Exemplification as Explanation

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Abstract: In this paper I critically investigate an unorthodox attempt to metaphysically explain in virtue of what there are states of affairs. This is a suggestion according to which states of affairs exist thanks to, rather than, as is the common view, in spite of, the infinite regress their metaphysical explanation seems to engender. I argue that, no matter in which form it is defended, or in which theoretical framework it is set, this suggestion cannot provide us with the explanation we crave.

You are sitting at your desk thinking about exemplification. Distracted, you reach for the cup of coffee to your right. You touch it, flinch, and coffee spills all over the work you have laid out in front of you. Annoyed you ask yourself: Why is the cup hot? Then you remember that the reason the cup is hot is that only minutes before you touched it your colleague was kind enough to top it up for you. Mystery solved. You calm down and take another look at the mess in front of you. But instead of cleaning it up you get distracted once more. Why, you repeat – now wearing your philosopher's hat – is the cup hot? But now the answer which satisfied you as a response to the first, seemingly identical, question will no longer do. It will not do because what you are asking for is not an account of what caused the cup's temperature; what you desire, rather, is an account of what reality must contain – how it must be ontologically structured – in order for it to be the case that the cup is hot. What you want is a *metaphysical* explanation. What you need, as we shall see shortly, is to think some more about exemplification.

Metaphysical explanation – a rough characterisation

It is easier to say what a metaphysical explanation is not than it is to say what it is. Negatively speaking, therefore, we can safely say that a metaphysical explanation is *not* a causal explanation. But if it is not causal, what is it? A distinctively metaphysical explanation, we might respond, is a *constitutive* explanation.[1] But exactly what this characterisation should be taken to entail is, again, not obvious. It does, however, seem at least not unsafe to claim that, when we say that A metaphysically explains B if B *in virtue of* A, what we mean is not just that A somehow necessitates B or that A makes B exist/obtain (although we do mean that as well). What we are saying is also, minimally, that A is this necessitating existential condition for B, and hence makes B exist/obtain, in virtue of being what B (mereologically or non-mereologically) consists of or, at least, by being the base on which B somehow supervenes or from which B emerges. Metaphysical explanations, thus understood, are not subjective; i.e., their value is not contingent on the sense of insight or revelation they give to their recipients (although a sense of insight may be, in fact very often is, a positive side-effect of a successful metaphysical explanation). For this reason, a perfectly legitimate metaphysical explanation may be of the primitivist form – B in virtue of B – where the insight gained is at most very little. In general, however, a metaphysical explanation in terms of something *more* rather than of

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[1] I borrow the distinction between causal and constitutive explanations, though not the use made of it, from W. Salmon (1984).

something equally fundamental is supposed to have a higher explanatory value so that, *ceteris paribus*, we should prefer an explanation of the form B in virtue of A (where A is more fundamental than B) over one of the form B in virtue of B. Now, it is normally said that we can metaphysically explain not just existence but also *truth*. However, clearly, to explain the truth of some proposition cannot be the same as listing its constituents. Instead, the idea that truth as well as existence can be metaphysically explained trades on the very reasonable idea that propositions are somehow made true by what exists or, at least, that their truth in some sense depends on or supervenes on what exists. A metaphysical explanation of the truth of a proposition looks, in the first instance, very much like a simple instance of the T-schema, e.g.: <The cup is hot>$_{true}$ in virtue of The cup is hot$_{exists}$.[2] A metaphysical explanation, but not every instance of a T-schema, is however such that, that which supposedly explains the truth of the proposition in question is both distinct from and independent of the proposition whose truth it explains. *Full* metaphysical explanation, moreover, requires that not just the truth of the proposition, but also the existence of the state of affairs (which presumably explains the truth of the proposition), receives a metaphysical explanation.

A full explication of our notion of a metaphysical explanation is beyond the scope of this paper.[3] For the moment, therefore, we will have to make do with the rough, but hopefully relatively uncontroversial, characterisation just given. As will become evident, however, to be able to evaluate the different answers to the question – why is the cup hot? – proposed in the literature, this first characterisation will have to be complicated. A complication which, as we shall see, involves distinguishing between different kinds of metaphysical explanatory tasks.

Why is the cup hot? – The Orthodox View[4]
Back to the cup and to thinking about exemplification. The explanatory task we have now set out for ourselves often is (though it does not have to be) put in terms of our seeking to metaphysically explain the truth of some proposition, in this case: <The cup is hot>. A metaphysical explanation of this kind, we have just noted, starts out looking very much like a simple T-sentence: <The cup is hot>$_{true}$ in virtue of The cup is hot$_{exists}$. Or, in general;

$$\text{Explanation}_1: \quad \text{<F}a\text{>}_{true} \text{ in virtue of F}a_{exists}$$

Now, as we have also seen, this is not a *full* metaphysical explanation. For, Fa can only explain the truth of <Fa> if Fa can, in turn, be metaphysically explained. What grounds the existence of Fa? Fa, in virtue of what? Fa could, of course, be given a primitivist explanation – Fa in virtue of Fa – but this is not the preferred view among proponents of what I will call "the orthodox view". For, according to proponents of this view there are strong independent reasons for thinking that Fa is a contingently existing, ontologically complex, entity constituted by a (a particular) and F-ness (a universal), which means that its metaphysical explanation should (at least) include reference to those constituents. Viz.:

$$\text{Explanation}_2: \quad \text{F}a_{exists} \text{ in virtue of F-ness}_{exists} \text{ and } a_{exists}$$

The problem with explanation$_2$ is that it cannot, appearances to the contrary, explain what it is supposed to. The reason why not is that as the existence of Fa is only contingent (the cup does not have to be hot), then given the existence of a and F-ness, the existence of Fa is not guaranteed. Therefore, Fa does not exist in virtue of, or has its existence grounded in, the existence of *just a* and

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[2] Throughout this paper, anything put between '<' and '>' should be understood as a proposition.

