Is Ground Said-in-Many-Ways?

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Proponents of ground, which is used to indicate relations of ontological fundamentality, insist that ground is a unified phenomenon, but this thesis has recently been criticized. I will first review the proponents' claims for ground's unicity, as well as the criticisms that ground is too heterogeneous to do the philosophical work it is supposed to do. By drawing on Aristotle's notion of homonymy, I explore whether ground's metaphysical heterogeneity can be theoretically accommodated while at the same time preserving its proponents' desideratum that it be a unified phenomenon.

Keywords: Aristotle, ground, homonymy

1. Introduction

The introduction of the topic of ground, which is used to indicate relations of ontological fundamentality, has contributed in part to the (re)turn to Aristotelian-inspired metaphysics (Fine 2001, 2012a, Rosen 2010, Schaffer 2009, 2012, Raven 2012). Grounding relations between states of affairs or facts aim to capture a non-Humean sense of priority: "[t]hey all target a particular sort of non-causal priority which we would like to call *grounding* and which we regard as a phenomenon of the highest philosophical importance" (Correia and Schnieder 2012, 1). Grounding has been characterized as "the primitive structuring conception of metaphysics" (Schaffer 2009, 364). Proponents of ground do not define the phenomenon,[1] but at the same time they share

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[1] "We should grant immediately that there is no prospect of a reductive account or definition of the grounding idiom: We do not know how to say in more basic terms *what it is* for one fact to obtain in virtue of another" (Rosen 2010, 113) Recently there have been some attempts to analyse grounding in terms of reduction and essence: (Correia 2013), (Skiles 2014). Some proponents of grounding look to essences in order to serve as end-points in explanatory chains, which is, according to Carnino (this volume) "quite distinct from and does not entail the view that the explanatory claims in question should be understood in

the inclination that ground is a *unified* phenomenon (Schaffer 2009, Rosen 2010, Audi 2012b). Whether and how ground is unified is the subject of this article.

While well-respected by a growing number of philosophers, ground has also been subject to scrutiny and criticism. The charges against it range from the serious (e.g., that ground is incoherent) to the dismissive (e.g., that ground is superfluous, useless, confused, regressive). Some recent criticisms take issue with the claim that ground is a unified phenomenon, pointing out ways in which it seems instead to be heterogeneous or variegated. In fact, the heterogeneity of ground, critics complain, renders it too coarse-grained, indeed too theoretically vacuous, to perform the metaphysically explanatory work its proponents claim to want from it. While there have been some efforts to meet this charge, proponents of ground have overlooked an interesting way in which ground's purported unity and its heterogeneity might be accommodated—a solution, I contend, that is *in principle* compatible with the Aristotelian-orientation of the proponents of ground. By drawing on Aristotle's notion of homonymy, I will explore whether ground is said-in-many-ways, and thus, like other systematic homonyms in Aristotle's philosophy (e.g., priority, nature, cause, etc.), grounding's metaphysical heterogeneity can be theoretically accommodated. At the same time, by identifying ground as an Aristotelian homonym the proponents' desideratum that metaphysical ground be in some sense a unified phenomenon can be met.

In what follows I will briefly (§2) outline the grounding proponents' emphasis on its unified character, and summarize what are taken to be the formal properties of ground (by broad consensus). Ground is putatively non-definable, unanalyzable, and primitive. While ground is supposed to be a unified phenomenon, in the main the proponents of ground argue only *indirectly* for the unity-thesis, placing on opponents the burden of arguing for its heterogeneity. Recently, Kathrin Koslicki and Jessica Wilson have attempted to do just that, and so I will (§3) outline their arguments against the unity of ground (Koslicki forthcoming, Wilson 2014). The options between proponents and critics seem to be exhausted by characterizing ground as either a unified phenomenon or as *merely* equivocal (i.e., the same in name only). There is, I propose, another option: that ground is an Aristotelian homonym. Specifically, ground can be seen to be what I call a core-dependent, systematic homonym. After (§4) outlining what Aristotle means by systematic homonymy, I will analyze one of Aristotle's homonyms as an example. Given that readers may be unfamiliar with this Aristotelian idea, I will outline Aristotle's motivations for recognizing the phenomenon of homonymy, which should at the same time make apparent the advantages for construing

definitional terms, i.e. that one should define grounding in terms of essence."

metaphysical ground as homonymous in Aristotle's sense. In closing, I will (§5) argue that while it is useful for neo-Aristotelians to identify ground as an Aristotelian homonym, to do so opens up a new set of questions for the proponents of metaphysical ground as the primitive structuring relation.

2. Ground, Its Formal Characteristics

Proponents of ground regularly urge that the notion of grounding is not difficult to grasp (Cameron 2008, Schaffer 2009). In the same breath they also urge that it is unanalyzable and therefore indefinable: "grounding passes every test for being a metaphysical primitive worth positing. It is unanalyzable. It is useful. And it is clear what we mean" (Schaffer 2009).[2] In addition to its being undefinable, grounding metaphysicians insist that there is a unified phenomenon of grounding,[3] although they offer no proof of its unicity.

Recent proponents of ground nearly all proceed in their discussion and analysis of the phenomenon by way of presenting examples of grounding relations. Most proponents of ground take it to be a relation between either actual entities, facts, propositions or sentences, although others (following Schaffer) take a *relata*-neutral approach.[4] Proponents suggest that the idea of metaphysical grounding has "a venerable pedigree" (Raven 2012, 687), citing not just *Euthyphro* (that something is pious in virtue of being loved by the gods), but also Aristotle's science of being *qua* being.

What are the formal features of ground? While there is some consensus amongst proponents, there is also ongoing controversy, which will turn out to be important to the central question being posed here, namely, whether ground is univocal or not. Ignoring for the moment the controversies over each of these, the most often cited formal characteristics are the following:

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[2] See (Rosen 2010, 113) for the claim that the unanalyzability, or primitiveness, of ground does not make it exceptional: "Many of our best words—the words we deem fully acceptable for rigorous explanation—do not admit of definition, the notion of metaphysical necessity being one pertinent example." On ground's analyzability, see (Correia 2013), (Skiles 2014).

[3] For example, Rosen (2010, 114): "there is a single salient form of metaphysical dependence to which the idioms we have been invoking all refer". Fine (2012a) distinguishes three species of ground: (i) metaphysical, (ii) nomological, and (iii) normative. At the same time, however, he urges that there can be a generic notion of ground from which all others are derived. The recent criticisms of ground's heterogeneity specifically target (i) metaphysical grounding.

