are pre-perceptual, this body schema that Merleau-

Ponty implies that the body has is a dynamic and organic schema, not a representational one. The body is already in an organic engagement with the world before we can think up an intention, so once we consciously decide that we are going to run our sink and brush our teeth it was already our body that was primed and reaching towards our daily routine of running a brush against our teeth. Our body understands how to position the brush with our teeth, our hand with the brush, and our legs towards the bathroom. These action patterns are already ingrained in it, and they contain motor-oriented meanings like “grasping” or “moving” which are necessary meanings for us to consciously establish a semantic structure such as “I am going to go brush my teeth”. They are the aims the body has in the world without representing the world, or motor intentionality — intentionality before our perception. The thought here is of intention not as the cognitive exercise as we typically view it, intention is instead understood as the body's capacity for possibilities of action. This view is understanding the world in front of us not as something to represent first and then impose actions onto, but our very perception of it as trailing the possibility of actions that existed pre-perceptually since they were already inhabited by the subject of our body, an intentional inhabiting rather than a passive placing of. These action possibilities are filtered into our conscious experience, evolving into semantics that will eventually be part of a conscious intention. Merleau-Ponty remains focused on bodily intentionality, maintaining that conscious intentionality is built from the body's schema of action possibilities and must engage with the body off the bat of any conscious formation to even have the understanding of something that can be carried out in the first place. In other words, for us to have an intention, for us to even ascribe an intention, we must know it as something to be carried out, and our body is our foundation for reaching possibilities. Under Merleau-Ponty’s view, The body's intentionality is always a precursor to our conscious intentionality, and is what carries it out in the end.

I will try to address how we can take Merleau-Ponty's frame of an intertwining of subject and object that has the body engaged with the world and show where selfhood is relevant and vital to understanding fundamentality in the intertwining of self, conceptual schemes, and the world. Merleau-Ponty's view of subjects gives us a view where the point of view of the self is an inherent constituting of the world, and so his framework of this point of view gives us a standpoint from which we can start to see where the physical and the self are intertwined together with potential space for involving conceptual schemes in that intertwining, and seeing what notion of fundamentality evolves from there.

Although Merleau-Ponty seems to deny the use of a conceptual scheme for the body to intend, what he is more closely denying is the fact that we can represent things in the world as objects, and then have a representation in our head which we fixate our aim towards. His use of bodily schema requires that the body must move as a coherent motion towards something that is not fully revealed to us yet, and that distinct parts of the body can move towards the same goal as if they know of the other parts precisely because they are not parts needed to be collected and moved towards a goal — rather, the existence of each of our body parts is an existence of possibilities, and so every intention is already implied rather than imposed. If I walk towards the sink, each part of my body already had that primed as a possibility, and so the fact that I as a whole self intended on it is rather a fact that each part happened to be primed towards its possibility, and the moment where my body is altogether primed towards the sink is a moment of a whole intention and where it will be carried out. There is no separate thing from the body that commands the body, but it is rather that each part of the body innately contains possibilities within the whole structure of the body, its priming towards anything is a priming in relationship with every other part — towards every other part, in a sense (like my mouth opening in

anticipation of my hand placing something within it). The body does not just understand how to maneuver around external things, each part understands how it maneuvers around each other, constituting the wholeness. The convergence of one whole intention is a massive set of relationships our body has with itself. For instance, my hand has a particular relation with my arm when it comes to picking an object up. And my arms and my hand together have a particular relation with my legs when it comes to lunging towards something. So if I take one thing like my hand, it is not that it has the same relationship with every other part. Rather, it has distinct relationships across my whole body, and as it acts these relationships themselves also keep changing. It is not that it has a relationship with my arm, and then merely adds on one relationship with my leg, and then also adds on one specific different relationship with my arm as I enact a different gesture. Rather, each prior relationship changes as my hand enacts a new way of relating or a new gesture. When I lunge towards something for the first time with my arms and my legs, my hands and my arms themselves embody an evolved possibility with each other, and a new field of possibilities opens up for them in conjunction with the possibilities that are opened up for my entire body. I do not have a relationship with my hand and arm first and then the relationship between my arm and leg, and nor is it vice versa. Relationships are not isolated, and so when one relationship is changing it is equivalent to all relationships amongst my body evolving. These show how the whole intention which is embodied through these relations isn't something that is added up towards, but is a capacity there from the beginning that can organically change. Maneuvering in such a way requires that our body can grow in its understanding, and that we can perceive things through understanding things as growing and changing rather than as fixed representations, but also that we can perceive relations between things, consistent and stable dynamics so that we can understand how to interact with them. It is

the consistencies within change that bring us to how concepts can work under Merleau-Ponty's view.