[3] For some recent, more thorough (and sometimes conflicting), views on the topic of metaphysical explanations, see e.g. Betti (2010); Correia (2008); deRosset (forthcoming); Schaffer (2010); Schneider (2010); Wieland & Weber (2010).

[4] Proponents of the Orthodox view include, as we shall see, all philosophers who agree that metaphysically explaining the existence of states of affairs by adding a universal exemplification-relation to a and F-ness leads to a vicious infinite regress. This means that there are *a lot* of proponents of this view. One prominent example is D. M. Armstrong (1978; 1997; 2004).

F-ness. More is needed. On the Orthodox view, what is needed is some way to ground the existence of Fa in not just the existence of the *prima facie* constituents of Fa, but in those same constituents somehow united. Enter exemplification. Fa exists, we can now say, in virtue of the existence of not just a and F-ness, but of exemplification as well, for to say that Fa exists is to say that apart from a and F-ness there is this exemplification-relation which holds a and F-ness together. Explanation$_2$, therefore, should be discarded and replaced by the following, supposedly more accurate explanation:

Explanation$_3$: Fa_{exists} in virtue of a_{exists}, F-ness$_{exists}$, and Exemplification$_{exists}$

But, again, clearly, this explanation cannot be the last word. For the same reason that made us rule out an explanation of the existence of Fa that pointed to (just) a and F-ness, we cannot rest content with an explanation that simply adds one more constituent to this list, for as before, what is now on the list, it seems, could exist and yet a not exemplify F-ness, which means that those things could well exist yet Fa not exist. For metaphysical explanation$_3$ to succeed more is, once again, needed. What we need now is not just some way of binding a to F-ness (which was what we were looking for when offering explanation$_3$) but also some way of binding Exemplification to a and F-ness. Explanation$_3$ should therefore be discarded and replaced:

Explanation$_4$: Fa_{exists} in virtue of a_{exists}, F-ness$_{exists}$, Exemplification$_{exists}$, and (2nd order) Exemplification$_{exists}$

But now we can see that this explanation, just as explanation$_3$, creates rather than satisfies an explanatory need. In virtue of what does a, F-ness, and Exemplification exemplify Exemplification? It is clear that if we continue along the same lines – and answer that a, F-ness, and (1st order) Exemplification exemplify (2nd order) Exemplification in virtue of a, F-ness, (1st order) Exemplification, and (2nd order) Exemplification exemplifying (3rd order) Exemplification – not much is gained. We end up in an infinite regress that has the following appearance:[5]

The Exemplification Regress – Orthodox View

Fa	explanandum
F $-$ a	(discarded) explanans
F $-$ Ex^1 $-$ a	(discarded) explanans
F $-$ Ex^2 $-$ Ex^1 $-$ Ex^2 $-$ a	(discarded) explanans
Etc. *ad infinitum*	

That this regress is vicious is, again, the orthodox view. Explanation$_1$ can only succeed if it can, in turn be explained, but whichever explanation we suggest, there is always something missing. Explanation is infinitely deferred, and hence never given. The infinite regress functions as a *reductio.* Given the regress, F-ness and a cannot explain the existence of Fa, which means that Fa cannot, after all, explain the truth of <Fa>, which means that we still do not know in virtue of what the cup is hot.

Does this failure to metaphysically explain the existence of Fa, and hence the truth of <Fa>, mean that there is no way in which Fa (and hence <Fa>) can receive a metaphysical explanation? Not necessarily. By finding out what doesn't work, proponents of the orthodox view tend to argue, we are well on route towards finding out what does, and the number of suggested ways out are many and varied.[6] This is however not a paper on how, in spite of the infinite regress

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[5] This regress is perhaps most famously formulated by F. H. Bradley in his (1908 [1893]). *Cf.* also: Maurin (2010).

[6] More or less extreme ways out include e.g. accepting monism and regarding all distinction as appearance (Bradley's own solution) and (less extremely) tinkering with how we regard the nature of exemplification by either taking exemplification to be "non-relational" (*cf.* Armstrong (1978)) or by taking it to be such that it necessarily relates specific relata (*cf.* Bergmann (1967); Maurin (2002; 2010; 2011)), etc. Another escape, one that we will have reason to get back to in this text,

generated above, we can nevertheless metaphysically explain either the existence of F*a* or the truth of <F*a*>. Instead, this is a paper on how, according to some philosophers, those same things can be metaphysically explained *thanks to* the regress any attempt to provide such an explanation will generate. This is the unorthodox view.