[4] But Fine (2012b,a) and Schnieder (2011) (in his logical analysis of 'because') take ground to be a sentential operator. Grounding proponents have not yet analyzed 'facts', and there are good reasons to do so; see (Oderberg 2007). On Schaffer's *relata*-neutral approach, see (Schaffer 2009).

ground is irreflexive,[5] asymmetrical, transitive,[6] factive, and non-monotonic. One can also add to this list: ground is necessary (in cases of full ground), explanatory, and hyperintensional.[7] Given these formal properties, ground is thereby supposed to be distinguished from Humean-causality, truth-making, supervenience, entailment, analyticity and conceptual priority.

As mentioned above, proponents of ground insist, without argument, that it is a unified phenomenon, and they shift the burden of arguing for its heterogeneity to opponents. Koslicki and Wilson recently took up this task, and in the next section I will outline some arguments they have raised against the unicity of ground (and thereby the univocity of 'ground' as an idiom). I will then show how Aristotelian homonymy provides a way for proponents of the unicity of metaphysical ground to defend against their charges.

3.   Critics of Ground as a Unified Phenomenon

Due to its alleged heterogeneity, despite its proponents' claims to the contrary, the grounding idiom has recently been criticized as useless for providing refined metaphysical explanation. Koslicki (forthcoming) issues this complaint: "grounding is too coarse-grained to perform the metaphysical work for which it was intended," and this is because ground fails to display the unity that is required for its theoretical usefulness. Wilson argues there is no reason to posit a relation of grounding over and above specific relations of metaphysical dependence, and thus that there is no unified, generic metaphysical phenomenon to be found (Wilson 2014). I will outline their primary complaints against the unity of grounding in turn.

3.1   Koslicki on Unity and Heterogeneity

Koslicki proceeds by taking issue with the purported unity of the grounding phenomenon claimed by its proponents. If grounding is unified, in what

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[5] But see Jenkins (2011), who raises an important concern with the unargued-for stipulation amongst proponents of ground that it is irreflexive combined with the (unargued-for) claim that such dependence relations retain the desired ontological neutrality about things such as the identity of states (of affairs) in question. Irreflexivity is also challenged by Fine (2010) and Krämer (2013).

[6] Both asymmetry and transitivity have been challenged by Rodriguez-Pereya (2005, forthcoming), Schaffer (2012), Litland (2013), Raven (2013), and Tahko (2013). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point. According to Fine (2012a), asymmetry and transitivity are criterial for partial, though not for full, ground.

[7] Daly (2012) also adds two further formal properties: first, that ground is relative and second, that it is partial. However, it is unclear why there could not be necessarily ungrounded facts, or that some fact necessarily has or does not have the ground that it has and no others. I would like to thank Mike Raven for drawing my attention to these considerations.

does its unity consist? Koslicki identifies three possibilities:

(i) The "single-relation" interpretation: "there is only a single grounding-relation and it is exemplified by all cases which allegedly present us with grounding connections";

(ii) The "single-genus" interpretation: "allows for distinct specific grounding relations, but posits that these distinct specific grounding relations fall under a single generic kind, viz. grounding";

(iii) The "mere resemblance" interpretation: "requires only that the distinct relations which go under the name, 'grounding', exhibit various objective similarities" (Koslicki forthcoming).

Regarding (i): As a single relation, ground would be a unified phenomenon and thus, *pace* to proponents of ground who declare it to be unanalyzable and undefinable, it would be amenable to definition. Consider, for example, a recent characterization by Audi of ground as "essential connectedness" (Audi 2012b):

> when a given instance of maroonness grounds a coincident instance of redness, this fact *manifests the natures of the relevant properties*. It is part of their *essence* to behave in this way when instantiated. (Audi 2012b, 695, my emphasis)

Manifesting the natures of the relevant properties, then, would exhibit the unity of the grounding relation amongst its instances. However, as Koslicki correctly points out, compare the case of the grounding of redness in the co-incident instance of maroonness, which is a case of a determinate/determinable relation (countenanced by all grounding theorists) with the case of the grounding of a moral property in a natural one (also so countenanced), for example, when an instance of telling-a-lie grounds an instance of moral wrongness in an act.[8] In the former case, it is always and necessarily true that instantiations of maroonness always give rise to simultaneous instantiations of red by the same object. However, in the latter case, in which the moral is grounded in the natural, it is not true that every case of telling-a-lie grounds an act of moral wrongness, as Koslicki rightly notes, since (say) for a well-informed Kantian the act of telling-a-lie may *not* be morally wrong if it is done to save a life. However, the appeal to ground was supposed to

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[8] Interestingly, just as the proponents of ground introduce their subject by illustrating it with examples, so too the critics adjudicate it by evaluating and contrasting the given examples. Even a proponent of ground agrees with the strategy of the critic: "I think the critics' best hope is to attack the examples (as Chris Daly does)" (Audi 2012a, 107, referring to Daly 2012).

explain the single relation of essential connectedness, or necessity, that is at work in each of these cases. Yet these two cases do not manifest the same type of relation. The distinction between the two cases can be explained in terms of, perhaps, different types of necessity at work (e.g., in the former, metaphysical necessity, whereas in the latter, hypothetical necessity). Accordingly, Koslicki contends that ground does not seem to be a single relation, such as one of essential connectedness, at least not for the examples cited by its proponents, and does not seem to be definable.[9]

Regarding (ii): Similarly for the interpretation of the unity of ground as a genus. Koslicki proceeds by comparing different examples of grounding relations to show that it is difficult to see what general characteristics or features they share. To take just one example, compare the grounding relation that obtains between a determinable fact (e.g., the ball's being red) and a determinate fact (e.g., the ball's being maroon) and that which obtains between a genus (e.g., the fact that this figure is an equilateral rectangle) and its species (e.g., the fact that this figure is a square). If the grounding relation is supposed to be a single genus over these two species, then it is difficult to see what it is that makes these, in fact, species of one and the same genus. For in the case of the determinable/determinate facts, the more specific colour maroon is what grounds the more general colour red. But in the case of the species/genus relationship, what grounds the more specific, the fact that the shape is a square, is the more general, the fact that it is an equilateral rectangle. Thus, the directions of explanation go in opposite ways, one from specific to general, the other from general to specific. And so, at least on the face of these commonly used examples given by proponents of ground to illustrate the general grounding relation, it is difficult to see that they are sufficiently similar to consider them to be two species of a general relation.

