

# Debating Dispositions

Issues in Metaphysics, Epistemology  
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The Editors

## Dispositions and Their Intentions

ANDREA BORCHINI

*Abstract:* Dispositional Realism is the view according to which some denizens of reality – i.e., dispositions – are properties, may exist in the natural world, and have an irreducible modal character. Among Dispositional Realists, Charlie Martin, Jillian Place and George Molnar most notably argued that the modal character of dispositions should be understood in terms of their *intentionality*. Other Dispositional Realists, most notably Stephen Mumford, challenged this understanding of the modal character of dispositions. In this paper, I defend a fresh version of the intentional understanding of dispositions. I start by distinguishing between two questions about properties, respectively addressing their identity conditions and their individuation conditions. I, then, define categorical and dispositional properties in terms of their *qualitative character*, and examine their identity and individual conditions. I conclude that the attribution of intentions is a conceptual tool introduced in order to alleviate the burdensome task of specifying the conditions of individuation of a disposition; however, such attribution does not affect the identity of a disposition.

Nominalists believe that there are no properties, but only particulars. Realists, instead, believe that some denizens of reality are properties. Among the Realists, some are Dispositional Realists: they believe that some properties are dispositions. Roughly, the latter are those entities with an irreducibly modal character that may be instantiated by objects in the natural (i.e., spatio-temporal) world. Other Realists, deny the existence of dispositional properties, thereby denying Dispositional Realism.

In this paper, I shall assume Realism about properties. My aim will be to provide a fresh understanding of Dispositional Realism, which gives some merit to the view according to which dispositions have intentions.

### 1. Singling Out Properties

As the debate on the ontological status of properties grew consistently over the past few decades, it was enriched by the addition of an increasingly technical vocabulary; it is thereby convenient to start off by introducing two distinctions that we shall employ during the discussion.

First distinction. There are two kinds of theories of properties: *abundant* and *sparse*. Abundant theories incorporate the following principle:

AB: For any predicate within the language of the theory, there is a property.<sup>1</sup>

Sparse theories, on the other hand, reject AB. For a sparse theorist, what properties there are cannot be established just by looking at the predicates within the language of the theory, as only a few predicates single out a property. In what follows, I shall endorse a sparse theory of properties.<sup>2</sup>

Second distinction. Some properties are said to be *pure* and some to be *impure*. Impure properties are those whose identity is fixed via reference to some particular. For example, *Dustin Hoffman's being cheerful* is identified via reference to Dustin Hoffman. Pure properties are those that are identified without reference to any particular. For example, *Being cheerful*.<sup>3</sup> The discussion that follows is concerned with pure properties. Derivatively, it might be applied to impure ones as well, although I shall not attempt to do so.

One of the problems for a theory according to which properties are sparse and pure is to devise a criterion (or: some criteria) through which properties can be singled out. For example, suppose that, in the language of the theory, you have the predicate: 'To be an electron'; does such a predicate, indeed, single out a property – *Being an electron* – or, rather, does it refer to an array of properties, perhaps a gerrymandered one? I shall label this the *Singling Out Question* (SOQ):

SOQ: Under what circumstances ought one to commit to the existence of a property?

As I see it, SOQ is composed of two sub-problems: the *Identity Question* (IDQ) and the *Individuation Question* (INQ):

IDQ: What makes a property the property that it is?

INQ: Under what conditions is the individuation of a property achieved?

IDQ is a metaphysical question: to tell what fixes the identity of a property is to tell what makes it a unity (*one* property) and what distinguishes it from all other properties. INQ is an epistemic problem: it concerns the sort of evidence that is necessary to single out a property.

1. Contradictory predicates as well as predicates that give rise to logical paradoxes ought to be excluded. For a recent presentation of AB, see Field 2004.

2. See Armstrong 1979, Lewis 1986, 59–69, Swoyer 1996, Molnar and Oliver 1997, 1–33, and Sharvit 2004.

3. See Kihara 1988, Lumbersone 1996, Langton 1998 and Langton and Lewis 1998.

In what follows, I shall first address IDQ and then INQ. My main argument will purport to show that the attribution of intentionality to dispositional properties is done in connection with INQ and not with IDQ. And, because of this, there is no need to attribute intentions to dispositions; yet, in order to individuate dispositions, and to single them out, talk of intentions comes in handy.