Why is the cup hot? – The Unorthodox View
How can an infinity of disjointed entities, entities whose existence is perfectly compatible with the non-existence of F*a*, nevertheless metaphysically explain F*a*? The answer, of course, is that it cannot. But then, proponents of the unorthodox view argue, the infinity to which our attempt to metaphysically explain the existence of F*a* commits us, is not this infinity of disjointed entities *in* F*a*. To see this, they argue, we need to consider, once again, our admittedly regressive explanation.

Suppose, therefore, and as before, that what we in the end want to explain is the truth of <F*a*>, and that our explanation should have the following appearance:

Explanation$_1$: <F*a*>$_{true}$ in virtue of F*a*$_{exists}$

Suppose next, and again in line with the orthodox view, that F*a*, which you agree is a contingently existing ontologically complex state of affairs constituted by *the union of a* (a particular) and F-ness (a universal), must in turn receive a metaphysical explanation. Now part company with the proponents of the orthodox view and suggest the following explanation of the existence of F*a*:

Explanation$_2$: F*a*$_{exists}$ in virtue of *the state of affairs that a* exemplifies F-ness$_{exists}$

Again, clearly, this explanation cannot be the last word. For, in virtue of what does the state of affairs that *a* exemplifies F-ness exist? The answer, says the proponent of the unorthodox view, is this:

Explanation$_3$: The state of affairs that *a* exemplifies F-ness$_{exists}$ in virtue of the state of affairs that *a* and F-ness exemplify (1st order) Exemplification$_{exists}$

But now we can see that this explanation, just as explanation$_2$, needs to be metaphysically explained. In virtue of what does the state of affairs that *a* and F-ness exemplify (1st order) Exemplification, exist? Again, we end up in infinite regress. So, how is this different from before? It is different, proponents of the unorthodox view argue, because this time, by not expressing the regress in a misleading way, we can see that it does *not* have the structure envisaged by the proponent of the orthodox view. Instead it has the following structure:

The Exemplification Regress – Unorthodox View

F*a*   explanandum
$Ex^1(F, a)$ explanans/explanandum
$Ex^2(Ex^1(F, a))$ explanans/explanandum
$Ex^3(Ex^2(Ex^1(F, a)))$ explanans/explanandum
…
∞

This regress, proponents of the unorthodox view now argue, is *not* vicious. It is not vicious because it does not consist of an infinite series of suggested, and then discarded, suggested, and then discarded metaphysical explanations of F*a* (if it did, they agree, the regress certainly would have to be considered as vicious). Instead, it consists of an infinite series of mutually distinct metaphysical explanations such that each explanation explains what comes before it and each explanation is

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involves giving up the assumption that exemplification is contingent, and hold instead that if *a* and F-ness exist, *a must* exemplify F-ness.

explained by what comes after it in the series.[7] Rather than *no* explanation, therefore, the regress is providing us with an infinite number of them. That each explanation in the series needs, in turn, to be explained does not make it less of an explanation according to the proponents of this view. Somewhat like, as some would argue, a mother is no less the (partial) cause of the existence of her child just because she, in turn, is the effect of the existence of *her* mother, etc. *ad infinitum*.

Two Kinds of Infinitists

Proponents of the unorthodox view – "Infinitists" – can be subdivided into two importantly different groups. On the one hand are those who, like the proponents of the orthodox view, are interested in metaphysically explaining the existence of entities such that what happens to constitute them does not have to do so (*a* and F-ness could exist without F*a* existing), i.e. that are interested in metaphysically explaining the existence of the *contingently* united state of affairs F*a*, in order to, with the help of F*a*, explain the *contingent* truth of their corresponding proposition. On the other hand are those who are interested, rather, in metaphysically explaining the existence of something with *necessarily* united constituents where, consequently, the existence of those constituents is incompatible with the non-existence of the state of affairs they make up.[8] In this paper I will argue that neither the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ nor the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view can give us the sort of explanation we crave, although be it for slightly different reasons.[9]

Why Infinitism$_{contingent}$ Fails

In order to understand why the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ view fails, we need first to understand what the source of the difference between the regress in its orthodox and unorthodox guise is. The regress in its orthodox guise, remember, is such that the generated infinity is an infinity so-to-speak "inside" the state of affairs for which we are trying to provide an account (as each new step of this regress basically consists in a supposedly more accurate, definitely more complicated, account of what constitutes F*a*). The unorthodox regress, on the other hand, is such that each step consists of a new state of affairs, distinct from that which precedes (and succeeds) it. This certainly looks like good news for the proponent of the unorthodox view. For, if at no point is there anything but the mere aggregate of would-be constituents of F*a*, the possible existence of F*a* is contradicted. But if, as says the proponent of the unorthodox view, at *every* point is there a (unified) state of affairs, a state of affairs, moreover, which, if it exists, necessarily co-exists with the state of affairs F*a* (and vice versa), there can be no such contradiction. Celebration will have to be indefinitely postponed, however. For, as we shall see in a moment, the reason why the Infinitist in this way avoids contradiction – the fact that the explanation it offers of F*a* consists in an infinity of states of affairs that necessarily co-exist with F*a*, and vice versa – is likewise the reason why she fails to metaphysically explain F*a*.