Conceptual Scheme under Merleau-Ponty

It is obviously useful to understand how Merleau-Ponty understood concepts, and it is important to see that there is no conceptual plane for Merleau-Ponty that is disembodied and separate from how we understand our actions. His body schema shows us how meaning is already ingrained in our actions, the way we embody the world since to act is to understand new possibilities we can open up in the world. This understanding entails a sort of knowledge ingrained within our body as knowledge for how it can move, how it can engage certain actions and open up interactions. Knowledge in this sense is not knowledge that knows the things around us as representations, but as ways to move and act. Our knowledge is in knowing how to navigate, knowing the rhythm of our own action. And what this entails is navigating a world around us. To know a particular way to navigate is to know a particular rhythm, a particular structure of how to move. What that structure shapes is the world we are navigating, the thing we are inhabiting which is shaping our intended action as we interact with it. This does not mean that the world is an indirect inference from the knowledge of our own action — we do not know action first and then understand the world as the sort of “negative space” that our movement exists within. We act as an implicit understanding of the world already being there, as there being a field to open. So instead of the world merely being indirect knowledge, the world is our knowledge of “indirectness” itself, of there being something beyond that does not directly follow from our actions but is what shapes them and gives them the possibility to evolve. The world has

a structure that co-evolves with the rhythms of our action, allowing us to understand a sink through a sequence of action possibilities we can enact with it. This lays out the concept of reversibility for Merleau-Ponty, where we understand the world and the existence of others outside ourselves as a reciprocal engagement with ourselves — we know of things through the fact that we can act and engage a possibility, implying there is something that has the similar capacity to return our interaction, that can receive our gestures and provide the interactive space for possibilities to be unfolded. We do not act with a fixed and closed field that is already predetermined, we act with something that engages back, a chiasm between self and other which lays the field for which our experience can unfold into. Our body learns of the sink not first as a concept, but through gradually habituating. It engages a sequence of actions it can perform with it, and when the body experiences this particular sequence as a particular way it can repeatedly open up the world, the habit becomes ingrained as a role the body plays with the world. The sink becomes something we interact with in a certain regimented way and we gain a particular relationship with it, knowing it through the actions we partake in relation to it. The “habit” is a slight expansion of knowledge ingrained as the body schema, but it is still nested within the body schema. It is not knowledge that represents the sink but knowledge as a particular way to live and exist in the world, the body knows a way or style of its being. Once we get to concepts under Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, we get to a form of knowledge that holds onto our experience, naming some particular role we can play with the world. Conceptualizing the sink is to label it as a sink and thus inherit a category that can be applied as possibilities to be enacted elsewhere and elsewhere. However, this is not just a label that we impose onto our experience — for Merleau-Ponty this arises from our embodied experience. It is a crystallization of our experience, where a habituated sequence of actions grows a set of boundaries in our perception, separating it from the

rest of our action possibilities. This bounding is categorizing it, a label which can be generalized to a distinct instance of that same crystallized rhythm of action. A particular way of acting is formed and severed, a way of gesturing in the world is frozen as a particular gesture. The sink becomes an isolated label defining a particular operation, a particular way of engagement. This is a crystallization of our perception as everytime we perceive something that appears to our visual system as the same bounded possibility as a sink, we automatically know it as a sink and navigate it as such, our body might expect to sit on a toilet or rub a towel nearby. This shows that it is not that there is some separate fixed concept we are holding, but rather our sense of possibility that is being sedimented, fixing into a particular expectation of what will possibly unfold in front of us.

We can now understand a concept under Merleau-Ponty as a sedimentation of our perception, something that is fixed and crystallized from the organic flow of the world. While our body is situated in the world it understands meaning by inhabiting the possibilities it has, and carries out intentions by feeling out a sequence of events as a felt holistic rhythm rather than a representation of each part of the sequence. Our understanding of certain meanings and concepts such as with language are not reflections of the world but a way to inhabit the world, which inherently has meaning to us because our bodies are already situated in the world.