## 2. On the Identity of Properties I: Categorical and Dispositional Entities

It is fairly ordinary to distinguish between two kinds of entities: categorical and dispositional. Yet, it is a major point of controversy how the distinction ought to be understood. The vast majority of the contestants focused on a certain purported difference between dispositional and categorical ascriptions: the first would entail conditionals, while the latter would not.<sup>4</sup>

Although this distinction enlightens a relevant side of the debate, to the eye of the Dispositional Realist it proceeds from a methodological vice: it is not through a linguistic distinction that we establish a metaphysical one. In other words, it is not methodologically sound to invoke certain features of ascriptions to substantiate differences among the ascribed entities. Linguistic facts can be hints or guides to ontological facts; yet, the latter will need an independent justification to be established. Here is the one I wish to propose for telling apart categorical from dispositional entities.

We start by saying that all properties have a *qualitative character*, sometimes labelled also nomic role.<sup>5</sup> This includes all aspects that each instance of a property entertains. Aspects are divided in two kinds, intrinsic and relational, defined as follows:

*Intrinsic aspect:* a feature that each instance of a property entertains regardless its environment.<sup>6</sup>

*Relational aspect:* a relation that each instance of a property entertains with instances of other properties.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion in Mellor 1974, Prior 1982, Prior 1985, Mumford 1998, 64–92, and, for an up to date overview, the article by Schrenk in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Robinson 1993 and Shaffer 2005.

<sup>6</sup> I reject the existence of intrinsic aspects, as they cannot be individuated – see Lewis 2004, Langton 2004 and Langton 1998. However, I shall leave this point on a side here, as it does not affect our discussion.

<sup>7</sup> Some prefer to define the qualitative character in a way that renders the subjects of the relations the particulars instantiating the properties, rather than the properties themselves. In the sequel, I shall speak as if the properties themselves are related. However, what I will say shall not depend

Thus, the qualitative character will be defined as follows:

*Qualitative character of property P:* all the intrinsic and relational aspects of P.

For example, the nomic role of *Being a molecule of oxygen* will include, among others, that its instances will be related to instances of *Being a molecule of hydrogen* and *Being water*.

Both intrinsic and relational aspects may be causally efficacious: that is, they do, or may, bring about changes in reality. Thus, identifying a property with its qualitative character is to tie it necessarily with (some of) the changes that it does and may bring about.

For some, however, this proposal is not adequate, as a property may partially or completely change its qualitative character and still retain its identity. These postulate the existence of non-causally efficacious aspects, called *quiddities*, such that each property – purportedly – has one and only one *quiddity* and each *quiddity* belongs to one and only one property. Thus, the *quiddity* of *Being a molecule of oxygen* will be peculiar to such a property and will make up, at least partially, its identity.<sup>8</sup>

Although I am suspicious of the theoretical plausibility of *quiddities*, what I will say about the identity of properties will not hinge on whether properties have *quiddities*. I shall, therefore, remain neutral with respect to this point.

Now, some aspects seem to be an always-or-never affair: when an instance of a property possesses it, it is manifest at all times. For example, instances of *Being round* are, at any time, round; instances of *Being a father* are, at all times, related to those of *Being a child*. In this sense, such a kind of aspects can be labeled as categorical.

On the other hand, some aspects seem to be such that they can lay latent at a time and be manifested at another time. Instances of *Being fragile*, for example, are related only occasionally with those of *Being broken*. In this sense, some aspects can be labeled as dispositional.<sup>9</sup>

We, thus, have a categorical *vs* dispositional distinction at the level of properties' aspects:

on this choice and, with some efforts, it is possible to rewrite it so that the qualitative character will involve relations among bearers of the properties rather than instances of the properties.

<sup>8</sup> See Armstrong 1989, Lewis 2004, and Shaffer 2005.

<sup>9</sup> It is the conviction of the majority that all dispositional aspects are relational. And, in the sequel, I shall employ 'dispositional relation' as synonymous with 'dispositional aspect'. Now, this will be no more than a terminological choice: I shall not attempt to undermine the thesis that there are non-relational dispositions. For a recent discussion, see Mckinnock 2011.

*Categorical aspect:*

an aspect such that, when included in the qualitative character of an instance of a property, is manifest at all times.

*Dispositional aspect:*

an aspect such that, when included in the qualitative character of an instance of a property, may manifest at a time and not manifest at another time.