There are at least two reasons why one might find this necessary co-existence problematic. The first, rather weak, reason is that one might think that if A necessarily co-exists with B, and B necessarily co-exists with A, then A and B are mutually existentially dependent. But then, if we want to say that A metaphysically explains B, we must also, and for the same reason, say that B metaphysically explains A. That is, one might think that if explanandum and explanans in a metaphysical explanation are mutually existentially dependent, then explanation must go both ways,

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[7] Exactly how the different steps of the regress – as well as the regress in its entirety – manage to metaphysically explain F*a* is in fact slightly more complicated than that, and this is a point where different proponents of this view tend to disagree. For the purposes of this paper, this complication does not matter and so I will leave its discussion for another occasion (but see Gaskin (2008: 356f.)).

[8] As I interpret them, Segelberg (1999 [1945]) and Orilia (2006; 2009) are proponents of the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ view. The Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view is, as far as I know, defended only by Gaskin (2008; 2010).

[9] I will not argue for this conclusion by arguing, as I very well might, that an infinite regress, no matter how it is structured, cannot constitute an explanation. Whether or not it can is a question I will have to leave for another paper. Here I will simply assume that it can.

it must be *symmetrical*. To some this is a deal-breaker; symmetrical explanations are *non-explanations*.[10] Therefore, Infinitism (whether of the contingent or necessary variety) fails because the explanation it offers is really a *non-explanation*.

This is a weak reason for holding that Infinitism fails because it depends on some prior notion of what is and, more importantly, what isn't a metaphysical explanation; a difficult matter on which many are still at least to some extent undecided. It is a weak reason, moreover, because even if the proponent of the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ view agrees that symmetrical explanations are non-explanations she might insist that from the fact that her explanandum and explanans are mutually existentially dependent it does not follow that the explanation she offers is symmetrical. To prove her point she might ask us to suppose that a and F-ness, if they exist, must constitute Fa. Would we then not want to say that it is F-ness and a that ground, and hence metaphysically explain, Fa *but not vice versa*? Or, in general, isn't a constitutive metaphysical explanation precisely the sort of explanation which, if successful, offers us something which constitutes (and hence explains) something else by (among other things) necessarily co-existing with it? Intuition seems to be on the side of the Infinitist; mutual existential dependence does not necessarily entail symmetrical metaphysical explanation.

The fact that the explanation offered by the Infinitist is in terms of something which necessarily co-exists with the explanandum therefore does not prove that the explanation in question must be viewed as symmetrical. It does however point to a weakness in the Infinitistic view. For, if mutual existential dependence does not entail symmetrical explanation, then whatever one claims *is* the direction of explanation (from Fa to regress, or, as says the Infinitist, from regress to Fa) needs some justification. But now intuition is no longer on the side of the Infinitist. For, arguably, the reason why, intuitively, we think that, even if F-ness and a exist only when Fa does, and vice versa, it is the existence of F-ness and a that grounds the existence of Fa but not the other way around, is that we consider F-ness and a as *simpler and (hence) more fundamental* than Fa. The proponent of the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ view must, however, have another reason in mind for the direction of explanation she opts for. For, arguably, a state of affairs that consists of the union of F-ness, a, and Exemplification is *less* simple, and (hence) less fundamental than one that consists of the union of just F-ness and a. Or, if it is not, an argument needs to be given for why it is not. The burden of proof, therefore, is on the Infinitist.

Suppose the requisite proof could be provided. Would this mean that celebrations were in order after all? No. The short story why not is that the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ view would still not be able to explain everything it needs to explain about (contingently united) Fa. To see why this is so, we need a slightly longer story.

Note, first, that the question – Fa in virtue of what? – given which the regress in its orthodox *and* unorthodox guise is generated, is ambiguous. If disambiguated, we find that what looked like one question are really two, substantially different, questions:

HOW can an F-ness and a-world be turned into an Fa world?
WHAT characterizes an Fa world in contrast to an F-ness and a-world?

…where the how-question is supposed to capture the sense in which what is asked for is that which makes Fa *possibly* exist, given the existence of F-ness and a, whereas the what-question is meant to convey the sense in which what is asked is rather, of Fa, what exists when it, and not just F-ness and a, does. This is a fine distinction indeed, and for most purposes it does not matter. When, for instance, the proponent of the orthodox view tries to provide an answer by introducing exemplification, her answer, was she to succeed, would constitute an answer to both the how- and to the what-question. The distinction does however matter if you are a proponent of the unorthodox view. For if you hold that, that which explains in virtue of what Fa exists, is an infinite regress that necessarily co-exists with Fa, and vice versa, your answer, although it works fine as an answer to the

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[10] *Cf.* e.g. Lowe (2005); Schaffer (2010)).

what-question will not do as an answer to the how-question. After all, you do not get Fa by introducing the relevant regress into an F-ness and a world, because in order to get the regress you have to already be in an Fa world.

Now, the fact that the unorthodox regress can only be used to answer the what-question is a problem for the Infinitist only if it can be shown that the how-question *must* receive an answer as well. But why should we think it must? The answer is that it must because in order to be able to ask and answer the what-question, we must assume the (possible) existence of something which we need to fulfill an explanatory task of the how-kind in order to establish.