If Koslicki is correct, then by process of elimination grounding phenomena are similar to one another only by (iii) "mere resemblance". Koslicki claims that, given the objective differences between varieties of ground, the grounding idiom is not able to do the fine metaphysical work required. For Koslicki, then, the grounding relation is ambiguous or homonymous, by which she means (I think) that instances of what are called 'ground' are the same in name only. Note that Koslicki has carefully indicated the ways in which different relations that are called 'grounding relations' exhibit important objective differences. At the same time, however, she recognizes that

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[9] Much more needs to be said about the necessity at work in grounding relations. Whether grounding necessitarianism can even be defended has recently been considered by Skiles (forthcoming). Whether or not it can, Koslicki has correctly pointed out that there are obviously different *types* of necessity in these two putative cases of grounding, and certainly this needs to be explained (or explained away).

there *are* objective similarities among them (albeit underdetermined and coarse-grained ones), such as the three formal properties that seem (albeit not uncontroversially) to be present in cases of grounding relations (e.g., irreflexivity, asymmetry, transitivity). How can these objective similarities be explained? Moreover, are these objective similarities sufficient to retain ground as a non-univocal but not *merely* equivocal idiom? Answers to these questions will be advanced in §4, but first let us review Wilson's criticisms.

3.2   Wilson Against the Generic Unity of Ground

Wilson raises a number of complaints about the efficacy of the grounding idiom for metaphysical explanation. Distinguishing between what she labels "'big-G' Grounding" and "'small-g' grounding" relations, Wilson dismisses the former for being underdetermined, if not vacuous, and urges instead that we need always to appeal to the latter in order to acquire "even basic explanatory illumination" (Wilson 2014, 19). Generalizing from characterizations given by its main proponents,[10] Wilson depicts Ground as the genus of various specific grounding relations, such as type identity, causal composition relations, determinable-determinate relations, and so on.[11] Wilson's characterization of the generic Grounding relation emphasizes its alleged responsibility for identifying a "distinctive kind of metaphysical relation," (Wilson 2014, 4, quoting Fine 2012a, 38) namely constitutive determination, and for its putative primitiveness, (for some proponents) its ontological neutrality, and its unity. I will focus on her criticisms of the latter, that is, on the claim that Ground is unified.

Wilson does not ever consider whether ground is a single relation (i.e., Koslicki's option (i)). Rather, her exclusive focus is on the phenomenon as a genus with various species of relation. Picking up on clues suggested by proponents, it might seem understandable why Wilson distinguishes between Ground (the generic relation) and grounding (the specific relations). Given the insistence that G(g)round is claimed to be a unified phenomenon, and that the G(g)rounding idiom is thereby supposed to be univocal, there would seem to be a need to posit a generic sense in order to capture whatever sort of dependence each of the various species of grounding relation shares. Wilson refers explicitly to Sider's insistence that none of the special grounding relations on its own can capture what is distinctive about Ground:

> Sider takes the use of expressions such as 'in a grounding relation'

[10] Wilson (2014) focuses mainly on Fine (2001, 2012a), Audi (2012a) and Schaffer (2009).

[11] Koslicki (forthcoming) briefly suggests that Wilson has included types of metaphysical relations that may not turn out to be dependence relations after all. This does not affect the substance of this discussion of G(g)round's unity, although it may overstate the problem for proponents.

> to provide terminological support for there being a general notion of
> Grounding, not reducible to any specific grounding relation. (Wilson
> 2014, 22)

Accordingly, Wilson proceeds to analyze Ground as genus and grounding
relations as species.

According to Wilson, however, on its own the appeal to 'big-G' Ground
as an explanation accomplishes no metaphysical work. Rather, "investiga-
tions into metaphysical dependence, conducted without any reference to
specific details, *cannot be carried out*" (Wilson 2014, 15). Wilson's obser-
vation is certainly borne out by much of the grounding literature, in which
proponents cite examples of grounded relations and then explicate the na-
ture of those relations by appeal to specific metaphysical relations, such as
the determinable-determinate relation, or the genus-species relation. Given
this, Wilson asks,

> insofar as appeal to specific 'small-g' grounding relations is required
> to gain even basic illumination about metaphysical dependence, what
> if any point is there moreover to positing Grounding? (Wilson 2014,
> 19)

On the face of things, the observation that explanations of relations of
metaphysical dependence require reference to the species of relation at work
seems such an obvious one that one wonders if something has gone wrong,
either in Wilson's characterization of G(g)round or in grounding theory it-
self. By pressing a distinction between 'big-G' Ground and 'little-g' ground-
ing relations, and then by claiming that metaphysicians need always to ap-
peal to the latter in order to be informative, Wilson has in effect eviscer-
ated 'big-G' Ground, leaving it without the capacity to do any finer-grained
metaphysical work.[12] If Wilson is correct about the relative uninformedness
of 'big-G' Grounding claims, then the special determination relations that
have gone under the generic Grounding heading turn out to be variegated
and disunified. Ground appears not to be unified and, according to Wilson,
the grounding idiom is rendered uninformative and thus useless.

Whether or not Wilson's arguments are successful, by pressing the pro-
ponents' characterization of Ground as a generic relation with several species,
Wilson has presented a formidable challenge to proponents on the unity
question. Is Ground something metaphysically robust and explanatory, over-
and-above its species, or is it merely a generic concept or term that rather

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[12] According to Wilson (2014, 10), "This underdetermination [of 'big-G' Ground] will high-
light just how uninformative Grounding claims are, by way of contrast with the detailed
illumination to be gained by appeal to the specific."

unhelpfully merely gestures towards types of metaphysical dependence relations? For reasons different than those identified by Koslicki, Wilson's criticisms of the unity claim in effect amount to the same. That is, she presents this challenge to proponents of Ground: either they explain how the phenomenon is a unity, or they admit that it is too heterogeneous to do effective, metaphysically explanatory work.

Koslicki and Wilson see two main options: ground is either unified or not. Both argue for its heterogeneity. There is another alternative not considered: it is time to see whether ground is an Aristotelian homonym.

4.   What is Aristotelian Homonymy?

Homonymy is the first technical notion defined in the Aristotelian corpus, appearing for the first time in the first book of the *Categories*. This text famously (and frustratingly) opens abruptly with three definitions: homonymy, synonymy and paronymy. It is clear that these are definitions not of words or word-uses, but of *things* themselves. This is the definition of homonymy, which is also the very opening lines of *Categories*:

> When *things* have only a name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is different, they are called *homonymous* (*homonyma legetai*). Thus, for example, both a man and a picture [of a man] are animals. These have only a name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is different; for if one is to say what an animal is for each of them, one will give two distinct definitions. (*Cat.* 1, 1a1–5)[13]

On the basis of this explanation, it is not immediately clear how homonymy should be construed.[14] At first glance, we might be inclined to think that these two things—a man and a picture of a man—which can be called by the same name, do indeed have something in common, namely being a man and a representation of a man. After all the man and the picture of the man both answer the question, 'What is this?' with the same answer, 'An animal [i.e., the species or kind of thing that men are]'. Aristotle points out, however, that the man and the picture of a man turn out to be defined in *distinct* ways. This is because what it is to be a man and what it is to be a picture are distinct *types* of things.

