

Fabrice CORREIA: *Existential Dependence and Cognitive Notions*. München: Philosophia Verlag 2005. 171 pp. ISBN 3-88405-088-5. € 68.00.

Fabrice Correia's excellent book presents a systematic account of certain modal and ontological relationships in terms of which various subtly different notions of *existential dependence* may be explicated. These notions are central to many projects in analytical metaphysics and the philosophy of mind and as such need to be understood as clearly as possible. For example, substance ontologists typically attempt to characterize the category of *substance* in terms of some suitable notion of *existential independence*. Again, physicalists in the philosophy of mind frequently try to explain the relationship between mental and physical properties in terms of the notion of *supervenience*, which is usually taken to imply some kind of existential dependence of the former properties upon the latter. Both of these examples, along with many others, are taken up and explored by Correia in the course of his book.

Although there have been other attempts in recent years to provide a rigorous account of the chief varieties of existential dependence, Correia's treatment of the topic is by far the most thoroughgoing and systematic to date. Correia critically examines some of these previous approaches in Chapter 2 before introducing his own in Chapter 3. In particular, he raises objections to three main alternative accounts, which he calls the "modal-existential" approach, the "purely essentialist" approach, and the "essentialist-existential" approach. The first of these approaches has had numerous advocates. The second Correia attributes to me and the third he attributes, independently, to Kit Fine and to Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons and Barry Smith. In each case, Correia argues that the approach in question fails to capture certain strong pre-theoretical intuitions concerning relationships of existential dependence between putative entities of various ontological categories.

Correia's own "foundational" approach,

as he calls it, appeals to a generalized notion of *grounding*—which he takes to be primitive—along with various more specific notions of grounding. He introduces, in Chapter 3, some relatively simple formal apparatus which enables him to represent perspicuously the basic principles that he takes to govern grounding relations. In Chapter 4, Correia elucidates these notions and their use in defining what he calls the "simple foundation" of one entity in another, with the help of detailed illustrative examples. Here is his proposed definition: " x is [simply] founded in y iff it is impossible that x exists without being based on y —i.e. $\Box(\exists x \supset x \text{ B } y)$ ", where "An object x is based on an object y ... when the fact that x exists is partly grounded in some fact about y " (p. 66). Later, in Chapter 5, Correia provides an analysis of "generic" dependence and other species of existential dependence, illustrating the importance of the former by discussing its role in debates between "Aristotelians" and "Platonists" concerning the nature of universals. He also examines in some detail Husserl's conception of foundation, comparing it (unfavourably) with his own. Subsequently, Correia develops the distinction between non-temporal existential dependence and various temporalized forms of dependence, applying it to the definition of *substance*. In a final chapter, Chapter 6, he analyses the cognate notion of *supervenience* with the aid of his foundational approach to existential dependence and compares this analysis with others to be found in the voluminous literature on supervenience. Correia's formal treatment of the various themes dealt with in the book exploits a logic of modality and essence which is provided with a philosophical motivation in Chapter 1 and is systematically formulated in an appendix.

The book is extremely clearly written and meticulous in its presentation and organization. A consistently high standard of precision and rigour is maintained throughout, both in formal and in philosophical analysis and argumentation. Correia's critiques of alternative approaches are well-informed and generally judicious and the theory that he defends is

cogently argued for. While building constructively on the work of others in many places, he develops an original and powerful system of ideas which makes an important contribution to a fundamental area of metaphysics and ontology—one that has, until recently, been inadequately explored.

Since Correia clearly thinks it important for the success of his own project that rival accounts such as my own can be seen to be flawed, I shall conclude this note by briefly examining the objection that he raises against my so-called “purely essentialist” approach. My approach appeals to the notion of what I call *identity-dependence*, which I define as follows: x is identity-dependent on y iff necessarily, there is a function f such that it is part of the essence of x that x is the f of y .¹ I claim, crucially, that identity-dependence entails what Correia calls “ m -necessitation”, i.e., that if x is identity-dependent on y , then, necessarily, if x exists, then y exists. In support of this entailment thesis, I argue thus: “[S]ince for x to exist is for there to be something identical with $x \dots$, x cannot exist unless everything upon which x 's identity depends also exists”,² and I illustrate this with examples—such as that of an assassination and the person assassinated. Thus, for an assassination to exist, there must be some particular assassination that it *is* (i.e., that it is identical with), and *which* assassination it is will depend on *which* person is assassinated. But if *there is no such person*, then it is undetermined *which* assassination it supposedly is, and so no such assassination exists. Correia, however, thinks that there are credible counter-examples to my entailment thesis. By contrast, he maintains that, according to his own definition of *simple foundation*, “unlike identity-dependence foundation has the desired property of entailing m -necessitation” (p. 67).