That proponents of the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ view cannot answer the how-question is easily seen. If whatever constitutes Fa only contingently constitutes Fa, every attempt to answer the – Fa in virtue of what? – question in its how-sense means ending up in the same (vicious) infinite regress as that facing the proponent of the orthodox view. This being said, the fact that the how-question needs to receive an answer, if there is to be any real point in moving on to the what-question, does not automatically mean that every type of Infinitism is automatically discarded. And, as we shall see next, an Infinitism which takes exemplification to be necessary, although it fails, does not fail because it fails to answer the how-question.

Why Infinitism$_{necessary}$ Fails
As we have just seen, if you are a proponent of the unorthodox view, the fact that the infinite regress to which you point can only be used to answer the what-question, cannot in itself be held against you. Of course, as we have also seen, an answer to the what-question must be supplemented with an answer to the how-question and proponents of the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ view could not provide us with the requisite supplementation. Importantly, though, they could not do so because of a *background assumption* they happened to share with proponents of the orthodox view: that exemplification is contingent. But this is not an assumption accepted by the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view. Instead, proponents of this view assume the opposite: that exemplification is necessary.

If exemplification is necessary in the sense that, if a and F-ness exist, a must exemplify F-ness, all we need to turn an a and F-ness world into an Fa world is a and F-ness, which means that the possible existence of Fa given the existence of a and F-ness, is metaphysically explained by the *necessary* existence of Fa given the existence of a and F-ness. But this means that the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view does have the resources to answer both the how- and the what-question. Why, then, do I want to say that the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view nevertheless fails?

To be able to answer that question, I must start by making a distinction between two versions of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view. On the one hand we have this view as formulated in a theoretical framework that is, with the exception of how one views the modal status of exemplification, the same as that accepted by proponents of either the orthodox or the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ views (an "orthodox" framework). Crucially for our present purposes, any account set in an orthodox framework is an account which metaphysically explains the existence of the state of affairs Fa *in order to* be able to metaphysically explain the truth of <Fa> with reference to this state of affairs. On the other hand we have the same view but now set in a theoretical framework that is significantly, even radically, different from that of its rivals (how it is different is set out below). Why Infinitism$_{necessary}$ fails depends on which version of this view we evaluate.

Set in an orthodox framework, the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view fails because, although it can metaphysically explain the existence of Fa, both in the how- and in the what-sense, it cannot plausibly explain the truth of <Fa>. To see this, remember that, on the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view, the existence of Fa given the existence of a and F-ness is possible because it is necessary. But, if the union a and F-ness (e.g. the cup and the property of being hot) is necessary, then the existence of my cup of half-forgotten lukewarm coffee together with the property had by my computer's hard-drive as it is working overtime to process my latest thoughts on exemplification is enough to ensure that the state of affairs *that the cup is hot* exists and, hence, is enough to ensure that it is true that <The

cup is hot>. But this is surely absurd. Not surprisingly, this is therefore a view which virtually no one is prepared to defend.[11]

To become an interesting (and real) contender, therefore, the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view must be set in a framework that does not force us to accept a similarly implausible explanation of the truth of true propositions. That is, it must be set in an unorthodox rather than an orthodox framework. As far as I know, only one example of an Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an unorthodox framework exists. This is Richard Gaskin's suggestion as it is set out in his book *The Unity of the Proposition* (2008). In the remainder of this paper, I will argue that this suggestion likewise fails.[12]

To represent a real alternative to the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an orthodox framework, the theoretical framework in which Gaskin formulates his view must be different, even radically different, from the framework in which these matters have been discussed so far. And so it is. According to Gaskin, true propositions do not have their truth somehow explained by worldly states of affairs. Gaskin is a linguistic idealist: What is given is symbolic language and "the senses and referents of items of symbolic language are theoretically derived posits, precipitated by a correct account of the meaningfulness of those items" (2008: 41).[13] This, Gaskin maintains, is nevertheless an empirical realism, for "though objects, taken collectively, exist as a transcendentally deduced necessary condition of the meaningfulness of language, it remains the case that, taken individually, their existence may be, and usually is, independent of the existence of any particular empirical language or family of languages, or even of all empirical languages: for an object's existence is dependent only on the possibility of its being referred to in some language or other" (ibid: 44). Structurally, the framework endorsed by Gaskin is a kind of hybrid between Frege's and Russell's which combines Frege's tripartite approach to semantics with Russell's approach to propositions (and facts) as spelled out in *The Principles of Mathematics* (1937 [1903]): Reality is subdivided into, first, a level of symbolic language, second, a level of sense (inhabited by something very much like Fregean Thoughts) and, third, a level of reference. The level of reference, for Gaskin, is not distinct from (or independent of) either the level of language or the level of sense. It is as linguistic (and abstract) as the rest. Most importantly for the purposes of the discussion conducted here, the level of reference is according to Gaskin entirely constituted by Russellian propositions *true and false*. That is, it is entirely constituted by propositionally structured entities ("meanings"), in turn constituted by those worldly entities – objects and properties (including relations) – which the semantically significant parts of those sentences the proposition is the meaning of introduce. Gaskin explains (ibid., pp. 118-119):

The picture I am offering is not transcendentally realistic, for I deny that reality is not in any sense linguistic. Reality is linguistic – though it does not consist of symbolic language – in just the sense that it is essentially expressible (though not necessarily expressed) in symbolic language. The position I recommend is, rather, transcendentally idealistic, not in Kant's sense, but in the sense that the existence of the world is conceived as a necessary condition of the meaningfulness of symbolic language. More specifically, the Russellian proposition is conceived of as both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the meaningfulness of our language. It is in

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[11] …at least not as long as we conceive of the property-constituent of the state of affairs as a universal (which is one of the background assumptions of the discussion conducted in this paper). If properties are *non-transferable* tropes, however, it should not be impossible to find defenders of something like the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in a framework that is the same as that in which both the orthodox and the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ views are set. Non-transferable tropes are defended by e.g. Molnar (2003). I argue that tropes should be conceived of as transferable in my 2010*b*.