It should be noted that these definitions are compatible with an aspect not being shared by all instances of a property. Thus, it might be that different instances of *Being uranium* do not share certain dispositional aspects. Whether or not to accept such properties will depend on how strictly one defines the identity of a property. I shall leave this issue open.

Can we derive, from this, a distinction at the level of properties too? There are two ways of doing it. *First way.* Define categorical properties as those whose qualitative character includes some and only categorical aspects; define dispositional properties as those whose qualitative character includes some and only dispositional relations. An advocate of this view is Molnar 2003.

*Categorical property 1:*

a property whose qualitative character includes some and only categorical aspects.

*Dispositional property 1:*

a property whose qualitative character includes some and only dispositional aspects.

*Second way.* Define categorical properties as those whose qualitative character includes some (but, perhaps, not only) categorical aspects; define dispositional properties as those whose qualitative character includes some (but, perhaps, not only) dispositional aspects. An advocate of this view is Martin's contribution to Armstrong et al. 1996.<sup>10</sup>

*Categorical property 2:*

a property whose qualitative character includes some categorical aspects.

*Dispositional property 2:*

a property whose qualitative character includes some dispositional aspects.

<sup>10</sup> A third way sees dispositional and categorical properties as identical. That is, according to this view there is no metaphysical distinction between categorical and dispositional aspects; still, both dispositional and categorical ascriptions may have truth-makers and these will be one and the same kind of entity. See for example Mumford 1999 and Heil 2003. As it shall become clear further on, I shall not consider this way, as I believe that it cannot properly accommodate for the primitive modal character of dispositions. If (some) modal sentences are true in virtue of some primitive modal entities, and reality includes entities that are non-modal, then it cannot be clear that modal and non-modal entities are identical.

Only the first way can be properly said to define two kinds of properties; the second way, just makes the categorical and the dispositional two aspects of properties. Indeed, all properties that entertain some, but not only, categorical aspects will entertain some dispositional relations; and, *vice versa*, all properties that entertain some, but not only, dispositional relations will entertain some categorical aspects. So, the categorical and the dispositional will not be distributed among properties in a mutually exclusive way.

Now, to clarify the distinction, an advocate of the second way might introduce a distinction between essential and accidental aspects – call this *second way*\*. Even if a property has both categorical and dispositional aspects, only one or the other kind can be essential to the property. Thus, the distinction will be as follows:

*Categorical property 2\*:*

a property whose qualitative character includes some essential aspects and these are all categorical.

*Dispositional property 2\*:*

a property whose qualitative character includes some essential aspects and these are all dispositional.

Furthermore, the advocate of the second way\* might also introduce a milder distinction among dispositional and categorical properties as follows:

*Aspect categorical property:*

a property whose qualitative character includes some categorical aspects, but it is not *categorical 2\**.

*Aspect dispositional property:*

a property whose qualitative character includes some dispositional aspects, but it is not *dispositional 2\**.

More below, we shall draw further considerations regarding the two ways. We can for now conclude that, whichever we choose, we have two kinds of aspects and, derivatively, two kinds of properties.

### 3. On the Identity of Properties II: Primitive Modalities

We shall now consider IDQ with respect to the two kinds of properties: what makes a categorical property the property it is? And, what makes a dispositional property the property that it is?

Presumably<sup>11</sup>, the identity of a categorical property will be fixed by its aspects as well as by its *quiddity* (if it has one). The identity of a dispositional property, on the other hand, will be fixed by the relations that it *is disposed to* entertain with other properties as well as by its *quiddity* (if it has one).

While many are ready to accept categorical aspects of properties, the number of those who are ready to accept dispositional relations among properties is smaller. Talk of dispositions is suspicious. Dispositions are but promises; and dispositional relations are but promises of relations. For this reason, many attempted to reduce the dispositional to the categorical.

The debate, over the last few decades, has been extensive. Slowly, the number of arguments against the possibility of a reduction has grown larger, and with it the number of the Dispositional Realists.<sup>12</sup> Still, there seems to be some disagreement regarding primitive modalities. It is opportune, at this point, to understand where a Dispositional Realist may locate herself within the contemporary debate on the metaphysics of modality.

