

Against cross-world anchoring¹

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Abstract:

A social fact S is grounded by some plurality of grounds. And the fact that S has the grounding-conditions it does is anchored by some set of anchors. Epstein has recently suggested (2019) that the anchoring relation is a *cross-world* determination relation. In this paper we put forward three arguments against this view. First, we argue from the analogy between social and non-social kinds: there is no cross-world determination involved in non-social natural kinds. Secondly, we take issue with the very idea of cross-world determination: no determination relation in our current metaphysical toolkit can have relata that occupy different possible worlds (in the relevant sense). Thirdly, we argue that cross-world anchoring generates an indeterminacy problem: if S holds in an anchorless world w, and there are distinct anchors (for S) holding at w₁ and w₂ respectively, then it is indeterminate whether S's grounding-conditions hold in virtue of the w₁-anchors or the w₂-anchors.

Keywords: anchoring, cross-world anchoring, social kinds, grounding, social ontology

Word-count: 12490

1. Introduction

A social fact S holds in virtue of some plurality of grounds Γ. The fact that S has the grounding-conditions it does (i.e., in terms of Γ) is not brute: it holds in virtue of some set of *anchors*. The first 'in virtue of' locution is underwritten by a grounding relation; the latter by the relation of anchoring (Epstein 2015). Epstein has recently suggested (2019) that the anchoring relation is a *cross-world* determination relation. In this paper we argue against this view. In other words, we reject the claim that anchoring can 'travel' between possible worlds.

Why think that anchoring is cross-worldly in this sense? Consider the following claim:

(*) Genghis Khan is a war criminal.

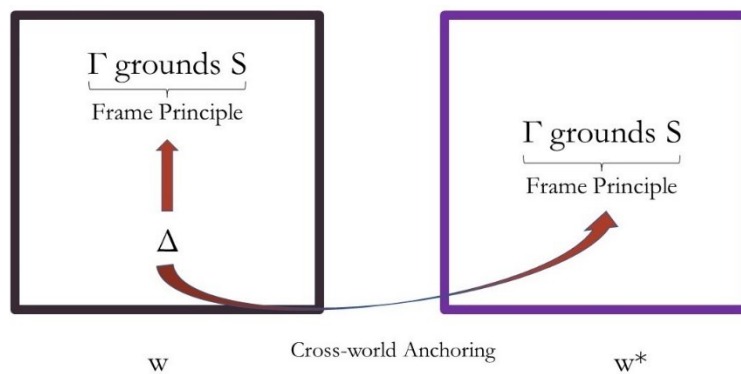
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On the face of it, (*) is curious. The anchors which ‘set-up’ the grounding-conditions of being a war criminal are not present at the Genghis Khan-world (w).² To see this consider that the Geneva Conventions (which, let us suppose, set-up the grounding-conditions for war criminality) do not exist in w . Still, according to (*), Genghis Khan possesses the relevant characteristics which, in turn, ground the fact that he is a war criminal at w . What is so curious about (*) is that w does not involve any anchors for war criminality. In other words, the idea is that Genghis Khan is a war criminal at w *even though* the Geneva conventions do not exist in w .³ Still, Epstein (2019: 772) has recently argued that propositions like (*) are true. This is so because of the following thesis:

(UNIVERSALITY) At a possible world w the fact that x is K ($[x \text{ is } K]$) has anchors $[A_1 \dots A_n]$.⁴ At w^* $[x \text{ is } K]$ can hold in the absence of $[A_1 \dots A_n]$ (and without there being any substitute anchors at w^*).

The idea behind UNIVERSALITY is this: (*) is true even though the relevant anchors do not exist at w . Instead, the fact that Genghis Khan is a war criminal is anchored by the anchors that hold in *another* possible world (w^*). So, there is an anchoring relation that links some anchor-facts at w to the fact that war criminality has the grounding-conditions it does at w^* . For this to be the case the following principle of anchoring must hold:

(CROSS-WORLD) The relation of anchoring is a cross-world relation. Anchoring can hold between relata that exist in different possible worlds.



(figure 1)

In this paper we argue that CROSS-WORLD should be resisted. To that end, we propose three different arguments:

² Following Epstein, we will call the principles that specify the grounding-conditions for a given kind, *frame-principles*. We postpone the introduction of the ideology of frame-principles until the next section to avoid unnecessary clutter.

³ And, crucially, *will not* exist in w (see sec. 3.1.).

⁴ ‘ $[x \text{ is } K]$ ’ read as ‘the fact that x is K ’. Also, the anchoring relation is supposed to relate anchor-facts (or, simply, ‘anchors’) to the grounding-conditions of a given social kind (rather than facts of the form ‘ $[x \text{ is } K]$ ’). Thus, we interpret the phrase ‘the fact that x is K ($[x \text{ is } K]$) has anchors $[A_1 \dots A_n]$ ’ as elliptical for the claim that K ’s grounding-conditions are anchored by $[A_1 \dots A_n]$.

- *The argument from the structural analogy with non-social natural kinds* (sec. 2)
- *The argument against cross-world determination relations* (sec. 3)
- *The argument from anchor indeterminacy* (sec. 4)

To be clear, our aim is not to attack Epstein’s (2015; 2019) influential ‘grounding/anchoring’ model: the theory according to which the metaphysics of the social realm are to be accounted for in terms of grounding and anchoring.⁵ In fact we are very much sympathetic to Epstein’s general project. Instead, we want to put pressure on a particular aspect of Epstein’s ideology; the view that anchoring is cross-worldly. In this sense, our paper should be understood as an attempt to further refine the ‘grounding/anchoring’ model.⁶ In what follows, we will consider each argument against CROSS-WORLD in turn.

2. The Argument from the Structural Analogy with Non-Social Natural Kinds

In this section we argue that if we take the structural analogy between social and natural kinds seriously, then CROSS-WORLD is controversial. To get our intuitions going, consider how a cross-world anchoring-based conception of a non-social, *natural* kind would look like.

Electrons have certain properties: a negative charge, very light mass, intrinsic angular momentum, location outside of the nucleus (in the so-called electron cloud) and they are both particles and waves. Think of these properties as being part of the grounding-conditions under which a certain entity is an electron. But what makes it the case that electrons have these grounding-conditions? Such conditions, in turn, hold in virtue of the laws of quantum mechanics at the relevant world (*w*). Specifically, Schrödinger’s equation and Pauli’s Exclusion Principle provide us with an explanation of why electrons have the properties they have.

How would the ‘grounding/anchoring’ structure look like when applied to this case? We take it that the ‘anchors’ of grounding-conditions of electrons would be the laws of quantum mechanics.⁷ Plugging in CROSS-WORLD and UNIVERSALITY, we get the following scenario: there is another possible world, *w**, where electrons and their grounding-conditions obtain *in the absence* of the laws of quantum mechanics at *w**.

⁵ And, in particular, in terms of two distinct projects: the grounding-project (the project that aims to identify the grounding-conditions of social kinds), and the anchoring-project (the project that aims to identify the facts that anchor the grounding-conditions of social kinds).

⁶ In this sense our criticism is similar in spirit to Schaffer’s (2019), who accepts the ‘grounding/anchoring’ model but, instead, wishes to put pressure on the idea that anchoring is a sui-generis relation (see also Mikkola 2017 and Hawley 2017). For other related papers on anchoring (two of which were published while our paper was still under review) see: Pagano (2024) who argues that only ‘thin’ social kinds export (and in a relatively uncontroversial way), Raven (forthcoming) who resists anchoring but proposes a distinct type of modality (*‘social necessity’*), and Moorfoot & Livesley (unpublished manuscript) who explore a cross-temporal variant of anchoring and its epistemological underpinnings.

⁷ At least in world *w* (and perhaps in every possible world if one is a necessitarian about laws of nature; more on this later).

To our minds, this is a very controversial result. If we take seriously the analogy between natural and social kinds, then the very idea behind CROSS-WORLD becomes suspect as it goes against the philosophical consensus about the metaphysics of natural kinds. To illustrate this, we shall look in more detail the metaphysical structure of social facts and compare them with the metaphysics of non-social natural kinds.