[12] Perhaps a version of this view set in an unorthodox framework which does not end up with the kind of trouble I will argue that it does end up with if the unorthodox framework is of the Gaskian kind *could* be formulated. I will not argue that it could not, though I note that I find it rather implausible that it could.

[13] One radical consequence of this concerns how truth, meaning, and existence now supposedly relate to one another (p. 241-242): "It is not because our expressions have referents that we succeed in saying things that are true or false: rather, it is because we succeed in saying things that are true or false that the expressions we use have referents. For that is the whole point of the context principle: in the beginning was the sentence – true or false – and words, together with their sense and referents, are posted with a view to gaining an essentially theoretical understanding of how sentences mean, how they are interrelated, and how on the basis of our linguistic training we are able to understand new sentences. The existence of objects is thus a fallout from the existence of language."

this sense that propositions are linguistic. But they are also non-linguistic in the sense that they are entities at the level of reference, not at the level of sense (let alone at the level of symbolic language itself) and, as we have seen, there is no prospect of a reduction of the level of reference to the levels of sense or of symbolic language. The world, therefore, is everything that is the case and everything that is not the case. This position represents the radicalization of a tendency clearly discernible in the Platonic and Aristotelian semantic traditions. Better, it is not so much a question of the lingualization of the world as its propositionalization. For the world has propositional, not syntactic, structure.

Against this background, the task of metaphysically explaining in virtue of what Fa, will differ in interesting ways from what may look as the same (or similar) task set against the background shared by proponents of the views so far discussed and discarded. What interests Gaskin, first of all, is not the existence (and unity) of the worldly *state of affairs* Fa. In Gaskin's framework, as we have just seen, there are no states of affairs as the referential level is instead entirely constituted by (Russellian) propositions. It is therefore for a metaphysical explanation of the existence (and unity) of the (Russellian) proposition that Gaskin is looking. Nor is Gaskin interested in metaphysically explaining *the truth* of the proposition <Fa> with reference to (unified) Fa. If set in a Gaskian framework, (Russellian) propositions are entities which *both* constitute the level of reference *and* are the carriers of truth-values (true *or* false). This means that a metaphysical explanation of the existence and unity of the proposition at most explains how there can be something that is truth-value-*apt*, but not what makes something carry a *particular* truth-value. But this is to be expected, says Gaskin, as that is not something that should be *metaphysically* explained in the first place.[14]

Gaskin is an Infinitist. As we have seen, this means that to him, the question – Fa in virtue of what? – (where Fa is taken to refer to the Russellian proposition <Fa>) should be understood as asking, of <Fa>, *what* the world must be like when it, and not just a and F-ness, exists. The answer, of course, is the infinite regress, unorthodoxly structured. In Gaskin's own words (ibid., p. 367):

At each stage of Bradley's regress we have a unity. The point about the regress, which does indeed burgeon into the upper reaches of the transfinite, is not that each stage of it seeks to restore a unity which has broken down at the previous stage – that would indeed be a hopeless task – but that each stage provides an analysis of the unity which was securely present at the previous stage. Each stage *guarantees* the unity of the previous stage, and tells us what that unity *consists in*. Embarking on Bradley's regress, in the present context, does not either destroy the unity of the original proposition or fail to unify an originally fragmented object; rather it analyses a proposition's original unity. It does so by producing, at each stage of the regress, another propositional unity.

Gaskin, moreover, takes exemplification to be necessary, and as we have seen, this gives him the requisite means to answer also the *how*-question: an F-ness and a world *can* be turned into an Fa world, quite simply because it must.

Now, the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an *orthodox* framework is likewise an Infinitist who takes exemplification to be necessary, yet she nevertheless ends up in serious trouble. How does changing the setting to an unorthodox one constitute an improvement? The answer is twofold. First, it constitutes an improvement in that now the assumption that exemplification is necessary, an assumption which comes across as rather arbitrary when the setting is orthodox, can be given a solid justification. Second, it constitutes a (radical) improvement in that the unorthodox framework offers us a way to clearly separate the issue of the modal status of exemplification from that of what makes a certain proposition true (or false). This means that a proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an *un*orthodox framework does not have to endorse the seriously implausible explanation of propositional truth which was forced upon the proponent of the same view set in an orthodox framework.

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[14] We will have reason to return to Gaskin's views on this point below.