Contemporary theories of modality recognize that some sentences that contain modal terms (briefly: modal sentences) are irreducible. Thus, if we believe that modal sentences have a truth-value, we need to make room for the existence of some irreducibly modal entities. For many years it was believed that David Lewis's modal realism was an exception to this; however, a number of criticisms has now shown that modal realism might fail to define a modal facts in terms of non-modal ones.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of a metaphysical theory of modality can, indeed, be seen as that of providing a satisfactory account of the irreducibly modal entities.

Among the proposals, the so-called *modalist* position, as it has been defended by Forbes 1985, Forbes 1989 and Chihara 1998 is perhaps the most liberal: it accepts all sorts of modal propositions – without regard to their constituents – as primitively modal. Each proposition, whose translation into the language of a modal semantics (a Kripke-style possible worlds semantics) contains some occurrences of the symbols ' $\Diamond$ ' or ' $\Box$ ', is a primitive modal proposition, and it carries a reference to primitive modal entities (presumably, primitive modal propositions themselves, or primitive modal facts or states of affairs). Among the constituents of the primitive modal facts or states of entities of all sorts: members of the natural world, abstract mathematical entities, fictional entities, and what else you may have to add to the list.

<sup>11</sup> For some, the identity of a property will be entirely fixed by the *quiddity*, no matter what its qualitative character be.

<sup>12</sup> Among the many contributions arguing in favor of this side of the debate, or acknowledging its achievements, see: Stanley and Wasserman 2008, Molnar 2003, Molnar 1999, Ellis 2002, Ellis 2001, Mumford 1998, Melker 2004, Melker 1974, Nuccini 1994, Popper 1990, Horwich 1970 and Fara 2005.

<sup>13</sup> See Szalkowski 1994, Melia 2003, Davies 2002, Cameron 2008, Denby 2004 and Borghini 2007.

On the other hand, some believe that not all apparently modal propositions need to be regarded as primitive. Rather, we ought to select certain propositions as irreducibly modal or, perhaps, some entities embedded in those propositions; all other modal propositions will, then, be explained in terms of those. Thus, for example, for the linguistic *etwazig*, primitive modal propositions involve linguistic entities; for the combinatorialist, primitive modal propositions are re-combinations of actual entities; for the fictionalist, they are all entities of a fiction.

The Dispositional Realist has, fundamentally, two options: being a *modalist* or endorsing a *dispositional theory of possibility* – a recently advanced theory, according to which all modal sentences are interpreted as attributions of primitive dispositions (see Borghini and Williams 2008). The other options are not open. Indeed, the Dispositional Realist claims that (at least some) dispositions – that is: certain modal entities – belong to the (actual) natural world; however, all other theories deny this: according to them, modal entities are – for example – linguistic entities, or fictions, or re-combinations of actual entities, or concrete worlds other than the actual.

But, the extreme liberality of the *modalist* might be unpalatable to most Dispositional Realists, for two reasons. The first has to do with the business of linguistic reduction. Most Dispositional Realists include dispositions among the primitive modal entities on account that you cannot apparently reduce dispositional talk to talk of categorical entities. But, for the probabilistic, mathematical, or counterfactual propositions we might find a reduction. Indeed, that is what the dispositional theory of possibility claims: that all modal talk can ultimately be interpreted as dispositional talk; that is, as attributing some dispositional properties (or relations) to certain entities.

The second reason is metaphysical. The Dispositional Realist will not (or ought not to) accept a proliferation of the kinds of modal primitives. Dispositions are properties; hence, metaphysical simplicity suggests seeking for an explanation according to which all modal primitives are properties. The *modalist*, on the other hand, will typically endorse a view according to which modal primitives are facts or situations or states of affairs rather than properties.

Whether the Dispositional Realist be a *modalist* or a *dispositionalist*, the following moral can be drawn for present purposes: if you accept that dispositions are real, then you need to look no further for your modal primitives when it comes to disposition ascriptions. The *modalist* will not attempt to reduce dispositions to some other kinds of entities; and the *dispositionalist* – by definition – will do the same.

From this follows that the so-called identity theory of dispositions, according to which dispositional and categorical properties are identical, fails



short of an adequate explanation of the nature of possibility.<sup>14</sup> This is a remark that has gone unnoticed so far in the disposition debate. If you take modal sentences at face value, possibility and actuality cannot coincide. It is obvious that there are possibilities that are not actualized. Thus, it is obvious that there are modal entities that are distinct from actual ones. But, dispositions are a kind of modal entities; and many dispositions are never manifested; hence, dispositions cannot be identical to some non-modal entities.