As mentioned, the fact that a social fact S has grounding-conditions Γ is anchored by a set of anchor-facts. Following Epstein (2015), these grounding-conditions are specified by a *frame-principle*. In turn, this frame-principle *frames* specific instances of the form ‘x is S by being grounded by Γ ’. More concretely, the frame-principle specifying the grounding-conditions of war criminality is anchored by the Geneva Conventions and, in turn, the fact that an individual x is a war criminal (by fulfilling the relevant grounding-conditions; e.g. by performing war-crimes) is *framed* by that frame-principle.

Now consider a natural, scientific, kind like the kind ‘electron’. Similarly, the grounding-conditions of electrons are specified by a nomic (non-accidental) generalization G concerning electrons. That generalization *subsumes* (or entails) instances of the form ‘x is an electron’ (based on the fact that x fulfils the G-conditions). And, in turn, that generalization is *governed* by some law of nature.

Now compare the two pictures:

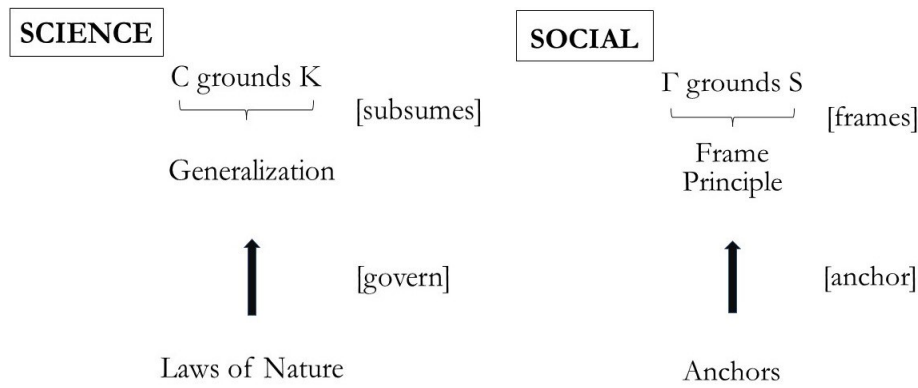
(SOCIAL) Some set of anchors $A_1 \dots A_n$ *anchor* a frame-principle F specifying the grounding-conditions Γ for social kind S, and F *frames* the fact that x is S (by fulfilling the Γ -conditions).

(SCIENCE) A law of nature N *governs* a nomic generalization G specifying the grounding-conditions C for some (non-social) natural kind K, and G *subsumes* the fact that x is K (by fulfilling the C-conditions).⁸

Specifically, and based on this comparison, we propose the following argument:

- (1) SOCIAL is *structurally analogous* to SCIENCE.
- (2) So, from (1), the *anchoring*-relation plays the same role as the *governing*-relation.
- (3) The governing-relation is not cross-worldly.
- (4) So, from (3) and (2), we have reasons to resist CROSS-WORLD.

⁸ There could be things other than laws of nature which can govern nomic regularities. For discussion see Tahko (2022) on the metaphysical function of ‘unification principles’.



(figure 2)

2.1. In Defence of (1)

When we say that SOCIAL and SCIENCE are *structurally* analogous, we mean to suggest that the metaphysical structure of social and (non-social) natural kinds is importantly similar to one another.⁹ To see this, consider two plausible views concerning the nature of social kinds which deliver such a result.

On the first view, SOCIAL is structurally analogous to SCIENCE even though social kinds are, strictly speaking, *distinct* from natural kinds. Still, according to this view, both social kinds and natural kinds are *kinds*, in the sense that their respective members are characterized by relations of objective similarity. So even if social kinds are not natural kinds in the sense that they are not part of the natural world, it is still the case that they are genuine *kinds*, which would licence the structural analogy between SOCIAL and SCIENCE. Epstein, for example, claims that his ‘grounding/anchoring’ model for social reality is based on the idea that kinds *in general*, and not merely social ones, are to be modelled as such. Specifically:

It is a general feature of kinds—not just social kinds like dollars and play tea parties—that something needs to *glue* them together. Even a natural kind like gold may need a bit of “glue,” to set it up as a natural kind. Some philosophers hold, for instance, that laws of nature play some role in acting as this glue. The idea is that all it takes for an object to be a sample of gold is to be

⁹ We take ‘analogy’ arguments to be argumentatively powerful. For example, there are used routinely in metaethics: e.g. ‘companion in guilt’ arguments concerning the explanation of moral supervenience, or naturalist arguments about the nature of moral kinds (see Cowie & Rowland 2019). Indeed, so-called Cornell realism, an influential (albeit not entirely uncontroversial) metaethical project draws from the analogy between moral and biological kinds in order to suggest that moral kinds *are* natural kinds (they can be used for inductive inferences, they are robustly explanatory, and so on) (see Boyd 1988). We should stress, however, that we don’t take analogy arguments on their own to be conclusive. Still, they create a strong presumption against their target (e.g. in metaethics people take Moore’s Open Question Argument to generate a strong presumption against moral naturalism even though it is inconclusive on its own). But this is arguably true about any philosophical argument (‘knockdown arguments’ in philosophy are hard to find) (Darwall et al. 1992). Instead, the three arguments put forward in this paper should be understood as, *collectively*, suggesting that we have good reasons to resist CROSS-WORLD. Also note that the kind of analogy we point out in this section is *extremely strong*: social kinds are either identical to natural kinds, or they are fundamentally similar to them in the sense that they both constitute genuine kinds.

composed of atoms with a particular atomic number. However, what unifies a chemical kind (like gold) into a natural kind is that the laws of nature make the chemical behave in certain regular ways. Without laws gluing the chemical kind together, it would not be a natural kind at all. The Standard Model gives us a standard answer about how the social kinds are “glued.” (Epstein 2015: 81)

And,

I do want to note, however, that anchoring is not limited to social facts or “social construction.” I do, in *The Ant Trap*, restrict my discussion to social facts. But that is only to keep the topic focused: the distinction between grounding and anchoring is quite general. Even facts about natural kinds, like ***x is a sample of gold, x is an electron, x is a eukaryote, and x is human***, have grounding conditions, and there are metaphysical reasons *why* they are real kinds and have the grounding conditions they do. (Epstein 2019: 780)

The ‘grounding/anchoring’ model which, as mentioned, we endorse and wish to elaborate upon, is supposed to provide an account of the metaphysical ‘glue’ which binds kinds together, whether they are natural or distinctively social in nature.¹⁰ So, even under the view that social kinds are not reducible to natural kinds, it is warranted to take SOCIAL and SCIENCE to be structurally analogous.

On the second view, SOCIAL is structurally analogous to SCIENCE because social kinds *are* natural kinds. Why think this? We do not have the space (or wish) to fully defend the naturalness of social kinds in this paper. For our purposes it suffices that it’s a plausible and defensible view. In fact, many have defended such a view in the literature.

For example, Mallon (2016) suggests that some social kinds exhibit the same counterfactual robustness that is typically attributed to paradigmatic natural kinds (see also Mason & Ritchie 2020 and Mason 2020). Take for example Boyd’s Homeostatic Property Cluster account under which a number of social kinds can be accommodated in similar lines to biological ones (e.g. Boyd 1991; 1999).¹¹ Or consider the more recent ‘causal’ accounts of natural kinds, offered by Khalidi (2018) and Ereshefsky (2018), who propose projectability as a criterion for kind-realism across scientific *and* (specifically) social kinds. At any rate, we are happy to present our argument as conditional on the claim that social kinds are either natural, or fundamentally similar to natural kinds.¹²

¹⁰ Another example: non-naturalist moral realists take moral kinds to exist, and their members to be characterized by relations of objective similarity. And, crucially, they take them to be governed in the same way as paradigmatic natural kinds. So even if moral kinds are *just too different* from natural kinds, it is still the case that the *role* of moral laws, according to the non-naturalist, is the same as the role of *natural* moral laws (e.g. by acting as bridge-principles between the moral and a particular subset of the natural domain, by having the same modal force, etc.) (see Rosen 2017).

¹¹ Boyd, in his seminal 1988 paper, goes as far as to say that this is the case even for *moral* kinds.