To see how the assumption that exemplification is necessary is justified by its inclusion in the Gaskian *un*orthodox framework, remember that, to Gaskin, the world *is* a world of Russellian propositions *both true and false*, and that what Russellian propositions there are should, as I understand him, be enough to cater for the referential (in the sense Gaskin gives to referential) needs of any possible language. But what this entails is that if one can meaningfully say that *the cup is hot* in some (possible) language or other, then whatever constitutes the (Russellian) referent of that sentence must exist because then the Russellian proposition must exist. For Gaskin, it is language which determines reality, which means that it is the existence of meaningful sentences which determines the existence of certain Russellian propositions which, in turn, determines the existence of that which constitutes those propositions.[15] But if so, then the constituents of the Russellian proposition cannot exist and not constitute the proposition. The assumption that exemplification is necessary hence constitutes a natural part of the overall Gaskian framework. That the assumption that exemplification is necessary does not lead to the same implausible consequences as it did for the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an orthodox framework is another natural consequence of the overall Gaskian framework. For, as we have seen, in this framework, it is the possible existence of the proposition, *true or false*, which is accounted for with reference to the assumption that exemplification is necessary and *not*, as for the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an orthodox framework, the existence of something which supposedly *guarantees* the truth of something else (i.e., a (non-Gaskin)proposition).

This looks like both good and bad news for the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view. The good news, of course, is that there is strong reason to believe that the proponent of this view does have the means necessary to answer both the how- and the what-question in a way that does not, thereby, mean that she is committing herself to an implausible theory of propositional truth. The bad news is that irrespective of her success in this department, or perhaps even because of it, she does not have the means necessary to be able to answer the question with which we began this paper. That is, as formulated, the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an unorthodox framework fails to explain in virtue of what the proposition <The cup is hot> is true. And how could she not fail? After all, this question, as formulated, *presupposes* a setting that is orthodox rather than unorthodox.

All is not lost, however. With a (radically) different framework comes (perhaps radically) different questions, and with different questions comes different explanatory requirements. And, if a certain framework *requires* a certain kind of explanation which, arguably, cannot be given, one way out, it seems, is to simply substitute this framework for another with different (more easily satisfied) explanatory demands. Seen in this light the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an unorthodox framework, although it fails to answer a question posed in a framework it doesn't accept, can, if it succeeds in answering every question relevantly generated by the framework it does accept, still be taken to constitute a solution – or, perhaps better, a *dis*solution – to the problem at hand. But, can the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an unorthodox framework really answer every question generated by her own framework? I will argue that she cannot.

As we have seen, the kind of trouble which proponents of either the orthodox or the Infinitism$_{contingent}$ views found themselves in when trying to account for *the truth* of <The cup is hot> does not arise with respect to a distinct question (formulated in a Gaskian framework) concerning the nature and existence of the (Russellian) proposition <The cup is hot>. But surely, even a Gaskian needs to be able to account for, not just the nature and existence of propositions, but also, what distinguishes the true propositions from those that are false. What does the Gaskian have to say about that? In virtue of what, according to the Gaskian, is it true that <The cup is hot>? As

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[15] Gaskin is clear on this point. On p. 386 he argues that: "We can compare the proposition that *a* is F with the mere aggregate of entities F, *a*, and ask what their difference consists in. Even if such aggregates are never found in pre-propositional reality – since there is no such thing as pre-propositional reality for them to be found in: reality is propositional (if the objects are in the picture, so is the proposition formed of them). The aggregates are however conceptually available – in abstraction from any proposition goes to compose. Hence we can raise the distinctively theoretical question: what differentiates a proposition from a mere aggregate?"

mentioned, according to the foremost Gaskian, Gaskin himself, this is *not* a metaphysical question in need of a metaphysical answer. Instead, he argues, the distinction between true and false (Russellian) propositions is a distinction that should be otherwise accounted for. This is the, rather cryptic, account he does provide (2008: 112):

False propositions differ from true ones at the level of reference neither in point of unity nor in their ontological status: the only difference is that their constituents are being said (by the proposition) to be related in a way in which they are not related.

So, according to Gaskin, the difference between a true and a false (Russellian) proposition is that, if true, the constituents of the proposition *are* related the way the proposition *says* they are related and, if false, the constituents *are not* related the way the proposition *says* they are related. Now, take the following two propositions – <The cup is hot> and <The cup is not hot> – both said of the cup on my desk introduced in the beginning of this paper. According to Gaskin, these are both propositions existing at the level of reference, constituted by the worldly items my cup and the property of being hot, and accompanied by the existence of an infinity of (likewise unified) propositions of ever increasing order. One of these propositions is true and one is false. We happen to know that it is the proposition <The cup is hot> that is true and, according to Gaskin, it is true *because* the cup is related to the property of being hot in the way the proposition says it is. But does this not sound very much like an answer in need of a metaphysical underpinning?

According to Gaskin it doesn't, and it is not hard to understand why he should resist this implication. For what would giving a metaphysical underpinning to the account provided by Gaskin entail? A natural response, it seems, would be to add to the Gaskian's previous three reality-levels of symbolic language, sense, and reference (in Gaskin's sense), a fourth level, expressly introduced to give us what we need. For then we could say that, when a Russellian proposition is true, and hence its constituents are related the way it says they are, this is because on the fourth level these constituents exist and are related; just as, if the Russellian proposition is false, and hence its constituents are *not* related in the way the proposition says they are, this is because on the fourth level the constituents of the proposition exist, yet are unrelated (or, are related in a *different* way).