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[13] Paronymy, unlike homonymy and synonymy, seems to be at base a grammatical relation in which words "get their name from something with a difference of ending …for example, the grammarian gets his name from grammar" (*Cat.* 1a13–15).

[14] The history of interpretation of the *Categories*, and of ways of construing what Aristotle means here by homonymy, is extensive. On the ancient commentators' interpretations, see (Anton 1969) and (Barnes 1971). For contemporary interpretations, see (Owen 1960), (Owens 1963), (Leszl 1970), (Ackrill 1979), (Irwin 1981), (Cleary 1988), (Shields 1999), (Ward 2008).

Given that the account (or definition) of a man and an account of a picture <of a man> are distinct, is referring to both of these items as 'animals' a case of what we might call 'discrete'[15] homonymy?

(1) *Discrete homonymy*:
    x and *y* are homonymously F iff (i) they have their name in common, but (ii) their definitions *have nothing in common* and so *do not overlap in any way*. (Shields 1999, 11)

Discrete homonymy is of no philosophical interest whatsoever. It corresponds to the definition of 'homonymy' followed by contemporary linguists, who regard homonymy as a strictly linguistic phenomenon:

[It is the] relation between words whose forms are the same but whose meanings are different and cannot be connected: e.g. between *pen* 'writing instrument' and *pen* 'enclosure'. (Matthews 2007)

While there are some examples of homonyms given by Aristotle throughout his writings that seem somewhat similar to this type of 'sounds-like' word-relation,[16] which Aristotle characterizes as a homonym by chance (*apo tuches*), it is extremely unlikely that this is what Aristotle had in mind for his broader theory of homonymy. After all, in the characterization of homonymy given in the *Categories*, Aristotle claims that the accounts of a man and a picture of a man are *distinct*, but they are not without *some* overlap. For example, the definition of man will factor to some extent in the account of what it is to be a picture of a man. Since an account of each one would make reference to *animal*, there is some resemblance between a man and a picture of a man.

It becomes even more unlikely that Airstotle is interested in mere homonyms by chance when the full extent and importance of Aristotle's use of homonymy throughout his corpus is examined, where we will find evidence that he recognized the phenomenon which will be called *systematic* homonymy.[17]

[15] Following (Shields 1999).

[16] See the discussion in (Shields 1999, chapter 1), especially of Aristotle's *De Generatione et Corruptione* 322b29–32, in which in discussing the homonymy of 'contact', "Aristotle clearly and indisputable refers to words (*onomata*)" (Shields 1999, 13). See also *Topics* 107a18–23.

[17] Aristotelian homonymy, as will be described here, is more akin to what contemporary linguists call 'polysemy': "The case of a single word having two or more related senses. Thus the noun 'screen' is polysemous [pɒlɪˈsiːməs], since it is used variously of a fire screen, a cinema screen, a television screen, and so on" (Matthews 2007). However, both are imprecise and fail to capture Aristotelian homonymy, since the latter is not (or not merely) a relationship between words or word-uses.

(2) *Systematic homonymy*:
　　　x and *y* are homonymously F iff (i) they have their name in com-
　　　mon, and (ii) their definitions overlap, but *not completely*.[18]

Condition (i), having a name in common, is self-explanatory. But what does
it mean to say that (ii) their definitions overlap, but *not completely*? What is
partial, non-comprehensive overlap in definition?

　　It is helpful to contrast systematic homonymy with what Aristotle calls
synonymy. According to his explanation, things are synonymous,

> when things have the name in common and the definition of being
> which corresponds to the name is the same. (*Cat.* 1, 1a6.)

For example, take a case in which there is a human and an ox. Both hu-
mans and oxen share a name, 'animal,' and since they are both species of one
and the same genus, they can be defined in the same way. Things are syn-
onymous, then, if they are able to be defined in (or *said in*) the same way.
According to Aristotle, definition is possible for things, or for the terms for
things, which 'signify one thing' (*Metaphyiscs* IV 4, 1006a32ff).[19] What is
signified by a definition is the essence of the thing to which the term ap-
plies (*APo* II.3, 91a1; 10, 93b29; *Top.* I.5, 101b38). Only one definition should
be given to each definite nature or essence (*Top.* VI.4, 141a31). But not all
items in reality are amenable to definition in this way. Homonymous things
are not, since while they may share the same name, their definitions do not
completely overlap.

　　Distinguishing between synonymous and homonymous items is a cru-
cial strategy in Aristotle's philosophy. The suggestion that *things*, rather than
words, are synonymous and homonymous will undoubtedly strike readers
as a foreign idea, but there is a parallel that might help to illuminate Aristo-
tle's point. The parallel is with the phenomenon of definition. For Aristotle,

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[18] Modified, from (Shields 1999, 11); Shields calls this "comprehensive homonymy", although
he characterizes it somewhat differently than I do here.

[19] While this may seem to suggest that it is terms, rather than things, which are defined, we
must remain as tolerant as we can of Aristotle's frequent shifts between speaking about
things on the linguistic level and things in the real world. It is not the case that Aristotle
was confused, slipping thoughtlessly between words and the things picked out by those
words. No—Aristotle was a linguistic realist, as he himself outlines in the first part of
On Interpretation, such that the ultimate referents or meanings of linguistic expressions
are things in extramental reality. See *On Interpretation* 1, 16a3–9. As a linguistic realist,
Aristotle's doctrine about the relation between linguistic expressions and the thoughts and
extramental things signified by them is best construed as conformalist, i.e., words express
the formal features of reality itself. It helps to recognize that, for Aristotle, names for things
and their definitions are in fact themselves synonymous, since (for example) the name
'human' and the definition 'rational, mortal animal' signify one and the same thing, i.e.,
the essence of being human. See *Met.* IV.4, 1006a31ff.

there can be both nominal and real definitions, in which the former are akin to word meanings or modern-day dictionary definitions, and the latter are explanations of the essences or natures of things themselves.[20] When we are able to articulate a real definition—and this is the very goal of intellectual enquiry (*epistēmē*) for Aristotle—we are in effect carving out from reality, i.e., articulating, *what it is to be* something. In parallel fashion, a discrete homonym merely tracks how things are called in accordance with similarity of sound (or script), whereas a systematic homonym tracks how things are in accordance with similarity of essence or nature. The focus is on *similarity*, not sameness, of essence, since if essences were one and the same we would have a case of synonymy. Putting to the side Humean-type epistemic worries about whether we can reliably track similarity of essence, we can at least begin to see the Aristotelian idea.