¹² An anonymous reviewer suggests that anchoring is not akin to governing given that the former is a non-causal form of determination, whereas the latter is causal. We disagree. Governing is a paradigmatic form of non-causal determination. Laws of nature do not *cause* their instances (they are synchronic to them). Instead, laws of nature *make it the case* (non-causally) that their instances have the features they do (one of which if their causal profile). It is not an

Before we move on to the other premises, let us consider one final objection. An anonymous referee suggests that one reason to doubt that social kinds are natural kinds (or even closely related to them) is based on their differences in *modal* behaviour. Roughly, as the thought goes, natural kinds hold necessarily whereas social kinds are contingent (if ‘war criminal’ had been constructed differently, its extension would have been different from the actual legal category). Another way of putting it is this: laws of nature are metaphysically necessary, whereas frame-principles are metaphysically contingent.

We agree with the reviewer that this is a natural thought. But ultimately, we disagree for two reasons. First, the suggestion that social and natural kinds are modally different can be resisted. There are powerful views about the metaphysics of lawhood which take natural laws to be metaphysically contingent (e.g. neo-Humeanism) (Lewis 1994). Also, there are views about the metaphysics of social kinds which take them to be metaphysically necessary (e.g. social essentialist views regarding gender; see Passinsky 2021: 943-7; Witt 2011; or even biological essentialist views as per Bach 2012). So it isn’t that obvious that natural and social kinds are modally different.

Secondly, we argue that differences in modal behaviour are not relevant insofar as both social kinds and natural kinds are modally *robust* (echoing here some of the points in previous paragraphs). Naturalness is tied to prediction and explanation. But these features can be delivered even by kinds which are not metaphysically necessary: it is plausible that special-science kinds like ‘money’ and ‘refugees’ are contingent (in the referee’s sense) and yet are clearly useful scientific categories. It is hardly incidental that such kinds are routinely the object of theorizing by social scientists (see Mason & Richie 2020). So, even if the metaphysical necessity of a given kind can deliver predictive and explanatory fruits, such fruits can be also delivered by kinds which are contingent, yet sufficiently modally robust (like the ones employed in the special and social sciences). For this reason, granting that social kinds are contingent doesn’t imply that they cannot be importantly similar to natural kinds.

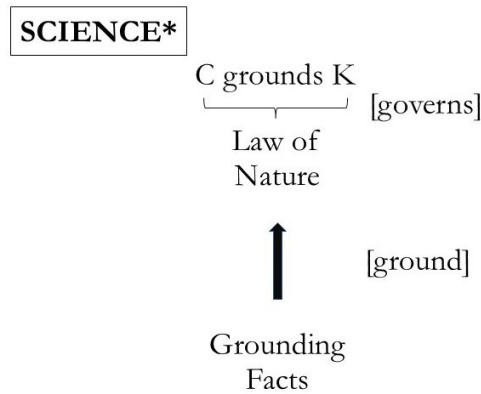
2.2. In Defence of (2) and (3)

As mentioned, we take SOCIAL and SCIENCE to be *structurally* analogous: in that sense, the role of the *anchoring* relation in SOCIAL is being fulfilled by the *governing* relation in SCIENCE. And based on the points made in the previous subsection, such structural analogy plausibly follows from the relation of objective similarity holding between social and natural kinds (in the sense that social kinds are either identical to natural kinds, or they are different yet both represent genuine types of ‘kinds’).

It could be objected, however, that SCIENCE is false. Rather, according to the objector, the correct view concerning the metaphysics of scientific facts is the following:

accident that philosophers have tried to model governing in terms of grounding; although we do not want to (and don’t have to) officially endorse such a view in this paper (see Emery 2019).

(SCIENCE*) A set of facts $G_1 \dots G_n$ *ground* a law of nature L specifying the grounding-conditions C of some scientific kind K , and L *governs* the fact that x is K .



(figure 3)

But, the objector continues, if SCIENCE* is analogous to SOCIAL then it isn't clear that governing is analogous to anchoring. In such a case, the *framing* relation would be analogous to governing, and anchoring would be analogous to some kind of grounding relation. Schaffer (2019) (in an illuminating footnote), makes this exact point:

I do think that [Epstein] needs a framing relation. He believes in background social rules, and he believes in these foreground grounding complexes, and surely these are not unrelated! Indeed I think that the situation is parallel to the situation with *laws of nature*, where one needs a relation, e.g. governing, to connect the background law of nature (“It is a law that all F s are G s”) to the particular instance (“if Fa then Ga ”)—what van Fraassen (1980) speaks of as “the inference problem.” (Laws of nature too can be thought of as selecting out some worlds in which the causal conditions are fixed in a particular way, but this hardly entails that the governing relation between laws and instances is nothing metaphysically.) (2019: 751, fn. 2)

In response, we claim that SCIENCE* goes against the consensus concerning the metaphysics of scientific kinds.¹³ To see this, consider that all major theories concerning the metaphysics of scientific laws do not hold that laws of nature govern *directly* the instances falling within their scope: rather, they govern the relevant nomic generalization which, in turn, subsumes the instances that fall within its scope.

A major desideratum for theories about the metaphysics of laws concern indeed the infamous ‘Inference Problem’: the question of how one can infer a nomic generalization from a law of nature. In this sense we agree with Schaffer that the inference problem is important and illustrative, but we disagree on how this

¹³ Note that even if SCIENCE* is accurate, it isn't clear that this is good news for the proponent of CROSS-WORLD. In this new picture, grounding is analogous to anchoring. But recall that anchoring was supposed to be importantly distinct from grounding. Of course, one could argue that anchoring is analogous to grounding and then claim that grounding is cross-worldly (as Schaffer 2019 does). We return to these arguments later.

problem is interpreted when applied to both natural and social kinds. To see this consider the following example.

On the Dretske-Tooley-Armstrong (DTA) view of laws of nature, the relevant inference goes like this: the generalization ‘(for any x)(Fx , iff, and because, Gx)’ is inferred via the existence of a necessitating relation between two universal-types (a fact of the form $\mathcal{N}(F, G)$) (see Psillos 2004: ch. 6).¹⁴ The fact that $\mathcal{N}(F, G)$ *governs* the fact that ‘(for any x)(Fx , iff, and because, Gx)’. In turn, generalizations subsume their instances. Or consider the power-based view of laws: the generalization ‘(for any x)(Fx , iff, and because, Gx)’ is governed by facts about the dispositional nature of F and G (Bird 2005).¹⁵ In turn, again, that generalization subsumes its instances.

The point here is not to argue that these views successfully solve the inference problem (for doubts see Lewis 1983). Rather, we want to suggest that the *structure* of these views illustrates that laws do not *immediately* govern their instances: laws govern nomic generalizations and, in turn, these generalizations subsume their instances.

In drawing the analogy, we have naturally focused on so-called *governing* views of lawhood. Yet, another way to see that laws govern their respective generalizations is to consider how *non-governing* theories of laws of nature like the Best-System-Account (BSA) treat lawhood. For such accounts, the mere subsumption of instances under a regularity does *not* involve a governing relation.

According to BSA, genuine laws of nature are expressed by law-statements which figure in a deductive system which strikes the optimal balance between (roughly) strength and simplicity (Lewis 1994). Thus, one can trivially infer ‘(for any x)(Fx , iff, and because, Gx)’ from the relevant law of nature since, according to BSA, laws are *themselves* nothing but nomic regularities. In turn, particular instances are entailed, or subsumed, by such regularities.¹⁶ This is to show that non-governing views of lawhood also posit an entailment, or subsuming-relation between regularities and particular instances: but this relation is clearly not the *governing* relation (which, as mentioned, holds strictly between laws and regularities).

Finally, we take (3) (‘The governing-relation is not cross-worldly’) to be the most independently plausible premise of the argument. Every major theory about the metaphysics of laws holds that the governing-relation is world-bound. First, as far as we can tell, there is nothing analogous to cross-world anchoring in the discussion around the metaphysics of lawhood (i.e. there is no notion of cross-world *governing*). Secondly, the world-boundedness of governing directly accommodates the datum that if a law exists at w , then it has a *ground* at w .

¹⁴ For convincing arguments for why such formulations need to also include the because-operator see Berker (2019).

¹⁵ For more details concerning that derivation see Kimpton-Nye (2023: sec. 2). We will also bracket the concern that dispositionalist/essentialist views of lawhood are sometimes categorized as *non-governing* views of laws (e.g. Hildebrand 2013: 2). For our purposes, they should be understood as governing views in the relevant sense (i.e. facts about dispositional essences *make*, rather than simply entail, facts about why particular instances hold).