When the world tends to show up for us in the same way, our perception of it becomes fixed, and just like with the sink we can conceptualize something like a chair and where it might belong in the world even when it's not in front of us. Our idea of a chair is rather just a fossilized form of what was our lived experience and intentionality with such an object. It is not a fixed mental thing, but a fixation of our lived orientation towards the world, a habituated way of seeing the world. Merleau-Ponty takes this even further with some of the most highly abstracted

concepts such as mathematics and logic. He implies that these concepts emerge in our perception as layers of sediments of our lived meaning, layers that get more and refined and fixed as we continue to experience our orientation in the world. Our experience of the space around us and sequences of events unfolding one step after another become the anchors for what become refined as equidistant intervals and logical equivalences, setting the stage for the emergence of concepts like math and logic.

What we have is that the body continuously learns of the space that it is in by gesturing towards and feeling possibilities, the act of which opens up new possibilities and grows our understanding of the meaning of the world. Under Merleau-Ponty's view, intentional action is not a discrete event anymore. We are constantly in a flux of intention, with each action in each moment of time guiding us to the next possibility of the world, the next moment that opens up to us and carries us to rediscovering new possibilities. So for every moment of an intentional action, my whole body collectively embodies not just the possibility right in front of it, but a sequence of possibilities that gather into a larger holistic possibility, such as brushing my teeth. My body intends as a whole, towards a felt holistic possibility. However, what my body must also do as it intends towards a possibility, is understand its present place in the world, to understand where it is in its orientation towards the possibility. And it cannot just do one thing at a time. It must understand its present positionality with the proximity that positionality has to the holistic possibility. What Merleau-Ponty claims is that the body knows its position through the body schema, which is the same schema used to understand a future possibility. This schema leads to a fluid sequence of intentional actions, not pausing and reflecting after a select amount because even our reflecting and conceptualizing the next action is just sediments of previous lived embodiments which are already guiding us to the next possibility. The way we experience

the future is not simply an abstract representation of the present, because we do not reflect on the present moment we are in — we quite literally open and unfold it, expressing it. We are not simply transitioning from present to future, but the future is something that organically emerges through our gesturing towards new possibilities.

As we have looked at in Chapter 2, Merleau-Ponty's framework denies the existence of knowledge that is completely separated from our sense of intending and possibilities of action — all knowledge is embodied knowledge. Concepts are emergent labels of our experience, boundaries arising and partitioning ways we act in the world, senses of possibilities that have sedimented and become more fixed. What we can know and what sets up a conceptual scheme is then fixed senses of possibility, abstracted and labeled roles we play in relation to the world. Now that we have what a conceptual scheme can look like under Merleau-Ponty's view, we can examine what may be fundamental to it.

Self as fundamental to knowledge

If we go off the body schema, our intentionality is holistic — it is not each part intending its own distinct action which afterwards adds up to one whole action that our body collectively moves to. This would imply that possibilities to engage and interact with the world are first isolated, when truly they are intended towards as a whole which means every possibility we can perceive relies on a sense of an individual whole for it to be perceived at all. Possibility itself has meaning under this view as a sort of practical possibility where we have the agency to unfold the world and engage new gestures shaping new ways of existing with it, and by being known deeply in our bodies must be known as something we have a holistic capacity to enact and

unfold. Possibility does not refer to anything in particular, but Merleau-Ponty's notion of it is a deliberately vague notion where to have a possibility is to have an existential possibility of our being, potential to unfold and open the very world we inhabit since the world is not given before the fact but structured after the fact, always in flux. Thus, there is no fixed particular goal for our sense of possibility to latch onto beyond a capacity to gesture and unfold some emerging style of our being which we feel and embody the rhythm of.