We encounter homonymy again in another of Aristotle's logical works, the *Topics*, a treatise which, according to Aristotle,

> proposes to find a line of inquiry whereby we shall be able to reason from reputable opinions about any subject presented to us, and also shall ourselves, when putting forward an argument, avoid saying anything contrary to it. (*Top.* I.1, 100a20)

Aristotle points out the instruments which are to be used in order to construct arguments: "one, the securing of propositions; second, the power to distinguish in how many ways an expression is used; third, the discovery of the differences of things; fourth, the investigation of likenesses" (*Top.* I.13, 105a22–25.). The second instrument is crucial, since

> it is useful to have examined the number of uses of a term both for clearness' sake (for a man is more likely to know what it is he asserts, if it has been made clear to him how many uses it may have), and also with a view to ensuring that our deductions shall be *in accordance with the actual facts and not addressed merely to the word used.* For as long as it is not clear in how many ways a term is used, it is possible that the answerer and the questioner [in a dialectical argument] are not directing their minds upon the same thing. (*Top.* I.8, 108a 18–24)

This instrument is key for determining "whether a term is used in many ways or in one only" (*Top.* I.15, 106a9–10).

The *Topics*, accordingly, introduces some tests that can be used in order to distinguish between synonymies and types of homonymies. For anyone engaged in argumentation, it is crucial to be able to distinguish between

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[20] For an account of how scientific progress is made by inquirers moving from nominal to real definitions by means of empirical investigation and the logic of demonstration, see Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, recently outlined in (Charles 2000).

cases of (1) discrete homonymy (where there is no definitional overlap) and (2) systematic homonymy (where there is definitional overlap).

To illustrate Aristotle's method for testing for homonymy, here are some examples. Imagine that we are to discern whether the property of being sharp, when applied both to musical sounds (e.g., 'That note is sharp') and to people (e.g., 'She's a sharp person'), is synonymous or homonymous. One way to do so is to determine whether there is any correspondence between the contraries of being sharp in each case.

Test for contrariety (*Top.* I.15, 106a9–21)[21]
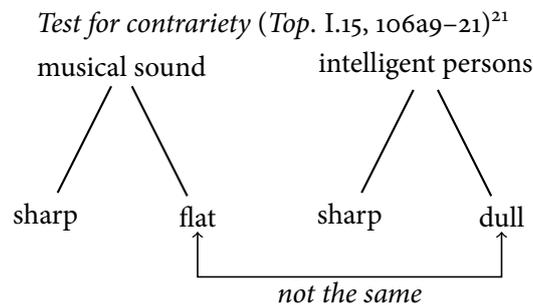
The test for contrariety suggests that there is evidently no resemblance between a sharp sound and a sharp person, no common quality or essence, as evidenced by the fact that their contraries are utterly distinct. Since there is no means by which we can compare flatness and dullness, which are the contraries in question in these two cases, we have acquired some insight into the reference to the property of being sharp in these two cases. Therefore, 'sharp' in this comparative case is a discrete homonym, and has no philosophical significance.[22]

But is 'sharp' ever a systematic homonym? Let us use the quality of sharpness used in the comparative context not of musical sounds and people but of knives (e.g., 'This knife is sharp') and skilled people (e.g., 'This professor is sharp'). In this case, Aristotle proposes that the things called sharp are themselves compared with one another.

> *Test of comparability* (*Top.* I.15, 107b13–18)
> A knife is sharp
> A professor is sharp
>
> But a professor cannot be sharper than a knife
> (or *vice versa*)

[21] See also *DA* II.8, 420a29. I have borrowed the labels for these tests from (Shields 1999, 50–54).

[22] Note that this is not true for Aristotle's medieval readers, who construed this as a case of a translation of meaning from a term's original sense. It is similar to a metaphorical use of the term.

The quality of sharpness is not univocal, i.e., not synonymous, since the things named by synonymous terms *should* admit of comparison. This is because to be synonymous is to be definable, and being definable is to be able to identify the type of thing something is. All things of that type (of that species or genus) accordingly should be comparable with one another. (Contrast this case with, say, the sharpness of a stick and that of a knife, which are clearly comparable along the same dimension.) Since there is no way to compare knives and professors along the domain of their sharpness, to be sharp is therefore homonymous. However, is it a discrete homonym, as in the preceding example, or a systematic one? This is not entirely clear, although Aristotle might concede that this is nearer to a systematic homonym than a merely linguistic one. Both the sharpness of the blade and the sharpness of the professor's mind are specific conditions of being, that is, they are the end-points or limits of those things in a particular condition.[23] Accordingly, there is *some* overlap, i.e., some similarity, between these two cases of being sharp, in the sense that both the knife and the professor are characterized in terms of their end-point or best way of being what they are.

Let us consider another test for homonymy. With this test and this example, we can begin to see other ways in which definitions of a given thing can overlap, but not completely.

Test based on difference in contradictory opposites (*Top*. I.15, 106b14–20)

failing to perceive

sensing   grasping the point
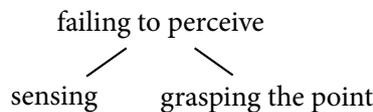
Sensing and grasping the point are contradictories. How does this indicate the homonymy of failing to perceive (and its contrary, perceiving, *aithanesthai*)? Both perceiving and failing to perceive have as their contradictories a bodily mode of perceiving/failing to perceive (sensing/nonsensing) and an intellectual mode of perceiving/failing to perceive. Given that there are two modes of having or failing to have perception, Aristotle has identified a non-accidental way in which we speak about failing to perceive. Perceiving and failing to perceive are thus homonyms whose modes are related to one another. Their definitions will overlap insofar as they both refer to having perception, but not completely since one is bodily and the other intellectual.

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[23] In a similar way in *Physics* V Aristotle notes that there is something comparable between the end of a line and the end of a walk, even though lines and walks are not, strictly speaking, comparable along the same dimension.

Other tests include: whether contraries exist (*Top.* I.15, 106a24–35), whether there are intermediates (*Top.* I.15, 106a35–b12), examination of inflections and paronyms (*Top.* I.15, 106b29–107a1), comparison of significations (*Top.* I.15, 107a3–18), sameness of genus (*Top.* I.15, 107a18–30), test by definition and abstraction (based on subtracting equals from equals, where equals should remain) (*Top.* I.15, 107a36–b5), distinctness of differentia (*Top.* I.15, 107b26–31), and test for confusion between differentia and species (*Top.* I.15, 107b32–6). In all of these tests, the goal is to determine whether items having the same name either have or do not have overlapping definitions. The tests enable the philosopher to ascertain whether there is some shared feature—either a common genus, or a common *differentia*, which are the two components of a definition—or not.[24]

While these various tests for homonymy may be useful for detecting cases in which items with the same name turn out to be related to one another by way of overlapping but non-identical definition, we do not at this stage have a means by which to organize the various overlapping definitions to see how they are connected to one another. In the case of homonyms such as, say, 'sharpness', 'seeing', 'nature' or 'being', is one of the definitions more privileged than another? Are there core and dependent instances of homonymous items? What sense can we make of having detected instances of homonymy? Answering these questions requires us to turn to the idea introduced by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* according to which systematic homonymy is now recognized to be organized around a core. We will call this (2*) *core-dependent, systematic homonymy*.