¹⁶ For what we take to be the minority view according to which regularities (in the form of generalizations) are *not* grounded in their instances see Kovacs (2020).

For example, the DTA theory, as mentioned, takes a law to exist at a world insofar as $N(F, G)$ exists at that world. In other words, the necessitation relation between the F and G-universal is contingent (for discussion see Psillos 2004: ch. 6). Also, so-called ‘primitivist’ views of laws (e.g. Maudlin 2007) take a law of nature L to hold at w given L’s intrinsic nature and the fact that L holds at w. Based on the above, we take the datum that the governing-relation is world-bound to be well-secured.

To take stock, we have argued that we have good reasons to take social and natural kinds to be structurally analogous. This is because either social kinds are themselves natural kinds, or they are irreducible to them but are still genuine kinds simpliciter. And based on these considerations, we are licensed to model the anchoring relation based on the governing relation. But then one is inclined to treat CROSS-WORLD with suspicion, since treating ‘governing’ as cross-worldly goes against the consensus concerning the metaphysics of natural kinds.¹⁷

3. The argument against cross-world determination relations

Recall that anchoring is supposed to be cross-worldly while also being a non-causal determination relation (Epstein 2019: 770): anchor-facts non-causally make it the case that a kind K has the grounding-conditions it does (or, in other words, the fact that K operates under a specific frame-principle). In this section, we present an argument according to which the very idea of cross-world determination relations is extremely controversial. Specifically, we suggest that CROSS-WORLD should be resisted given that cross-world determination relations *in general* should be resisted.¹⁸ To argue for this, we proceed by identifying two potential candidates (specifically, two distinct types of grounding) that could exhibit cross-world determination. We then argue that they fall short, either because they fail to be genuinely cross-worldly, or because they fail to be cross-worldly *in the relevant sense*.¹⁹

3.1. Grounding at a Distance

¹⁷ It could be that anchoring is either identical (or objectively similar) to governing, and governing is cross-worldly only when applied to the social realm. We take this suggestion to be very costly (at the very least, the proponent of that view would need to come up with a compelling argument for thinking that governing has a different ‘modal behaviour’ when applied to the social level).

¹⁸ This is not to say that *there could never be* any cross-world determination relations. Rather, we simply want to highlight that theories that posit such relations are controversial for that very reason. Perhaps the benefits for positing cross-world determination outstrip the fact that it is controversial (which we seriously doubt, although this is a topic for another paper). Still, noting that *it is in fact* controversial (and combined with the other arguments in this paper) puts serious dialectical pressure on the proponent of CROSS-WORLD.

¹⁹ We wish to argue against the view that there could be cross-world anchoring. So, Epstein’s view as a whole is not our target (merely the component of his theory stating that anchoring is a cross-world relation). In this sense, we remain non-committal concerning the question of whether anchoring is a sui-generis relation. This is why we consider as an open possibility worth exploring that anchoring is a kind of grounding and, in turn, that grounding is cross-worldly.

First consider what Baron et al. (2019) have recently called *grounding at a distance*. In its most extreme case, grounding at a distance is exemplified by cases of so-called *double disjoint grounding*: x grounds y (in a doubly disjoint way), iff, x grounds y and, x and y do not exhibit any spatiotemporal overlap in terms of their parts.

Here is an example:

[C]onsider the fact that Alastair is human. If one accepts the essentiality of origin, then what it is to be human is to be descended from a particular lineage, which includes Homo Sapiens. Thus, swamp-person is not human because swamp person was created ex nihilo from the swamp, without an evolutionary history that connects swamp person to the Homo Sapiens lineage. The fact that Alastair is a human now is therefore grounded in some past events: the past events that constitute the right ancestral connection for membership in the kind Homo Sapiens. Again, because these facts about Alastair's heritage concern events in the past, it follows that Alastair's being human now is partly grounded in a past event. Since Alastair is located in the present, the grounding involved appears to be temporally disjoint grounding. (Baron et al. 2019: 3377-8)

It is tempting to say that the Genghis Khan case involved in (*) could be explained in a similar way. After all, the fact that Genghis Khan is a war criminal at w (a world not involving the appropriate anchors) is due to the anchors involved in a possible world w^* . This is a case of double disjoint grounding since the fact that Genghis Khan is a war criminal and the relevant anchors do not share any spatiotemporal parts.

Still, there is a major difference between the Genghis Khan case and the evolutionary-lineage case: the latter involves locationally *mediated* temporally disjoint grounding. In other words, the fact that Alastair is a human is connected to the relevant ancestral events via a *locationally overlapping grounding chain*. That is, the grounding chain that connects these facts is continuously 'stretched-out' through time and space without leaving any 'gaps' (so to speak). This means that the kind of grounding at a distance that Baron et al. have in mind is world-bound: the relevant kind of locationally overlapping grounding chain can occur only *within* a given world.

We anticipate two objections. First, it could be objected that there is nothing, in principle, preventing the proponent of CROSS-WORLD from claiming that anchoring (qua grounding at a distance) can connect anchors and frame-principles via a locationally overlapping chain. This is certainly a move that is open to our objectors. But it comes at a great cost since it requires a kind of spatiotemporal continuity between actual and possible facts (which, we admit, we have a hard time getting our heads around). Appealing to modal realism is of no help either: (in)famously, modal realism states that possible worlds are concrete but spatiotemporally isolated from one another.

Secondly, it could be argued that the Genghis Khan case could be interpreted as merely involving world-bound spatiotemporal grounding continuity. Consider this case: "[S]uppose that Hilary is a future president. Her possession of this property now is grounded in facts about the future: namely Hilary's eventual inauguration." (Baron et al. 2019: 3378) Analogously, the fact that Genghis Khan *in the past* possessed the

property of *being a war criminal*, is grounded (at a distance) by facts about *his future* (namely, by facts pertaining to the relevant anchors).

We find such grounding-cases plausible. Note, however, that these are not the kind of cases that are at stake when one tries to defend CROSS-WORLD. CROSS-WORLD states that anchoring is cross-worldly: that is, it is supposed to connect entities residing in different possible worlds. To see the importance of this feature, consider a world w^* where Genghis Khan has the war-criminal property, but w^* evolves in a way that the relevant anchors are never manifested (say, because Nazi Germany is not defeated by the Allied forces).²⁰ The proponent of CROSS-WORLD would argue that *even in a world like w^** , Genghis Khan is a war criminal. This is so because of the existence of anchors in other possible worlds. But such cases require grounding at a distance between possible worlds. And, as noted, mediated locationally overlapping grounding chains (which is the only thing that ‘grounding-at-a-distance’ *can* deliver) are unable to accommodate such cases.²¹ So ‘grounding-at-a-distance’ is out.

3.2. Schaffer’s Relations-Reply

In recent work, Schaffer (2019) has attempted to show that anchoring is a form of grounding. In doing so, instead of rejecting CROSS-WORLD (which is our preferred option) he suggests that grounding can be cross-worldly alongside anchoring. Specifically, he takes *relational facts* to be particularly apt for ‘travelling’. Here’s an example:

In 1940, Robert Pershing Wadlow (the tallest recorded human) was 8’11.1”. In the world of Harry Potter, Rubeus Hagrid (a half-giant said to be twice as tall as the average man and nearly five times as wide) is—let us say—11’3”. And I am now actually 5’9”. So Wadlow in 1940 of the actual world, and Hagrid in the Harry Potter world, both have the extrinsic, relational property of being taller than me. And surely part of the grounds for Wadlow’s having this property in 1940, and Hagrid’s

²⁰ We return to the issue of uninstantiated anchors in sec. 4.5.