This implies that there is a capacity that holistically engages, a whole individual capacity to bring about possibility directly for itself distinct from possibilities for others. This brings us to Merleau-Ponty's sense of self. Merleau-Ponty does not believe in the self as being fundamentally internal, as our embodied subjecthood is intertwined with the world. What this leads to is a view where our sense of "self" and "other" emerge through interaction, and emerge in a reversible simultaneity. As our bodies gesture towards possibilities, we experience a difference between our manner of behaving in the world and how that manner is reversed back upon us. Touching a surface, I notice a distinction between my pressing into it and the impression it trails back on my hand. And speaking to someone, their voice has a consistent delay in reaching my ears than mine does. This distinction parses us from the other, our collective reversible acting stitching the fabric of shared reality — the world. What is also true under this view, is that our entire field of possibility is a field of potential interactions between our fleshing out of possibilities and the reversible acting of the other, giving us something constantly beyond what is right in front of us thus a world that keeps opening up.

There are some implications that we can draw from this, which are not explicitly in Merleau-Ponty's writing. First, it is plausible to say under his view that our perception begins with an already implied distinction of self and other, because otherwise there is nothing to

perceive. Merleau-Ponty writes that our sense of self emerges in simultaneity with our sense of the other, and we come to act more and understand the rhythm of the way we embody and flesh out possibilities with others, the difference in my actions with others cultivating a view of myself. However, for this distinction to even begin, for me to experience that something is distinct to a rhythm in the world that belongs to me, that already presupposes a given sense of self. To be able to have evidence that justified that my experience is mine requires that my experience of such evidence belongs to me in the first place. If my perception which exists in relationship with the world did not already contain my sense of self, there would be no possibility for me to view any action possibilities since the fleshing out of action possibilities are reversible intertwinings of subject and object, a reversible interaction of self and other which allows each to receive the other and allows me to understand myself as an active agent in the world that others can engage with rather than a passive recipient of actions imparted onto me, in which case I hold no possibilities or potential of action for myself. The moment our perception grabs this reversibility of there being an “other” it is interacting with and thus grasping the fact that it is interacting at all, that is the moment it makes a distinction between self and other which is the very moment it embodies such possibilities holistically as an implicit understanding that those possibilities are it’s own to unfold within a world that is shared with others — the other explaining why those possibilities are not known yet but are yet to be enacted. Possibilities are only fleshed out in a reciprocal engagement with the other, the intersubjective interaction that is perceptible after-the-fact. These do not occur one after the other, but in simultaneity, and so that implicit understanding of a self must be there from the beginning.

What “self” entails

Going off of this, it is important to clarify what it means for the self to unfold in simultaneity with the other, yet also be ontologically fundamental with its existence necessary for the unfolding distinction in the first place. The self under this view is a sort of thing that is already implied at the same time as it is unfolding, because it is not a point or completion at the end of the evolution, but innate to the unfolding itself. This is not a contradiction — it is rather a distinct way of looking at change and potential. The important note is that “self” is not just evolving, but it is always evolving in distinction from “other”. The evolving of self and other is a proportional relationship — as you have more of one unfolding, you also have the other unfolding. What we can say from that is that “self” and “other” are relative to each other. Since the existence of both is already relative to each other where their relationship is intrinsic and not related through any kind of external relations, the evolving of the sense of self is something that evolves in simultaneity with the evolving sense of the other — it's not a sense that can evolve in isolation from our sense of the other. We cannot gain a sense of self while having no sense of the other. The self is already being given to have a capacity to explore possibilities, and those possibilities it explores lead to its distinction from the other. The self that exists for itself is thus a capacity, a potentiality. And the self that evolves in relation to the other is an evolving growth of possibilities, an individualization of possibilities that further distinguishes self from other.

It may seem that the self existing for itself has no place to exist, that classifying it as a potentiality is removing it from a concrete existence. But this is exactly what makes the self fundamental within Merleau-Ponty's line of thought — the self is what grants concreteness to all else, and concrete existences emerge from its own relative unfolding alongside the other. This allows us to tie the notion of self back into what Merleau-Ponty's fundamental ontology was —

the flesh. Reality is not pre-given, it is something that is fleshed out, and every change is not something that can be reduced to something before it — it is literally fleshed out after the fact through the interactions between self and others, emerging from the intertwining of subject and object. Just because the self is not a fixed thing, does not mean it cannot be fundamental.

Merleau-Ponty's ontology in fact calls for change itself as being fundamental to the fabric of reality, and not something that can be deduced from a fixed set of facts or derive from an already given particular sort of thing.