(2*)   *Core-dependent Systematic Homonymy*:
        x and *y* are homonymously F iff (i) they have their name in common, (ii) their definitions overlap, but *not completely*, and (iii) they are organized around a core sense or instance of F.[25]

Core-dependent systematic homonymy (2*) seems to be a modification of, or advance upon, Aristotle's recognition of systematic homonymy (2).[26] The

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[24] The *differentia* is that feature of a species which distinguishes it from other members of its genus. For example, oxen and humans are both members of the genus animal, but humans are distinguished from other members of that genus by their distinctive feature of being rational. Rationality is the *differentia* of the species human.

[25] Core-dependent systematic homonymy was elaborated during the middle ages into the Doctrine of Analogy, which provided various means by which to organize homonyms around a core. See (Ashworth 2013) for an overview.

[26] There is some question as to whether Aristotle means the same by 'homonymy' throughout his corpus, or whether the notion evolved and changed from its introduction in *Categories* to its application in *Metaphysics*. This issue is taken up by Ward (2008), and I broadly agree with her assessment that homonymy is used to distinct purposes in various aspects of Aristotle's philosophy.

addition is (iii), that x and y are organized around a core sense or instance of F. To be a core sense of F, e.g., to be the core sense of what it is to be sharp or what it is to be healthy, is to be that sense around which all other instances of being sharp or being healthy are organized. 'Core' is not Aristotle's own characterization. Rather, he described what we are calling core-dependent systematic homonymy in this way:

> There are many senses in which a thing may be said to 'be', but they are related to *one central point, one definite kind of thing*, and are not [merely discretely] homonymous. (*Met.* III.2, 1003a33–35)

That is, things are not homonymous *simpliciter*, but are homonymously related to one thing.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle puts core-dependent systematic homonymy to positive philosophical use. As it turns out, many things are homonymous, or are, as Aristotle puts it, said-in-many-ways. To name a few: sameness, difference, unity, priority, posteriority, source/principle, the body, friendship, the healthy, the medical, the state, justice, whole, part, genus, species, and others. These are, clearly, important philosophical topics. Aristotle adds to these topics some of the more central metaphysical ones in his philosophy: being, oneness, actuality, potentiality. It would be a challenge to explain the various ways in which Aristotle construes these as systematic, rather than discrete homonyms, let alone to determine whether or not he is successful in doing so. Aristotle does not present a *theory* of systematic homonymy, although it is obvious that the philosophical device is used by him for a wide range of topics to discern unity in multiplicity without univocity (or synonymy).

While in the *Topics* Aristotle does not emphasize that homonyms are structurally organized around a core, in *Metaphysics* Book IV the relation of ontological dependence between homonyms is clear (what is called *pros hen* homonymy). So, what is systematic, core-dependent homonymy?[27] Take as an example Aristotle's treatment of the homonym nature, which according to Aristotle is said-in-many-ways.

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[27] Owen (1960) dubbed this 'focal meaning', which is an unfortunate and misleading characterization, not least because 'meaning' suggests that this is a purely semantic phenomenon when Aristotle seems to want it to have metaphysical implications. Or, one can retain this characterization while bearing in mind that for Aristotle, 'to signify' is to raise an understanding of a thing in someone's mind, which can be non-semantically interpreted in terms of signification being essence-specification. What should be emphasized most of all is that Aristotelian homonymy is not to be compared, as it sometimes has been, in any way to Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblance'. As Hintikka (1971) made perfectly clear, "Aristotle unmistakably like his concepts neat. In contrast, Wittgenstein's later philosophy embodies a radical distrust of almost all clear-cut conceptual distinctions."

Aristotle recognizes that people speak about nature and what is natural in many ways.[28] Nature (*physis*) is called:

(i)   The genesis (origin) of growing things;

(ii) The primary immanent element in a thing, from which its growth proceeds;

(iii) The source from which the primary movement in each natural object is present in it in virtue of its own essence;

(iv) The primary matter of which any non-natural object consists or out of which it is made, which cannot be changed or modified from its own potency (e.g. bronze is said to be the nature of a statue and of bronze utensils);

(v)   The substance (*ousia*) of natural objects

(vi) When things have their form (*eidos*) and shape (*morphe*). (*Met.* IV.4, 1014b16–1015a12)

There is no Platonic form of nature to which all of these ways of speaking of nature refer. 'Nature' is not a univocal term, and thus nature itself is not a synonym that admits of a single definition. On the contrary, these various, overlapping but non-identical ways of speaking of nature indicate that nature is an Aristotelian homonym.

We can see from this catalogue that nature is spoken of (i) as origin, (ii) as preexistent thing, (iii) as source of motion, (iv) as matter, (v) as substance, and (vi) as form. But what, if anything, gives order to these various ways of speaking about nature? In other words, is there anything that prevents nature from being heterogeneous, and thus talk of nature from being hopelessly ambiguous? To answer this question, Aristotle shows how the ways in which nature is said are ordered by reference to a core sense:

> From what has been said, then, it is plain that nature in the primary and strict sense is the substance of things [(v)] which have in themselves, as such, a source of movement; for the matter is called nature because it is qualified to receive this, and processes of becoming and growing are called nature because they are movements proceeding from this. And nature in this sense is the source of the movement of natural objects, being present in them somehow, either potentially or actually. (*Met.* IV.4, 1015a13–19)

[28] Aristotle frequently uses the investigative method of examining people's common opinions (*endoxa*) about some thing in order to begin his own analysis of that thing. For a more familiar illustration of the use of this method see *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I, in which Aristotle canvasses the many ways people speak about happiness (*eudaimonia*).

For Aristotle, it is the ontological priority of substance that provides order to the ways in which we speak of nature, and accounts for the dependence of the other ways of speaking. Accordingly, these secondary ways of speaking of nature depend on nature as the substance of things as follows:

> Nature as matter: matter (i.e., the matter of a substance) is said to be natural *in virtue of* being able to receive the source of movement;

> Nature as processes of becoming and growing: these processes are said to be natural *in virtue of* proceeding from nature as the substance of things;

> Nature as source of motion: as a source either potentially or actually it is in nature *in virtue of* the substance of things.