²¹ Similar remarks (which unfortunately we cannot fully develop here) apply to other kinds of determination relations like causation and, so-called, ‘small-g’ grounding (relations like constitution and functional realization) (see Wilson 2014). Every account of causation (the energy transfer account, causal interventionism, etc.) typically takes the relation of causation to hold in the same world. In the relevant literature, as far as we can tell, there is one development of cross-world (or ‘trans-world’) causation, which involves adopting a counterfactual analysis of causation alongside modal realism. And, crucially, the author of that paper uses the result that there’s cross-world causation *as a reductio* for modal realism (García-Ramírez 2011). Or consider the energy-transfer theory of causation (Dowe 2000). We admit that we can’t really imagine how that would work in a ‘cross-world’ setting. Presumably, such a scenario would involve an energy transfer between two possible worlds. But, again, this seems bizarre: can energy transfer occur between possible worlds? (Or, between actuality and possible worlds?). Or take some small-g relation like composition: it seems bizarre to say that the P s compose Q , where the P s are actual and Q holds in w_1 . A potential counterexample might be the truthmaking relation: the fact some proposition (qua interpreted sentence) is true at @, is made true by some fact in w_1 . But, plausibly, truthmaking is not a determination relation (Audi 2019). Also, this seems like too much of a ‘recherché’ case to work as an argument for CROSS-WORLD.

having this property in the Harry Potter world, is my present actual height. This case should be unproblematic. (Schaffer 2019: 763-4)

The idea is this: the fact that Hagrid is 11'3" and taller than Schaffer at the Harry Potter world is partly grounded in Schaffer's present actual height. So, it seems that grounding can connect actual and possible facts.

For dialectical reasons we grant that Schaffer's relational grounding case is coherent.²² Our response is that, even so, the types of facts that are at stake in the discussion surrounding CROSS-WORLD are not relational. In this sense, we agree with Epstein (2019) who rejects Schaffer's contention that properties like *being a war criminal* are covert relational properties of the form *being a war criminal in relation to the Lieber Code of 1862* (Schaffer 2019: 764). Rather, Epstein argues, *being a war criminal* is primarily a monadic property.

In other words, what is at stake are statements like "Genghis Khan is a war criminal"; not statements like "Genghis Khan is a war criminal according to the Lieber Code of 1862". We find the latter kind of statements relatively uncontroversial. But the proponent of CROSS-WORLD must defend the former kind. And in order to do so, they would need to claim that Genghis Khan bears the monadic property of *being a war criminal simpliciter*.

So, it seems that the proponent of CROSS-WORLD cannot appeal to the analogy (or identity) between anchoring and grounding in order to vindicate the view that anchoring travels. As indicated above, even when grounding relates spatiotemporally distinct entities there is still a continuous mediating grounding chain. And even when grounding does not involve such a mediating chain, as it is perhaps the case with relational facts, it is orthogonal to the issue at hand: what is at stake is the cross-worldly anchoring of facts involving monadic properties.

4. The argument from Anchor-Indeterminacy

We will now consider the third, and final, argument against CROSS-WORLD. Consider the Genghis Khan case once more. It is plausible that there can be variation between the different possible worlds in terms of the war-criminal anchors: being a war criminal will be grounded by different facts in different possible worlds. In other words, there is variation in the types of frame-principles under which the 'war-criminal' property can operate under.

For example, in the actual world (@), being a war criminal is grounded in terms of the Geneva Conventions (call these anchors 'anchors_x', and the frame-principle they set-up 'frame_x'). But in a different possible world (w₁), being a war criminal is grounded differently. Perhaps, a completely different set of treaties altogether set-up different grounding-conditions for being a war criminal at w₁ (call these anchors 'anchors_y').

²² For objections see Epstein (2019: sec. 6.2).

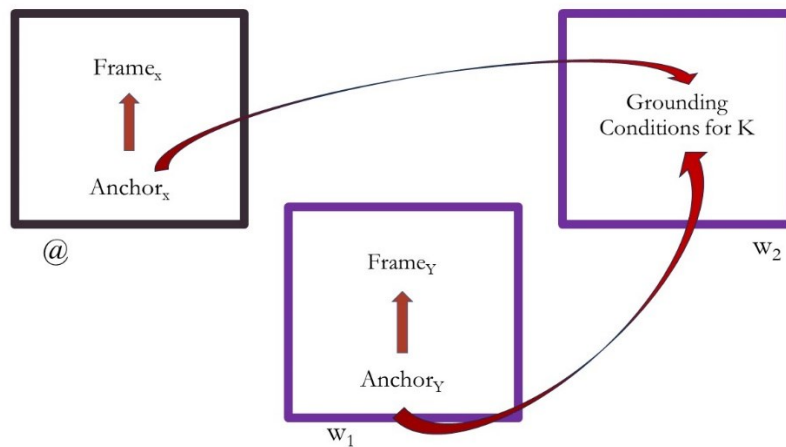
and the frame-principle they set-up ‘frame_Y’). Finally, imagine a world (w_2) without any war criminal anchors. This is a world, as noted in section 1, where war criminals exist *in the absence* of the relevant anchors.

Now assume that all three worlds ($@$, w_1 , w_2) have the same *pre-social facts*. What we have in mind here is something like Einheuser’s notion of a ‘substratum’, or, “[...] stuff, which is neutral with respect to the features that are taken to be conventional [social, in our sense]. Onto this substratum, features of the kind in question can be conventionally imposed in many different ways.” (Einheuser 2006: 461; modified). So, $@$, w_1 , and w_2 are identical in terms of their pre-social facts but differ in terms of their anchors and frame-principles:

$@$: <pre-social facts, anchors_X (i.e. which set-up frame_X)>

w_1 : <pre-social facts, anchors_Y (i.e. which set-up frame_Y)>

w_2 : <pre-social facts, no anchors>



(figure 4)

Additionally to Einheuser’s remarks about the possibility of imposing many different social ‘carvings’ upon a given substratum (‘pre-social facts’, in our sense), it should be noted that it is a commonplace in the social construction literature that the exact same facts can be framed differently even by conflicting frame principles. For example, so called “constitutive constructions” according to which the nature of a - socially constructed - entity is determined by what is attributed to it, or how it is classified (Haslanger 2012: ch. 2 and 3, Diaz-Leon 2015), rest on this assumption. The consensus here is that social constructions involve a rather high degree of contingency.

Now, put the following question to the proponent of CROSS-WORLD: What grounds the property of being a war criminal at w_2 ? Are the grounding-conditions of being a war criminal at w_2 cross-world anchored by anchors_X or anchors_Y?

For vividness let us suppose that Genghis Khan is a war criminal in @, whereas he is a *war hero* in w_1 .²³ Now consider w_2 again: is Genghis Khan a war criminal or a war hero in w_2 ? We argue that, based on CROSS-WORLD and UNIVERSALITY, the answer to this question is indeterminate. Call this *the indeterminacy problem*.

4.1. Biting the Bullet

Assume that there is indeterminacy in w_2 between anchors_X and anchors_Y concerning the war criminal kind (call it K).²⁴ Why is this a problem? After all, the proponent of CROSS-WORLD might simply say that anchor-indeterminacy is, at worst, simply a quirky characteristic of the social world. Perhaps it could even be argued that it is a *feature* of CROSS-WORLD that it reveals an unexpected and interesting dimension of social reality.

4.1.1. The conjunctive move

There are two ways in which the proponent of CROSS-WORLD can ‘bite the bullet’ in this sense. First, they could suggest that K’s grounding conditions at w_2 are cross-world anchored by *both* anchors_X or anchors_Y (holding in @ and w_1 , respectively). According to such a view, the frame-principle under which K operates would be the *conjunction* of frame_X and the frame_Y. Applied to the Genghis Khan case, this strategy would entail that Genghis Khan is, at the same time, *both* a war criminal and a war hero. Call this the *conjunctive move*.

We take this result to be problematic for multiple reasons. First, note that the conjunctive move is radically revisionary concerning the case that was supposed to *motivate* CROSS-WORLD in the first place. As per UNIVERSALITY, there is an intuitive appeal to the idea that Genghis Khan is a war criminal in the absence of anchors.²⁵ But there is nothing intuitive about the view that Genghis Khan is both a war criminal and a

²³ Another way of putting the same worry is saying that anchors_X make it so that Genghis Khan *is* a war criminal, whereas anchors_Y suggest that he *is not* a war criminal (in this sense, frame_X is directly inconsistent with frame_Y; see sec. 4.1.1). In our presentation, we take Genghis Khan at w_1 to be a war hero *given* that he is not a war criminal as per anchors_Y. Naturally, this assumption can be contested since not being a war criminal does not entail being a war hero. Still, we present the indeterminacy problem by using this extreme contrast (‘being a war criminal’ / ‘being a war hero’) to highlight the urgency of the indeterminacy problem.