That means that every new moment is not simply a trajectory of the previous moment or the very first moment, but that new moment itself contains a newly grown trajectory, a re-orienting. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy does not contain any particular thing to orient oneself to, but rather to exist is to constantly reorient with every orientation bringing about a new sense of possibility. What we are oriented towards is then something that itself is an emergence, we are oriented towards a form of change itself, towards an aspect of ourselves that our very act of orienting towards creates. This is why Merleau-Ponty's philosophy has the structure of our perception trailing our intention — we act first, and acting is not knowing exactly what we are but it is the process of learning it while we stitch it. How we change does not boil down to what we know, because we know how we change after the fact, and what we know and how we understand ourselves constricts what our next change is — what we intend. Our knowledge is embodied, and our bodies prime towards possibilities that continuously settle as changes in our embodiment, these embodied changes understanding and reorienting towards our emerging style of being. It is the case that what we know is how we know ourselves changing, and so we change and act first and then deeply understand that change, our embodied knowledge re-orienting ourselves and constraining our next action without knowing such action. This embodied

knowledge never knows an action, it just feels out where it could be headed. So the way we act, the way we change in Merleau-Ponty's ontology is not a translation across a fixed field, but an opening of the field itself — the world, the fundamental fabric of reality is constantly opening up with new possibilities and meanings rather than shifting from a set of possibilities it already has. Change is fundamental, and the fundamental things are things that change. However, this is also not a pure sort of change where from one moment to the next we have a completely different sort of thing, as for Merleau-Ponty we have meanings and possibilities that aren't complete shifts but an emerging growth of possibility.

Relations are inherent to his phenomenology, as things only distinguish through reversible interactions where self distinguishes from the other through recognizing it as imparting an action back and thus opening up a possibility that is not just from and for the self but beyond just the self, the self is intertwined within a greater unfolding of the world. Every new moment is a reversible interaction and thus a reciprocation of action that unfolds a new possibility for both sides, and so every moment following from it must hold that reciprocation stable in order to have a true organic flesh. If I am interacting with the sink in front of me and turning it on, and in the next moment it can completely lose its meaning as a sink entirely, I would have no way to embody that knowledge and would lose that particular possibility of interaction with the sink. My body thus has no way to intend and move because there is no constraint on its orientation. It is the stability of interactions of self and other that allow there to be unfolding standpoints of self and other that keep the interactions going and can consistently stitch reality. The consistency of my embodied interactions with something else highlights our reciprocity, the relationship we have with each other. We are both changing, but not away from each other — there is a sort of stability between us as we move towards each other's unfolding

possibilities. And “we”, as in me and the other, are not fixed things either, so as my evolution is evolving and changing alongside the other, our relationship with each other is slowly becoming a relationship between more distinguished things, making the relationship itself more and more distinct, particular and personal to me and the other rather than a mere repetition or copy of some other relationship. And these personal relationships are cultivated in simultaneity with the self unfolding in distinction from the other. The more we have a meaning of self, the more we have a meaning of other. And the more distinct self and other are, is the more each gains a more particular individualized meaning and constrains a relationship between them.

What we can see now is that as we have change, we also have more specific relationships. As a capacity or potential of this change emerges, it must also become more distinguished and distinguish itself from others, an individualization without which there is no trajectory towards further interaction and possibility, the grounds for change in the first place. It is not just pure change that is fundamental, but individualizing change, change of embodied flesh that can reorient and continue to cultivate new relationships simultaneously constraining its relationship to all others.

The self that unfolds in distinction with other is found as the unfolding itself, it is not something that is completed after the evolution but delineating the evolution. The self is never completed because it was always there as potential, as it is the character of potential and capacity itself — to act and unfold possibility is to distinguish self and other. Merleau-Ponty’s after the fact ontology shows that potential itself is never dwindled, because it is not completed and given at any point, it is constantly fleshing out. And so it is not that potential fleshes out into concreteness, but that potential fleshes itself out into further potential and possibilities, concrete reality being the stability of the change, the relationships that are cultivated and personalized

alongside the emerging potential. As we gain more change, we also gain more relative fixtures, stable and more personalized relations of the change, each self distinguishing itself from the other and from all others. Potential is constantly emerging, unfolding into something new but always remaining as potential, never stagnating and fixing as any particular thing. This is reminiscent of expansion — potential does not lose its nature and transform completely into something new, but as it changes it embodies a new possibility for itself, it grows. So we can understand the self not as a fixed thing, or a pure change, or not existing at all — but as a capacity of expansion, the thing that as it opens and changes itself also constrains, distinguishes and individualizes itself, as this is the intertwining of reality, the organic unfolding of it. And within any subject it is this implicit understanding that they can open possibilities that do not belong to a reality that has already been given, but rather that possibilities unfold from their personal distinction with others, that to exist is to exist as an individualizing capacity that that makes a sense of individualness inherent within the notion of potential.