What Aristotle provides here is an explanation of the dependence of the secondary, non-core instances of nature on the core instance, viz., nature as substance. Accordingly, the core sense of nature is prior in definition and prior in *logos*, since matter defined as "that which can receive this" (*Met.* IV.4, 1015a15–16) refers to substance, as do the definitions of nature as a process of growth and as origin of change (since substance must be both that which undergoes generation and that which is the subject of change).[29]

Recognizing the homonymy of nature, and especially the way in which the various ways of speaking about nature are ordered to a core sense, provides a great deal of clarity where there had been obscurity. For Aristotle, the project of arriving at scientific explanation (*epistēmē*) demands identifying the things that can be known. Things that can be ordered to a single species or genus are knowable and definable. But not all things are ordered to a single genus (such as the case with nature). Making precise the relations between the various ways of speaking about something that either does not fit into a single genus or transects more than one genus is the job for the analysis of homonymy.

Throughout his writing, Aristotle identifies many other instances of systematic homonymy. Not all are so clearly organized by means of an identifiable core with dependent senses that can be analytically derived from the core. There are, as is well known, ongoing scholarly disputes over whether some things identified by Aristotle as homonyms are in fact so: most famously, scholars dispute the success of Aristotle's case for the homonymy of being. It has been suggested, and I think this is right, that each of the homonyms identified by Aristotle needs its own analysis to determine whether it is non-synonymous or not. Moreover, despite identifying and,

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[29] For a more detailed analysis, see (Ward 2008, 137–145).

in some cases, analyzing, systematic homonyms, Aristotle does not provide us with either a principle or a methodology for determining core dependence. This is not meant to suggest that such a principle or methodology is unattainable, but only that one needs to be identified and defended.

Now, let us return to the question of how to resolve the question of ground, specifically with a view to accommodating the proponents' desire to establish ground's unicity alongside the criticisms that ground seems to exhibit heterogeneous traits. Recall Koslicki's analysis of the different interpretations of the claim that ground is a unified phenomenon. Let us grant for the time being that Koslicki is correct in her assessment that "the unity of grounding and the heterogeneity of grounding stand on roughly equal footing" (Koslicki forthcoming). Recall that her analysis showed that, while the determinable/determinate and the moral/natural species of grounding can be seen to share certain objective characteristics (they both exhibit asymmetry, irreflexivity, for example), they are also objectively distinct (due to the type of essential connection claimed to exist via the grounding relations). Koslicki, like the proponents of grounding mentioned above, takes it that the grounding idiom is either univocal or (merely) equivocal (what she calls the "mere resemblance" interpretation of grounding, according to which "the distinct relations which go under *the name*, 'grounding', exhibit various objective similarities"), and that these options are exhaustive. However, it seems fairly clear that the analysis to which Koslicki subjects various species of grounding is consistent with the method used by Aristotle himself in *Topics* in order to test for whether terms are or are not non-synonymous: that is, the method of testing for homonymy. In doing so, Koslicki has gone some way to show that ground could be an Aristotelian, that is, a systematic homonym.

But a big question remains: Would a contemporary neo-Aristotelian metaphysician avail herself of the doctrine of substantial priority, or something functionally similar, in order to distinguish between core and dependent senses of ground itself? If ground turns out to be an Aristotelian, or systematic homonym (rather than a single relation or a single genus), then we have avoided the unpleasant outcome that ground is a 'mere' or discrete homonym with nothing in common between any of the things that are called 'grounding relations'. If it can be shown to be an Aristotelian homonym, then we might be able to satisfy the proponents of ground by supplying the much-desired unity of the grounding phenomenon by supplying unity out of multiplicity. But is this something that contemporary neo-Aristotelian metaphysicians would find appealing?

5.   Is Ground Homonymous in this Aristotelian Sense?

Is ground a discrete homonym or a systematic one? This is a new way to construe the debate between the proponents of ground and their critics. In other words, it is no longer just a question of whether ground is univocal or (merely) equivocal, i.e., as a discrete homonym, but now whether it can be considered a systematic homonym. What would it mean to treat ground as a systematic homonym?

It is up to the proponents of ground to engage in the work of determining what is core about ground (e.g., asymmetry and transitivity[30] seem to be obvious, but on their own they may not be sufficient to distinguish ground from other types of metaphysical priority, e.g., being a substring of). The tests for homonymy suggested by Aristotle in *Topics* may do some helpful work in this regard. After all, proponents of ground present their case for the unity and the usefulness of ground by means of generating examples and discerning their shared formal properties. Critics of the grounding phenomenon attack the examples, displaying their lack of unity. Perhaps there is a problem in proceeding this way, since some proponents of ground may have latched on to false cases of the grounding relation, and have thereby put forward what are in fact discrete relations that are merely *called* 'ground'. The tests for homonymy might do some work to settle on the systematic cases of ground (if in fact there are any).

The difficulty this poses to proponents of ground is not insignificant. To preserve the unity of the phenomenon of ground by construing it as an Aristotelian homonym, then ground itself must have a core meaning upon which other senses or instances of ground are dependent. However, proponents of ground have another desideratum for their theory that may not be consistent with construing ground as an Aristotelian homonym: namely, they seem to assume that the phenomenon of ground, and the meaning of the grounding idiom itself, are ontologically neutral (viz., Schaffer's *relata*-neutral characterization of items related by ground). Whether or not ground is or can be so ontologically neutral is not a question that I can take up here. What I do want to point out, however, is that it will not be possible to maintain both the claim to the ontological neutrality of the grounding phenomenon and to identify a core or fundamental sense of ground upon which the other instances are dependent. Aristotle could do so, but he was working within the presuppositions and commitments of his own ontological theory. For example, Aristotle was free to identify a core sense of any of his homonymous terms in a way that was consistent with his philosophical commitments, such

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[30] But see Schaffer (2012), who provides a number of counterexamples to the transitivity of ground; the response by Litland (2013) aims to counter these counterexamples.

as identifying the priority of nature as substance, which gives order to the other senses of nature that depend on substance. While those who are working on the theory of ground do see themselves as working, broadly speaking, within the Aristotelian tradition, they may not want to commit themselves to every element of Aristotle's philosophy. But it is difficult to see how they could preserve their claim to the ontological neutrality of ground and at the same time distinguish between core and non-core instances.

Still, it is worth pressing the point to find the required unity of the grounding phenomenon by considering it as an Aristotelian homonym. Proponents of the coherence of the grounding relation as the primitive structuring conception of metaphysics will have to show that of things called ground, they have:

(i) definitions or explanations which overlap but not completely; and

(ii) some core to which they are related; and

(iii) a core relation of ground that organizes the other dependent grounding relations.[31]

Recasting (iii) in the grounding idiom:

(iii-a) the core ground relation *grounds* the dependent grounding relations.