²⁴ There is also indeterminacy in terms of the relevant frame-principles (‘frame_X’ and ‘frame_Y’). But such ‘frame-indeterminacy’ is downstream from the indeterminacy that occurs at the level of anchors, hence our focus on ‘anchor-indeterminacy’. Additionally, there could be interesting permutations which we do not have the space to review here. For example, it could be that the *same* type of anchors set-up different frame-principles in different possible worlds (e.g. the Geneva Conventions set-up different frame-principles for war-criminality in different possible worlds). Or it could be that the very same frame-principle is generated by two *distinct* types of anchors (e.g. the same frame-principle for war-criminality is anchored by both the Geneva Conventions *and* the Lieber Code). These permutations arguably also generate indeterminacy problems for CROSS-WORLD but given their complexity we postpone their exploration.

²⁵ Karagiannopoulos & Stamatidis-Bréhier (2024) dispute such intuitions (or that they have any probative evidential force)..

war hero. Put differently, there is nothing intuitive about the view that being a war criminal operates under an *inherently inconsistent* frame-principle.

Perhaps some states of affairs in the social world are *supposed* to be inconsistent (see Brouwer 2022 for some potential cases).²⁶ But this brings us to our second point: there is no reason to think that such social inconsistencies (i.e. at the level of anchors and frame-principles) will be *isolated* phenomena. In fact, based on CROSS-WORLD and UNIVERSALITY quite the opposite is to be expected: *any* kind which is supposed to occur in an anchorless world (under the assumption that there is frame-variability across modal space for that kind), will turn out to be inconsistent in this sense. So, the relevant sense of inconsistency here is *systematic* and, hence, extremely objectionable.²⁷

Finally, recall that another motivation behind CROSS-WORLD is the apparent plausibility of UNIVERSALITY. The view that a social fact K can hold at w in the absence of anchors has an air of plausibility because so-called *etic* analyses are routinely used in the social sciences: there are cases where social scientists apply social categories or concepts to societies and communities that seem culturally distant from their own.

Presumably, one is licensed to apply the ‘war criminal’ category to Genghis Khan even though the Genghis Khan-world is relatively distant from their own. But, if the frame-principle under which Genghis Khan operates in that world (‘w₂’ according to our set-up) is inconsistent, then the very applicability of *etic* analyses is compromised (for a similar point see Hawley 2017).²⁸

4.1.2. The Disjunctive Move

Here's a different way of biting the bullet concerning the indeterminacy problem: perhaps K's frame-principle in w₂ (i.e. the anchorless world) is *irreducibly disjunctive*. Instead of saying that K's frame-principle in w₂ is the conjunction of frame_X and frame_Y, according to this view there is simply no fact of the matter about whether ‘being a war criminal’ is grounded in terms of frame_X or in terms of frame_Y. In this sense this strategy ‘takes it on the chin’ and accepts the indeterminacy between anchors (and frame-principles) at face value. Call this the *disjunctive move*.²⁹

²⁶ While genuine inconsistencies may exist, they do not necessarily vindicate CROSS-WORLD. Inconsistencies might be best explained by, say, a world-bound conception of anchoring (in fact, we believe that the cases presented in Brouwer (2022) are as such). Therefore, inconsistencies seem orthogonal to CROSS-WORLD.

²⁷ A potential response here from the proponent of CROSS-WORLD would be to restrict instances of cross-world anchoring only to *certain* types of cases (for this strategy see sec. 4.3.).

²⁸ By contrast, if anchoring is world-bound then we are not faced with this problem: one is justified to apply a given category at a world insofar as the proper anchors can be found at *that* world. Still, note that it is not our aim to directly defend the view that anchoring is world-bound (although we find this view very plausible). The primary aim of this paper concerns casting doubt on CROSS-WORLD.

²⁹ To compare, according to the conjunctive move, the frame-principle under which K operates in w₂ is *not*, strictly speaking, indeterminate: rather, it is determinate that K (in w₂) is grounded in terms of *both* frame_X and frame_Y.

Again, problems arise. First, it should be noted that the indeterminacy at play here is ontic.³⁰ A subtle point to note is that the disjunctive move doesn't *merely* suggest that the grounding conditions for being a war criminal is either provided by frame_X or frame_Y. In other words, the idea isn't simply that Genghis Khan either is or isn't a war criminal. Rather, the disjunctive move suggests that *there is no fact of the matter* that would settle whether Genghis Khan is determinatively a war criminal or not at the relevant possible world ('w₂' according to our set-up).

If such a scenario holds, then it is *ontically indeterminate* whether anchors_X or anchors_Y are the right anchors for K's grounding-conditions (and it is equally indeterminate whether frame_X or frame_Y applies to K). We take it that if a view about anchoring can avoid commitment to indeterministic states of affairs, ontically understood, then it would be preferable to do so.

Secondly, there is a worry from ontological parsimony. Assume that the grounding-conditions of a given kind are anchored by an indeterminate state involving two distinct anchors: anchors_X and anchors_Y. But why assume that there will be only two? For all we know, the disjunction of anchors could be extremely long or infinite. In fact, we do not think that this is an especially far-fetched scenario: there are *many* different possible worlds and there could also be potentially many ways in which a given set of anchors can set-up the grounding-conditions of a given kind. At any rate, the burden of proof is on our opponent to tell us what kind of constraints are at play that do not allow for the proliferation of anchors. And even if they successfully do so for a given social kind, we are not particularly optimistic that the same strategy will extend to *every* social kind. In that sense, the ontological proliferation of anchors is a genuine worry for those who wish to bite the bullet concerning the indeterminacy problem.³¹

Finally, the disjunctive move *also* compromises the viability of etic analyses. In this case, it is inherently indeterminate whether Genghis Khan is a war criminal or a war hero in w₂. So, we *can* apply the 'war criminal' category to Genghis Khan, in the same way we can apply the 'war hero' category to Genghis Khan. This trivializes the *explanatory* power of etic analyses. We consider etic analyses to be explanatory in terms of the ascription of social kind terms to settings occurring at distant possible worlds. If an etic analysis is successful, then our *understanding* of the relevant social phenomenon is increased: for example, knowing that Genghis Khan is a war criminal in a world that is distant from our own is a surprising, highly non-trivial, fact.

³⁰ For other examples involving objectionable ontic indeterminacies see Schaffer (2009) (for gavagai-style indeterminacies in a meta-semantical setting), Kripke (1980: 156-8) (for indeterminacies in the context of personal identity across modal space), and Stamatidis-Bréhier (2023a; 2023b) (for moral indeterminacies)

³¹ Even though ontic indeterminacy is inherently controversial, the issue we are trying to highlight here concerns *systematic* ontic indeterminacy, which we take to be *particularly* controversial, in the same way *systematic inconsistency* is controversial. In that sense we do not object to there being certain kinds which *are* 'disjunctive' in the above sense. A potential example would be certain non-binary theories of genders which take gender identity (in some cases) to exist in a state of 'liminality' (Ellawala 2020 seems to argue along these lines concerning gender identity in Sri Lanka). For other such cases (which, again, do not presuppose a cross-worldly feature of anchoring) see Richardson (2024).

To see this consider that some etic analyses are notoriously problematic, as it is the case with anachronistic applications of contemporary social kind terms. It is plausibly *improper* to ascribe the ‘bisexuality’-category to Alcibiades and Socrates. And a clear-cut explanation for this is that the ‘bisexuality’-kind does not export (although see Finocchiaro 2021 for more nuance which we cannot fully explore here). On the flipside, plausibly, it *is* proper to apply the ‘recession’ category to economic phenomena which occurred in societies preceding the marginal revolution in economics (Park 1992). So, it seems that both the conjunctive and the disjunctive move are out.³²

4.2. Against Anchor-Uniqueness

Perhaps the indeterminacy-problem has a clear-cut solution. Based on the contingent modal character of anchor-facts, there can be contextual variations in anchoring and, thus, in terms of the frame-principles that apply to a given social kind. And such variation seems to be compatible with the indeterminacy problem. After all, isn’t indeterminacy what we should *expect* given the contingent modal signature of anchor-facts?³³

In response, we agree that, at least for some social kinds, there can be variations in terms of the anchor-facts, which in turn produce variation in terms of the relevant frame-principles. Indeed, this *must* be the case if the indeterminacy problem (as we have presented it) is to even get off the ground.