As we navigate through what a sense of individuality or selfhood means for Merleau-Ponty, it can be seen that it does not abide by a pure and independent notion of self akin to something like a soul, but neither does his philosophy deny the existence of the self. This shows how his notion of self evolves past typical traditional Western and Eastern ideas of the self. Running along the Western notions, there is a capacity to become self aware and “know thyself”, which typically implies that there is already a fixed self from the beginning that our endeavors of knowledge can uncover, and we can learn what this self entails generating a complete notion of one. The self within Ponty’s philosophy, which while it involves knowledge as knowledge of how to unfold possibilities, is not knowledge uncovering a hidden image of self. It is more so knowledge that learns how to relate and feel the other, and this knowledge becomes embodied

which unfolds our next action before we can fixate on it and have a full understanding of it. Knowledge is not representational knowledge, and self awareness is not simply awareness but is also already engaged with the world and intending. There is never a point where we can fully represent the self — our individuality is the very thing allowing us to conceptualize and understand anything at all as the delineation of our experience, thus not something that can be compartmentalized within it.

Although Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is against a completed self, it still implies the existence of a self and thus runs against certain Eastern notions of a lack of self, where the self can be something we experience yet is an illusion. Buddhist philosophy brings this idea up, where our sense of self is an aggregation of different processes that do not hold any particular ontological significance, a fabricated extrapolation of the way things are changing. Merleau-Ponty's self remains distinct from this notion because change for Merleau-Ponty is embodied and intentional, and so change already implies a sense of self. With Merleau-Ponty's ontology, any process itself is an emerging distinction of self and other, an unfolding of possibility that requires a sense of individuality to further distinguish and engage with the organic change of the world. Within Buddhism, it is true that you cannot truly represent the self, as there is no real self to be represented. But with Merleau-Ponty, we cannot represent the self because we do not represent anything, we only know through possibility of ourselves, and so we cannot compartmentalize the self as we already understand and experience all things through our individuality. Furthermore, experience is not an isolated activity from the world but in an intertwined engagement with it, so what we experience can still hold a very real existence.

As we understand Merleau-Ponty's intertwining of experience with reality which is tied to intertwining of subject and object, we also gain a finer understanding of how self delineates

the contents of our experience. Our entire field of experience has a horizon of possibility — the threshold of experience is the threshold of which beyond which we cannot see possibilities of action, as possibilities of acting is what colors our perception . That means that beyond this threshold, self is no longer a distinction from other — the horizon is the threshold we cannot see possibility thus cannot see how we interact with the other. Where the self and other do not interact, there is no possibility to be perceived. And where we collapse completely into the other, there is nothing to interact with, no reversibility or span for existence to extend into, it becomes zero. So going from our whole field of experience, which is a fundamental constituent of a relational, intersubjective reality, the field opens from a distinction of self and other and closes where the self is isolated, where it has no potential for interaction. So our horizon of possibility is how much we can act and change with the world, but every step of the way our sense of self is there. Our experience is then framed by the evolution of our self, how our self can evolve, while it consistently belongs to us. It is always the locus for which we perceive the other, it is the fundamental locus of our experience. We can reframe self under Merleau-Ponty's view where self in this sense is not fixed, not isolated. Self is the possibility of evolution, the possibility to reach for possibilities, and is something that continuously distinguishes itself further. Its consistency, the fact that we can always understand it as our locus, established it as a sediment of our perception in some sense, except it is not a sediment within. It is the perimeter, its sediment is temporal more than just spatial. It is what remains across our evolution, the backbone of evolution, not what remains just as we conceptualize one category or thing to another.