Rephrasing this in Wilson's idiomatic sense (although without construing this in terms of a genus-species relation, as she tries to do), 'big-G' Ground *grounds* 'little-g' grounding relations. This might at first seem absurd, since the condition required to *identify* a core sense of ground relies on the notion of ground itself. It might appear, then, that ground cannot be an Aristotelian homonym, since the very phenomenon of Aristotelian homonymy is itself *explained by* ground (or metaphysical dependence, ontological priority, asymmetrical relation, etc.). And this seems incoherent!

But this, still, is worth further consideration. Take as a comparison the core-dependent homonym priority. Things are called prior in a number of senses, according to Aristotle. As a core-dependent homonym, however, this means that there is some prior instance of priority on which the other instances ontologically depend. Let us propose that this is a non-viciously circular way of identifying core versus dependent senses of structured relations such as priority and grounding. If there is any coherence to the idea that priority is homonymous in this way, then there may be coherence to the

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[31] The variables x and y here can stand for Fa, Fb or for P or Q (for cases in which something is grounded in one of its disjuncts).

claim that ground is also homonymous, despite having to appeal to *itself* in order to distinguish core from non-core instances of the phenomenon.[32]

By identifying ground as an Aristotelian homonym, proponents can avoid the difficulties thrust upon it by Koslicki's and Wilson's efforts to construe grounding relations to be ordered as genus ('big-G' Ground) and species ('little-g' grounding relations). If ground (or Ground) were to be a genus, then it would have to be synonymous (in Aristotle's sense) or univocal. If so, then it could be defined. Koslicki and Wilson have gone some way to show that ground is not unified in this way. But the alternative is not simply to accept the heterogeneity of grounding relations to be merely equivocal (and thus theoretically useless). Ground as an Aristotelian homonym would allow proponents to acknowledge ground's heterogeneity, while at the same time fasten upon a means to display its unity.

To do so, though, will require proponents of ground to identify a core sense of ground, which can be used to organize and thereby unify other senses of grounding relations. It is not immediately clear what this core sense could be, but one option suggests itself. Rather than looking amongst the various types of grounding relations to see which are more fundamental—more core—than others, one could instead look to the formal properties of ground to discern what are in fact ground's *differentiae*. As we listed above, there is some consensus amongst proponents that ground is irreflexive, asymmetrical, transitive and explanatory. Also noted, however, was the frequent disagreement amongst metaphysicians over whether these formal characteristics are, in fact, proper to ground. Perhaps recognizing the homonymous character of ground provides a way to manage both the consensus and the disagreement as follows. Since systematic, core homonyms share a name but have definitions that overlap but not completely, there will be some types of grounding relations sharing some formal characteristics (i.e., *differentiae*), but not others. Other types of grounding relations may have partially overlapping but non-identical formal characteristics with these, and so on.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that proponents of ground who in-

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[32] The alternative would be that ground would be amenable to definition that does not appeal to itself. If this is the case, then ground would turn out to be a species of some other genus, distinguished from other members of that genus by a uniquely distinguishing feature, i.e., by its *differentia*. But if ground turns out to be a species of some other genus, then it is not primitive and unanalyzable, as many of its proponents would like it to be.

As a reviewer pointed out, that ground has to appeal to itself in order to distinguish between core and non-core instances might seem to entail an infinite regress. Perhaps this is the case, although it is not necessarily a vicious regress, especially if grounding turns out to be able to account for relations of fundamentality without 'bottoming out', so to speak, in some foundation or other. See Raven (manuscript).

sist (without argument) that ground is a unified phenomenon have considered the objection that ground is what they call 'merely homonymous', and in doing so they have explicitly invoked Aristotle. For example, Jonathan Schaffer considers a possible objection to the theory of grounding from an (unnamed) opponent who dismisses the notion of ground as 'merely [i.e. discretely] homonymous'. Schaffer, however, errs in his understanding of Aristotelian homonymy and accordingly dismisses its utility and application to the theory of grounding, and instead issues a desideratum for a unified notion of grounding that, *malgre lui*, comes out sounding much closer to what Aristotle himself had in mind by systematic homonymy:

> I digress to consider a possible objection, according to which there are many distinct notions of grounding, *united only in name*. Whereas Aristotle claimed that there were many notions of priority, singling out priority in nature as foremost among them (c.f. Owen 1986a, 186), this objector goes further, holding that priority in nature is *itself* 'said in many ways'. By way of reply I see no more reason to consider this a case of *mere homonymy*, than to consider various cases of identity as *merely homonymous*.[33] In both cases, there is a common term, and the same formal structure. This is some evidence of real unity. At the very least, I would think that it is incumbent on the objector to provide further reason for thinking that the general term 'grounding' denotes no unified notion. (Schaffer 2009, 376–377)

While proponents of ground have offered no positive argument for ground's unity, and while it is clear (from Koslicki's analysis and what has been said here) that ground is not univocal, it seems that the burden of proving how there can be unity in the multiplicity of grounding relations is placed back on its proponents. Aristotelian homonymy is a good way to start.

But what about Koslicki's and Wilson's complaint that ground, given its heterogeneity, cannot perform the fine-grained work its proponents want for it to do? There is both a positive and a negative answer to this question, one that can only be settled by establishing one's own tolerance for the phenomenon of Aristotelian homonymy itself. The positive aspects of proposing that grounding relations are homonymous are several. By being homonymously organized around a core, ground retains flexibility for its range of

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[33] Schaffer's comment about identity being 'merely homonymous' reveals that he views homonymy in terms of sharing a name only. To anticipate the difference between this sense of homonymy and Aristotelian homonymy properly understood, see (Shields 1999, 268–269), in which he canvasses the multiple contemporary and historical notions of causation: "Judging from a sufficient remove, it is hard to escape the thought that each of these theories captures something important about causation; and it is tempting to infer on this basis, since they are in some cases incompatible with one another, that causation admits of no general univocal analysis. ... Aristotle rightly resists this temptation."

applications, while at the same time preserves the non-reducibility and in-eliminability of the grounding relation. Moreover, the presence or absence of any one particular formal feature of ground (e.g., necessity in cases of full ground, but not in cases of partial ground) can be explained, since not all grounding relations admit of perfectly overlapping formal features. (If they did, ground would be a synonym, and thus definable.)

The negative aspects of recognizing ground as an Aristotelian homonym are just all those that accrue to Aristotle's very idea of homonymy itself. Systematic homonymy is difficult to identify, challenging to analyze, and operates with an idiosyncratic notion of unity, namely a unity in multiplicity. Most pressingly, it is open to construing the homonymous character of ground (or any other purported systematic homonym) as ambiguous—and thus philosophically weak or useless as a tool. However, ambiguity is not necessarily vicious, especially if we recognize that ground, like countless other central and important metaphysical explanations (such as identity, cause, priority, being, and so on), is simply not amenable to the kind of definition some might prefer.

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