In a sense, there is a kind of indeterminacy which by our lights is innocuous and we are happy to accept.³⁴ There might be potentially many different anchor-types (and frame-principle types) which can correspond to a given social kind. And it would be a mistake to ascribe a *unique* frame-principle to such kinds (by singling out some world as special).³⁵ So, there is indeterminacy about the different types of anchors (and frame-principles) which may be ascribed to a kind K.

³² For extremely similar concerns (bracketing some nuances) we also reject Schaffer’s ‘relations-reply’ as a solution to the indeterminacy problem. According to such a view, if both $frame_X$ and $frame_Y$ export to w_2 (the anchorless world for kind K), then x is a war criminal *relative to* $frame_X$ but *not relative to* $frame_Y$, assuming x fulfils conditions-X (and thus falls under $frame_X$). Alternatively, x is a war criminal *relative to* $frame_Y$, and *not relative to* $frame_X$, assuming x fulfils conditions-Y (and thus falls under $frame_Y$). In other words, construed in this way, there are two, *relational*, social kinds at w_2 : ‘K-relative-to- $frame_X$ ’ and ‘K-relative-to- $frame_Y$ ’. But, again, this seems to trivialize our practice of etic analyses. *Of course*, Genghis-Khan is a war criminal relative to *some* set of standards. But this is not the issue: the question is whether it is *appropriate* (in an objectivist sense to be specified) whether a given social category can be applied in some set of circumstances. Given the independent plausibility of the non-triviality of etic analyses we conclude that the ‘relations-reply’ (when applied to the indeterminacy problem) should be rejected. Many thanks to an anonymous referee for discussion here.

³³ We thank an anonymous referee for pressing us on this.

³⁴ It should also be noted that, strictly speaking, *contextual variation* does not necessarily imply *indeterminacy*. We concur with Díaz-León (2020: 184 fn. 13) who distinguishes between social kind terms which are ‘genuinely indeterminate’ from those that are “context-sensitive”.

³⁵ See sec. 4.4. on how such a move could look like.

But this is *not* the indeterminacy we have in mind when we put forward the indeterminacy-problem against cross-world anchoring. Our proposed indeterminacy problem concerns a scenario where an anchorless world is cross-world anchored by (at least) two different types of anchors (from, at least, two different possible worlds). So, the question is this: which frame-principle applies to a kind K in a *specific* possible world? (w_2 in our example in sec. 4) *That* indeterminacy is noxious for the reasons we state in the previous section (e.g. compromising the possibility of etic analyses and proliferating our ontology).

Perhaps the worry is, instead, that our insistence in singling out a unique frame for some specific possible world is somehow morally (and politically) problematic. For example, plausibly the kind ‘gender’ is pluralistic. And one might worry that, if there could only be one frame-principle applying to K at some specific world, then such accounts are precluded. Alternatively, according to the objector, something like the disjunctive move (considered in the previous section) delivers pluralistic social kinds.³⁶

Note, however, that there being a unique frame-principle for K at some possible world does not preclude that principle from being pluralistic. It could be, for example, that ‘gender’ operates under a pluralistic frame principle according to which ‘being a man’ involves being grounded by a (long) disjunction of potential (and perhaps even mutually conflicting) behaviours and/or features. Other kinds, like the kind ‘being a war criminal’, are not like so. For reasons already mentioned, it is problematic to say that Genghis Khan is *at the same time* a war criminal and a war hero at w_2 (thus adopting an inherently *inconsistent* frame principle), and it is also problematic to say that it is *indeterminate* whether Genghis Khan is or isn’t a war criminal at w_2 .

To reiterate, we argue that the issue of kind pluralism is largely orthogonal to the indeterminacy problem. A kind like ‘gender’ can be pluralistic at w even if anchoring is world-bound (entailing that ‘gender’ is anchored purely by anchors holding at w). In other words, there are two different types of questions which should be disentangled. First, there is the question concerning the ways in which a social kind *could* be grounded. And there is the question of the way in which a given social kind is grounded, *as a matter of fact*, in a specific possible world. The first question is, as mentioned, innocuous and we are happy to grant the multiplicity of social kinds *in that sense*. The indeterminacy problem is based on the second type of question: specifically, it indicates that there will either be indeterminate states of affairs (as per the disjunctive move) or inconsistent ones (as per the conjunctive move). And, crucially, this will be so *within a specific world* and in a *systematic* way. *That* kind of indeterminacy problem is not innocuous and requires attention from the proponent of CROSS-WORLD.

4.3. Restricted Cross-World Anchoring

Perhaps there are some cases where we should *reject* that there is cross-world anchoring at play. If K holds at w (without any anchors at w), and it is ontically indeterminate whether K is anchored in terms of anchors_x or anchors_y then perhaps the right response is to say that K does not *hold* at w after all. Recall that CROSS-

³⁶ We thank an anonymous referee and Anna-Sofia Maurin for helpful discussion.

WORLD does not state that *every* instance of the anchoring relation is cross-worldly (nor is it implied by UNIVERSALITY). Presumably, there are cases where anchoring operates strictly within a world. So, the suggestion here seems to be this: the cases which seem to generate objectionable ontic indeterminacy of anchors are cases where the relevant social kind does not exist.

So, are there any plausible cases which seem to motivate this *restricted* form of CROSS-WORLD? We admit that we have a hard time finding any compelling examples (recall, for example, our remarks against Schaffer’s case of ‘relative heights’ in sec. 3.2.). This is why in what follows we stick to the Genghis Khan case (as we have done throughout this paper) which is, after all, the case that was used to motivate CROSS-WORLD in the first place.

Our first worry about this strategy is epistemological in nature. How would one differentiate between a world where K exists but there are no anchors for K at that world, from a world where K does not exist?

w: <pre-social facts, no anchors, K exists>

w*: <pre-social facts, no anchors, K does not exist>

w is a world where K exists and, assuming CROSS-WORLD, the grounding-conditions of K are cross-world anchored. This is not the case for w* where K does not exist (and, thus, there is no cross-world anchoring at play).

It is difficult to see how someone would tell whether they inhabit a world like w compared to a world like w*. The Genghis Khan case, we have assumed, concerns a world like w. But this assumption can be challenged if we allow for the coherence of worlds like w*. We have no horse in this race, but it seems not entirely unreasonable that someone could claim that Genghis Khan is not a war criminal (because, *in general*, there are no war criminals in his world). In other words, it is unclear how one would know whether a given frame-principle *exports or not* to another possible world.³⁷ For example, Guala (2016) has suggested that the war criminal charge is supposed to act as a *deterrent*:

[S]ince bad things are supposed to happen to war criminals when they get caught (martial court, imprisonment, capital punishment), the main point of having the institutional role of war criminal is to reduce the level of gratuitous violence in a war (Guala 2016: 143).

According to such a view, the ‘war criminal’ property cannot be cross-world anchored (of course, without this entailing that *other* properties cannot be cross-world anchored).

How would one adjudicate between the view that Genghis Khan is a war criminal, from the view that he isn’t? In other words, how would we know whether we are entitled to apply the ‘war criminal’ category to Genghis Khan? Ex hypothesi, w and w* have no anchors and the same pre-social facts. So, again, the

³⁷ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for discussion on this point.

proponent of CROSS-WORLD owes us a story of how we can detect whether a given social property exists at a world.³⁸

Another, related, issue is distinctively metaphysical. Assume that some social properties are cross-world anchored, and others are not. Why is that the case? If the war criminal property can be cross-world anchored, whereas (say) gender-properties cannot, then the proponent of CROSS-WORLD owes us a story of why this is so. Perhaps the proponent of CROSS-WORLD can say that it is a brute fact that some properties are cross-world anchored and others do not. But then this would inflate their ontology with yet another category of facts.

4.4. The primacy of the actual world

Another way to restrict cross-world anchoring is the following: perhaps there is cross-world anchoring at play only in cases where the relevant anchors inhabit the *actual* world. In other words, perhaps there are only ‘actual-to-possible’ cases of cross-world anchoring: that is, cases where the actual world cross-world anchors some other possible world. To illustrate, consider once more the set-up from sec. 4:

@: <pre-social facts, anchors_X>

w₁: <pre-social facts, anchors_Y>

w₂: <pre-social facts, no anchors>

According to this suggestion, if K exists at w₂, then K’s grounding-conditions are anchored in terms of @ rather than w₁. So, when faced with a case of apparent indeterminacy between two anchors, we should give priority to the anchors holding at @:

(ACTUAL PRIMACY) Anchors that hold in the actual world can reach other possible worlds, but anchors that hold in any other possible world are ‘stuck’ in that possible world.