This helps us tie the sense of self or individuality in how it is fundamental to conceptual schemes. As it is what grants meaning as the field that allows us to understand the notion of possibility, it is fundamental to our experience of possibilities, which is what makes up the

content of our experience. Conceptual schemes or sediments of our experience are sediments of possibility, fixtures of how we can act. And because we understand ourselves as a capacity to unfold possibilities, a concept is also a fixed sense of our individuality. To have a concept of something is to fix our individuality to some partial extent, to bound a particular role we play in the world which is a particular way we sense our individuality, our sense of self. And to have a conceptual scheme is to have relations between these fixed roles, relations between fixed possibilities for ourselves. The scheme puts these roles, which are sediments of how we can act and unfold possibilities all in relation with each other. But because these relations are not organically changing, they are like fossils of what was organic embodied change — fossilized representations. We are putting parts of our sense of self in a network with each other where they are not reciprocally engaging with each other. As such, a concept within a scheme marks a distinct threshold of our perception where we do not see any further possibility — each distinct threshold dividing our individuality into distinct sets of possibilities that do not holistically and organically engage with each other. In this sense, fixed concepts are like small divisions of the self, isolated and fossilized parts of self that make our understanding of holistic possibility more incoherent. These thresholds are where self and other are isolated rather than distinguished, and this partial sense of self collapses into neither true sense of self or other. The stability of these fossilized relations within a conceptual scheme is not a true stability because it is stagnant while reality is changing, and so it is a network that is constantly falling behind while it appears stable, becoming incoherent relative to the natural rhythmic change of the world. Where we have organic knowledge, stable relationships between self and other that are moving with organic change like a dynamic topography, we have a scheme that is not representational but embodied — something that becomes a part of us and how we act in the world. Our sense of individuality

is fundamental to our experience and our knowledge of the world, as it is precisely our distinction from the world. Where it is isolated or collapsed into otherness marks a threshold of possibility, and a threshold for what we can perceive and know. We can tie in the notions of fundamentality from previous chapters to understand what kind of notion of fundamentality this is.

Self intertwined with Concept and World and it's notion of fundamentality

This view of self shows it not as complete and separate self but a consistent trajectory towards individuality, its existence at the fundamental level is intertwined with the world and there is no hard bound of separation. This intertwining makes it difficult to establish the self as being independent across any relation that would fit it under the restricted independence notion of fundamentality. For example, it is not causally independent from any sort of emergent thing because as the self engages and unfolds the world, the change of the world is also something that changes how the self is distinguished from other, changing its relative position with the world. The encompassment is not a reductive and minimal basis, rather the opposite — it is a sort of encompassment that expands with what it encompasses and never reduces what is to come next. This sort of encompassing nature that Merleau-Ponty's implied sense of individuality has is one that provides a basis for which things can emerge, while it itself continues to expand and evolve along the way. In this way, its existence is like a capacity. However, it is a special type of capacity. It is not just an ability to cause something to happen, as if it is a causal power. This kind of capacity is not fixed and rigid, and it is not something that is separate from the entity. It is rather the entity as the capacity — my “self” or my individuality is my capacity to unfold

possibilities and distinguish within the world. It is also something that expands or organically grows in every moment of its interaction, as every interaction is a gesture towards new possibilities. If I have the capacity to hunt, that means I can get food for myself without it necessarily being entailed. Everytime I hunt for food and get new kinds of food, I also refine my ability to hunt, and open new possibilities for food. But it is not just particular abilities that get refined, like my vision or my hand-eye coordination. In fact, I can plausibly improve in hunting while keeping these abilities rigid and not improved. Perhaps I just learn how to apply them altogether just for the context, and my capacity to use these abilities together improves. This need not be a preset ability that is just for hunting, as that is an external context. But, I can use other particular abilities targeted towards hunting and improve my capacity for the context of hunting without refining any of the abilities themselves, because the refining is in learning to use them for the context. What gets refined is my sense of a context I am within and not an ability that is within me. My capacity for hunting does not entail that I will only get any particular kind of food, because it is something that can change and so I know I don't know exactly what food I will get because of my capacity until I actually try it — until the relevant change actually happens. At the same time, everytime I hunt and get food, it is because of my capacity to hunt. And each time this capacity expands to some degree.

Individuality along Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is like this — it can bring about change, but as things change it also refines and re-orientes itself, distinguishing and expanding alongside change. It is not merely a particular ability we hold within us, as the capacity expands that very sense of "us", it is our individuality that continues to expand. It is not something that is already given and complete, it is always changing and never complete at any particular point, yet always there and only becoming more distinguished with every interaction.