That the introduction of a fourth level, fit to metaphysically explain the distinction between true and false proposition on the third level, is not only recommended but in fact necessary has been convincingly argued by William Vallicella. For, according to Vallicella, without a fourth level, the Gaskian view becomes incoherent (2010: 273):

As a proposition a R[ussellian]-proposition must say something about something. But as a Russellian proposition, it cannot say something about something wholly distinct from itself. So, an R-proposition must say something about its own constituents. But if what it says is false, then the constituents are not related in the way they would have to be related to form a proposition.

But Gaskin is unimpressed.[16] There can be no fourth level, he argues, because if there is, you face an impossible dilemma (p. 124):

Either the worldly facts which are said to correspond to true propositions at my level of reference are propositionally structured entities or they are not. If they are not, there can be no question of correspondence with propositions; if they are, there is no structure which they can intelligibly have other than (in the simplest

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[16] In a response to Vallicella's charge of inconsistency, Gaskin offers a rather weak defense, the gist of which is that, as Vallicella is willing to accept the existence of propositionally structured entities at the level of sense, "there is nothing in the consideration he [i.e. Vallicella] brings to bear against the possibility of false but unified Russellian propositions that would not equally rule out the possibility of false but unified Fregean Thoughts" (2010: 305). Aside from the fact that this argument could easily be interpreted as merely adding to, rather than taking away from, the trouble Gaskin is in, it also clearly misses the point. For even supposing that Vallicella accepts that there are unified propositions on the level of sense, propositions which may be either true or false, he *also* takes there to be a level more fundamental than the propositional one at which the truth or falsity of these propositions can be metaphysically grounded.

case) the (schematic) form *that a is F*, in which case the relation they enjoy with true propositions is one of identity, not of mere correspondence.

And, again (ibid.):

So, the whole idea of a non-propositional underlying reality is fantastical. To seek to peel off worldly states of affairs from Russellian propositions housed at my level of reference and locate those states of affairs at an ontologically lower level in the semantic hierarchy than the propositions whose truth their existence allegedly grounds is not only futile but even self-defeating. For the grounding can only work if the correspondence between the resultant states of affairs and the original proposition is perfect – that is, if the entities grounding the truth of the propositions of the form *that a is F* are themselves exactly of that form.

But Gaskin's argument cannot take him where he wants to go. Either there can or there can't be a fourth level and, hence, either the distinction between true and false Russellian proposition can or it can't receive a metaphysical explanation. What Gaskin fails to realize is that either way he is in trouble. To see this, suppose, first, that Gaskin is right and there can't be a fourth level.[17] Then, best case scenario, the Gaskian framework comes out as highly implausible because of the far from explanatory explanation it offers of something which most would take to require a substantial, metaphysical explanation. Worst case scenario, if Vallicella's objection is accepted – which I think it should be – the Gaskian framework, in which the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view is now set, not only should but actually *must* be rejected. Suppose instead that there *is* a fourth level. Then the Russellian proposition <F*a*> is true *in virtue of* the existence, on this fourth level, of the non-linguistic state of affairs F*a*. But <F*a*> might be false which means *a* might not exemplify F-ness (on the fourth level). But this means that, when it comes to the metaphysical explanation of the truth of the Russellian proposition, the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an unorthodox framework, is no better off than were her rivals when they tried to account for the truth of the proposition <The cup is hot>. For, in order to be able to account for the distinction between truth and falsity with reference to what exists on the fourth level, the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view, like her rivals, must hold that exemplification in this particular case is contingent.[18] And this, I have already demonstrated, means that the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view cannot answer at least one how-question generated by the framework she does endorse. In the end, therefore, we still do not know in virtue of what <The cup is hot> is true.

Only one option remains. To find out in virtue of what my cup is hot, I must avoid rather than embrace the regress to which I seem so firmly committed. If and how I can do that is however a topic I must leave for another paper.[19]

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[17] Strong independent reasons for why we should *not* accept Gaskin's argument for this point exist of course. It is, first, at least unclear why there could not be a distinct level of likewise propositionally structured entities (especially given the existence, according to Gaskin himself, of a distinct level of propositionally structured Fregean Thoughts). It is also unclear why, if that which exists at the fourth level is propositionally structured, only something with not just the same structure, but the same constituents (in the same order) could metaphysically explain the truth of <F*a*> (were it not for the unfortunate circumstance that this something then would be identical to <F*a*>). Even more seriously for his argument, if what exists at the fourth level is *not* propositional, why should we require that only if it were could it metaphysically explain what exists on the third level? Why, that is, should we accept that to be able to metaphysically explain the truth of a proposition, something must share the structure of that proposition? On this point, it seems to me, the burden of proof is definitely on the side of Gaskin as many accounts of truth today (the so-called truthmaker accounts) seem to do perfectly well without accepting this kind of "mirror-thesis". *Cf.* e.g. Beebee & Dodd (2005); Maurin (2002; 2010); Mulligan, Simons & Smith (1987); etc.

[18] In principle she *could* of course stubbornly maintain that exemplification *is* necessary, even in this case. The price would, however, be (too) high. For, if it is necessary, then the proponent of the Infinitism$_{necessary}$ view set in an unorthodox framework would have to endorse the seriously implausible kind of account of propositional truth forced upon the proponent of the same view set in an orthodox framework.

[19] *Cf.* also my 2011.

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