This strategy deals with the epistemological worry we presented in the previous section. Recall that according to that worry, if there are no anchors for K at w, then it is epistemically unclear whether w is a world where K exists but is cross-world anchored (e.g. by the anchors at w₁), or a world where K does not exist at all. But if only ‘actual-to-possible’ cases of cross-world anchoring are permitted, then if there are no anchors for K at @, then there is no K at w. And, inversely, if there *are* anchors for K at @, then K exists at w (since it is cross-world anchored in terms of @).

Similar remarks apply to the metaphysical worry (also sketched in the previous section). According to that worry, if cross-world anchoring occurs only in *some* cases, then we should have an explanation for why this is so. In other words, we should be given an account of what makes those cases metaphysically special. But

³⁸ Perhaps the proponent of CROSS-WORLD can claim that one can have access to social properties via some special faculty of intuition (similar to the moral epistemology of moral intuitionists). We do not have the space to explore this intriguing possibility.

according to the suggestion under examination, there *is* something special about those cases: it is the metaphysical primacy of the actual world which does the work.

Why think that the actual world is metaphysically primary in this sense? Here's a thought: the fact that the actual world is special is reflected by facts about the use of social kind *terms*.³⁹ For a given social kind K and its corresponding concept <K>, when we ask whether <K> applies to an anchorless possible world w, we are in the habit of considering w, *as if it were actual*.

For example, when we ask whether Genghis Khan is a war criminal in a world that doesn't (and, also, *won't*) involve the Geneva Conventions, we imagine what it would be like to *actually* live in that world, and whether we would be warranted to apply the term 'war criminal' in such conditions.

Also, it seems that when we ask whether <K> applies to the actual world *absent the relevant anchors*, we don't imagine a world *like* the actual world where K exists (i.e. we don't evaluate @ from the perspective of another possible world taken as actual). Rather, we consider @ as actual, and we *then* consider directly whether K exists at @. So, in general it seems that in whichever kind of scenario, when we want to consider whether a kind applies to a world, we consider that world *as actual*. So, as the thought goes, this suggests that there is something special about the actual world.

In response, we doubt that the actual world is metaphysically primary in any important sense.⁴⁰ Our main concern is this: it is a highly contingent matter that the actual world is the way it is. To see this, consider the possibility of uninstantiated anchors: the actual Genghis Khan lived in a world where the relevant anchors didn't hold at his time, but they ended up existing in the future. But it is epistemically possible that there are some anchors (for at least some social kinds) which are never instantiated at @. We take this to be a natural thought: why think that *every* type of anchor is going to end up existing at @?

In other worlds, even though there are war-criminal anchors in @, @ could have been anchorless (given the idea of uninstantiated anchors). And, in that case, we would still be inclined to say that Genghis Khan is a war criminal. But then, if one is a proponent of CROSS-WORLD, they would have to accept 'possible-to-actual'-anchoring (thus reinstating the indeterminacy problem).⁴¹

³⁹ We thank David Kovacs for this suggestion and for relevant discussion.

⁴⁰ Additionally, even if we grant that the folk usage of social kind terms is evidentially probative, restricting cross-world anchoring only to cases of 'actual-to-possible' anchoring would largely diminish the dialectical strength of CROSS-WORLD. UNIVERSALITY, at least formally speaking, was supposed to be a general thesis claiming that K can hold at a world in the absence of anchors at that world (also allowing for cases of 'possible-to-possible' and possible-to-actual' anchoring).

⁴¹ As a side note, there are distinctively metaphysical reasons to doubt about the primacy of the actual world. 'Actual' is taken to be an indexical term. So, a world where Genghis Khan exists in the absence of the Geneva Conventions is 'actual' from the perspective of that world (and @ is taken to be possible). This suggests that the 'actual'-property is highly gerrymandered (in the Lewis sense). (We're bracketing concerns about whether 'the actual world' is an indexical in the strict sense – what matters for our purposes is that 'the actual world' is highly non-rigid) (for discussion see van Inwagen 1980).

It could be suggested, instead, that the actual world is primary in a *normative* sense. Perhaps, as the thought would go, the anchors that obtain in the actual world are normatively privileged in the sense that they bring about some political or moral good. This seems to be the case in the Genghis Khan case. The relevant actual world anchors ‘do better’ than other anchors (holding in other possible worlds) in getting the right normative characteristics for war criminality. It is morally and politically *desirable* (perhaps in Haslanger’s ameliorative sense of the term) that Genghis Khan is labelled as a war criminal instead of a war hero (e.g., as per w_1 according to our set-up). In that sense, the actual world should be prioritized thus vindicating ACTUAL PRIMACY.

In response, we appeal to the contingency of the actual world once more. It is a highly contingent matter that the actual world has the *normative* characteristics it does: the actual world could have had anchors for war criminality according to which Genghis Khan is a war hero. In other words, it could have been the case that the actual world *didn’t* get the right normative characteristics for moral criminality since it is neither morally nor politically desirable to label Genghis Khan as a war hero.

To see this consider the phenomenon of *ontic injustice* (Jenkins 2023; Dembroff 2018). For example, Dembroff (2018: 26) suggests that some social kinds might be constructed in a way that, due to historical or continued prejudice, result into having *unjust membership conditions* (see also Richardson 2022 on the phenomenon of ontological erasure/exclusion). These are cases where:

the boundaries around a social kind are set up such that groups who ought to have access to kind membership (or to exit membership) do not or rarely have such access. The kind eligible voter provides a clear example. Historically, this kind had membership conditions that unjustly excluded anyone assigned female at birth; today, in many US states it has conditions that unjustly exclude persons with criminal records. (Dembroff 2018: 26)

In grounding/anchoring terminology, these are cases where certain anchors (what Dembroff (2018: 26) would call “social practices and structures”) set-up grounding conditions for a certain kind K in a way where K has morally and politically problematic consequences. And, crucially, whether such anchors are instantiated in the actual world is a highly contingent matter.⁴² For this reason, we cannot appeal to the putative normative superiority of the actual world to vindicate ACTUAL PRIMACY.

Conclusion

In this paper we presented three arguments against the view that the anchoring relation is cross-worldly (i.e. what we labelled ‘CROSS-WORLD’). The argument from the structural analogy between social and natural kinds builds upon the insight that there is nothing like the anchoring relation figuring in the

⁴² We do not dispute that many social kinds are set-up in the morally appropriate way (or, even, that they will be properly set-up in the future). Rather, we simply make the uncontroversial remark that this will not be the case for *every* social kind.

metaphysics of natural kinds. Similarly, the second argument builds on the inherent controversial nature of cross-world determination relations in general. Finally, the challenge from anchor indeterminacy presents a dilemma for the proponent of CROSS-WORLD. On the one hand, they would need to accept some kind of *systematic* indeterminacy (or even inconsistency) between different types of anchors. Or they would need to find some way to restrict instances of cross-world anchoring only to cases which are unobjectionable. The first option, as mentioned, compromises the viability of etic analyses (among other issues). Concerning the second option, we admit that we have a hard time finding a non-arbitrary way to restrict anchoring in this sense (and the option we considered – ACTUAL-PRIMACY – faces serious problems).

Is this bad news for Epstein's grounding/anchoring model? Not necessarily. The whole point behind UNIVERSALITY and CROSS-WORLD is to make sense of successful etic analyses (i.e. cases in distant possible worlds where it is appropriate to ascribe some social kind category). If CROSS-WORLD is rejected, then this simply means that we would need to find another way to make sense of such analyses. And it seems to us that a *world bound* conception of anchoring (this antithesis of CROSS-WORLD) has a lot going for it. Under such a view, etic analyses are successful when the relevant anchors are *present* in the relevant world. And in cases we have the intuition of exportation without there being any anchors, then we should simply find a way to dispel those very intuitions. There's much more that could be discussed here, but we'll table that for a later time.

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