Here is one such putative counter-example.³ Correia suggests that the property I_S of *being identical with Socrates* is identity-dependent on Socrates and yet can exist even though Socrates does not exist, given that I_S is a necessary existent and Socrates is a contingent existent. However, in my view, properties are *not*, in general, necessary existents (I hold that they exist only in worlds in which they are exemplified) and, certainly, I see no

reason to suppose that I_S is. In any case, it may be doubted whether I_S , if indeed it is a genuine property, is identity-dependent on Socrates: for, plausibly, if it is a genuine property at all, it is a *haecceity* and as such an *individuator* of Socrates and so not something to which Socrates is ontologically prior.⁴

Correia has other putative counter-examples to my entailment thesis involving *disjunctive sums* and *disjunctive facts*. Since I don't believe in either disjunctive sums or disjunctive facts (at least as Correia seems to conceive of the latter), these “counterexamples” are, in my view, unconvincing. With regard to disjunctive sums, these seem to be in no better shape than disjunctive *sets*. Is there a “disjunctive set” whose members are either Mars or Venus? Certainly, there is such a thing as the set of all and only those things x such that either $x = \text{Mars}$ or $x = \text{Venus}$, i.e. $\{x: x = \text{Mars} \vee x = \text{Venus}\}$, but this is just the set $\{\text{Mars}, \text{Venus}\}$. The disjunctive sum of Socrates and Plato would be something that is indistinguishable from Socrates in some worlds, indistinguishable from Plato in others, and indistinguishable from the (conjunctive) sum of Socrates and Plato in yet others—and which exists in no other worlds. So there is no world in which it is not indistinguishable from something else. I don't believe that there can be any such thing. As for facts, to the extent that I am in favour of them at all, I incline towards the Plantingan view that facts are states of affairs which obtain and that states of affairs are necessary existents. I could then happily accept that there are disjunctive states of affairs and that such a state of affairs is identity-dependent on each of its disjuncts: but this won't provide a counterexample to the thesis that identity-dependence entails m -necessitation, precisely because states of affairs thus conceived are necessary existents.

A final putative counter-example offered by Correia is that of *my present thought about Pegasus*: Correia maintains that “we can hold with some plausibility that [this] thought is identity-dependent on Pegasus” (p. 49), even though Pegasus does not exist. However, I would say that, if there really is such a thought, then in fact it is either a purely descriptive thought or else is one containing as a constituent Pegasus's individual concept, where the latter is tak-

en *not* to be identity-dependent on Pegasus. If it really were an *object-dependent* thought, then it couldn't exist unless Pegasus did. (Of course, it may *seem* to me that I am having such an object-dependent thought when really I am not, as in the case of apparent demonstrative thoughts about hallucinatory objects.) All of Correia's alleged counterexamples to my entailment thesis are indeed, as he concedes, "somewhat baroque".⁵ He takes these examples to defeat my "premise that where *F* is a function, for every *x*, the *F* of *x* cannot exist unless *x* exists" (p. 48, n. 13). But this premise simply appeals to the standard conception of a function, according to which a function is undefined for values for which it lacks an argument. (What is the length of Santa Claus's beard, given that Santa Claus, and hence his beard, doesn't exist?) Of course, Correia has already made it clear that his quantifiers are *possibilist*, not *actualist*,⁶ which rather stacks the cards against my position from the outset. On my (actualist) view, something doesn't exist at all unless it actually exists. For me, a singular term which lacks a referent in this, the actual world, cannot have one in some other, merely possible, world. For me, to say that something exists at all is just to say that there is actually something with which it is identical.

I should mention that Correia thinks that the force of his alleged counter-examples doesn't depend on our accepting that they really *are* genuine counter-examples, but only on our accepting that some metaphysician *could reasonably take them* to be counter-examples. This is in line with his general aim to explicate the notion(s) of existential dependence in a *metaphysical neutral* fashion (though how his preference for possibilist quantifiers can be taken to be consistent with such neutrality is not entirely clear to me). In his view, "[A]ny account of the various notions of existential dependence should be compatible with any viable, i.e. non-absurd, i.e. dialectically possible metaphysical view" (p. 10). And he acknowledges that my own account of existential dependence does not aim at such neutrality and hence that he "will not take [his] objections to establish that Lowe's characterization is inadequate given his particular purposes" (p. 46, n. 12). In defence of my own non-neutrality in this matter, I would only

say that, unlike Correia,⁷ I take the explanation of existential dependence not to be a mere exercise in conceptual analysis, but a substantive contribution to fundamental metaphysics: and, concerning the truths of fundamental metaphysics we cannot, if we are realists, adopt a neutral stance.

In any case, how does Correia's own entailment thesis fare, given his policy of metaphysical neutrality? As I mentioned earlier, he contends that, "unlike identity-dependence foundation has the desired property of entailing *m*-necessitation" (p. 67). Correia says that this "follows from the fact that grounding is factive ... and [that] ... for something to be a base of *x*, it must have an 'existence-entailing' feature which explains the existence of *x*" (p. 67). But I confess that I don't really see how, if Correia's putative counter-examples work against my own entailment thesis, they or similar ones won't work equally against his. Why, for instance, shouldn't some metaphysician claim that the property of *being identical with Pegasus* is "based" on Pegasus, i.e. that "the fact that the property of *being identical with Pegasus* exists is partly grounded in some fact about Pegasus"—for example, that it is partly grounded in the fact that Pegasus *could* exist—even though Pegasus does not exist? Is this an *incoherent* or *absurd* claim, according to Correia, and if so, why? But if it is not an incoherent or absurd claim, then it would seem that such a metaphysician could coherently maintain that the property of being identical with Pegasus is, in Correia's sense, *founded* in Pegasus even though that property exists and Pegasus does not—thus contradicting Correia's claim that foundation entails *m*-necessitation.

Concerning Correia's positive proposals, I would further ask only this: is it really satisfactory to take the notion of "metaphysical grounding" as *primitive*, as Correia does?⁸ The reason why I abandoned my own earlier attempts along such lines is precisely that leaving such a notion undefined seems intolerably obscure, even after all of the various elucidatory points have been made and illustrative examples have been provided.⁹

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