Within our conceptual scheme, it expands with everything we know, constantly distinguishing from the other — a constant expansion in line with our further understanding of the world, an understanding which is after-the-fact and an organic growth of epistemic knowledge. Knowing more of the world occurs as we distinguish the world from ourselves, the other from ourselves, and new knowledge is embodied knowledge granting new possibilities and thus new meaning to what our actions can do. Our knowledge of the world is constructed not as technical knowledge but knowledge of our own self potential, knowledge of possibilities for how we can act with and unfold the world. The self unfolds in an equal proportion to how our knowledge genuinely grows, and so as we use it as an anchor to grow our knowledge we also refine our sense of it, which allows us to build and embody further knowledge and distinction with others in the world. Even here with the conceptual, individuality plays a role as a capacity, something that as it expands simultaneously delineates our schema of action thus refining how we will interact with the world, showing the bridge with Merleau-Ponty where our experience is not internal but directly related to the change we facilitate in the world, intertwining with and thus changing the fabric of reality through expanding our piece of that fabric — our individuality.

What we have is that the metaphysical and the conceptual are intertwined with Merleau-Ponty's world, which is shown in that the notion of fundamentality for selfhood or individuality shows up as an encompassing sort of fundamental thing that is akin to a capacity — not a tangible fixed thing but the way of being, the style or possibility for how to exist.

Conclusion

As we have navigated through these chapters, we have seen relevant notions of fundamentality to analytic and non-analytic traditions, bringing us from metaphysical to conceptual systems and into philosophies where both systems are brought together. As this has been navigated, we also have seen how the notions of fundamentality have changed. This chapter delved into what fundamentality looks like under a view with metaphysical, conceptual, and the self all intertwined, taking Merleau-Ponty's stance as the framework. What has been shown through the different worldviews in previous chapters which pose different kinds of metaphysical existences such as modal connections or bring in subjects, our notion of fundamentality also changes, and what it means for a thing to be fundamental under one worldview is not what it meant to be fundamental under another view. Moving from the analytic to the non-analytic philosophers, we have seen that what it means to be fundamental is not as conflated with being independent, even in a restricted sense as the ontologies of Bergson and Ponty call for an inherent interconnectedness in reality. What is fundamental becomes something that can also be wholly interdependent. What also happens as we move towards the philosophies of Bergson and Merleau-Ponty is that the boundary between conceptual fundamentality and metaphysical fundamentality begins to soften, no longer are they two completely separate notions but intertwined with one another — and the things that are fundamental can be fundamental amongst both respective notions. This final chapter examined more of what these fundamental things are and what the notion of fundamentality can be understood as under a non-analytic view, working off of Merleau-Ponty's worldview. I have attempted to show that the notion of self is fundamental to a conceptual scheme under Merleau-Ponty's worldview, but also that any conceptual scheme, which are seen as sedimentations of our experience, is interwoven with tangible reality since reality does not exist outside of experience — making self fundamental

beyond just a purely conceptual sense. I also have attempted to show that this notion of fundamentality in Merleau-Ponty's world is something akin to an organic notion of capacity — the self is something that allows the sense of and actualization of possibilities, interaction with the world, and is also something that gets further distinguished and refined with every interaction.

Looking further ahead, this lens that I have brought to looking at Merleau-Ponty's work leaves some open questions. For one, it seems clear that semantic meanings within his worldview are not purely technical meanings, as they always are tied back to some sense of possibility which is also related to a holistic expansion of our sense of self, a new understanding of our own being. Merleau-Ponty's existential framework raises the question of how meanings that relate to our values, things that are meaningful to us and fulfilling, are tied up with semantic meanings. We looked at how a conceptual scheme can exist under Merleau-Ponty's worldview, but there is still room to examine where these meanings pertaining to values exist in relation to our experience.

There are also many possible questions with what experience could look like beyond human experience (and whether that is something we could even grasp), and what a self would look like whether in other sentient beings or even inanimate objects, tying Merleau-Ponty to the panpsychism that his ontology subtly suggests. These questions lay out potential directions that could bring attention to some of the loose or unfinished ends not just in Merleau-Ponty's work but also to phenomenology in general.

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