In other words: if you take modal sentences at face value, the realm of the possible and the one of the actual are distinct. For the Dispositional Realist, the dispositions represent part of (if not all) the realm of the possible; hence, they cannot be identical with the realm of the actual. Indeed, by definition, a Dispositional Realist cannot attempt to reduce dispositional talk to talk of re-own. What the Dispositional Realist accepts is that the realm of the possible and the one of the actual may both be part of the (actual) natural world, as dispositions may belong to objects in the natural world.

Let us now explore a little further the peculiarity of dispositions as modal primitives. A modal primitive is an entity which expresses a possibility: that a certain situation *can*, *could have*, *might*, ... obtain. If we say that dispositions are modal primitives, we are accepting that certain situations are *disposed* to obtain. This, roughly, means that they will obtain, if certain conditions will also obtain; but, this is no definition of the entity in question: it is just an illustration, a tool that is useful for us to talk about the entity in question.

Dispositions are a ductile modal primitive. They belong to a certain ontological category – namely, properties; yet, it is left open to what sort of individuals (if any) they are ascribed. Thus, you may find dispositions ascribed to entities in the natural world as well as to mathematical entities, social institutions, fictional entities, or any other realm of being one might envisage. This gives a great explanatory power to the Dispositional Realist, at the cost of admitting one kind of properties.

To accept that some modal primitives thrive in the natural world poses obvious epistemic worries: it amounts to giving plausibility to the hypothesis that there might be infinite features of our environment that lie hidden to us. Still, we also have strong reasons to swallow this pill. And, we ought to resist the temptation to make the swallowing less unpleasant by trying to further explain the ontological structure of our modal primitives.

Dispositions are just that: primitive properties, perhaps always lying hidden to our sensory perceptions. Joe enjoys the property *Being a father*, along the same lines, perhaps he enjoys the property *Being brave in wartime*, but, (hopefully) we might never find that out. Both entities are properties: if you can,

can, ontologically speaking, make sense of the first, you ought to be able to make sense also of the latter.

The only difference between categorical and dispositional entities consists in the fact that the latter, sometimes, lie hidden to our senses. Yet, this ought to be no scandal: if you accept that modal propositions have truth-values, then you ought to accept that there are some modal entities that lie hidden to your senses. Perhaps, it is a scandal that such entities belong to the natural world: but this calls for an epistemic justification, rather than a further analysis of the metaphysical nature of those entities. Metaphysically speaking, they are just properties.

However, some Dispositional Realists have given in to the temptation. For example, Martin and Păcurar 1986, Place 1996, Place's contribution to Armstrong et al. (1996, 19–33) and Molnar 2003 invoked an additional notion to explain the metaphysical nature of dispositions: *intentions*. According to their proposal, intentionality is the mark of the dispositional. By 'intention' here it is not meant that plan to carry out a certain action; rather, that feature of a mind to be in a state, which is about something without being that thing. Joe can 'intend' the apple in front of him, without being that apple or having the apple as a part of himself. Along the same lines, if the glass is fragile, it means that it 'intends' breaking, whose state would be revealed where the right circumstances to obtain.

From this, a debate ensued on whether dispositions ought to be understood – at the metaphysical level – in terms of intentions or, rather, in terms of other kinds of entities, such as functions (for the latter suggestion, see Mumford 1999; for a reply, Place 1999). But, in light of what we have said, it should be clear that dispositions ought not to be understood in terms of other modal notions.

Still, invoking intentions can be useful; not to answer (DQ), rather, to answer INQ. To this task we shall now turn.

#### 4. On The Individuation Of Properties I: Categorical Properties

Suppose you agree that there are both categorical and dispositional entities. You ought to wonder, next, how the individuation of these entities is achieved.

At first, let us briefly consider categorical entities. Presumably, those that inhabit the natural world will be individuated in terms of the way they manifest themselves to our senses. Those that do not inhabit the natural world (if there are any) will be individuated in terms of the concepts through which they are expressed to us, be those concepts abstractions from sensory experiences or *a priori*.

<sup>14</sup> For an exposition of the identity theory, see Mumford 1998 and Hlail 2003.

I here find an argument in favor of the *second way* (and the *second way*\*) of defining categorical and dispositional properties: the way that allows for a property of a kind to entertain aspects of the other kind. Indeed, in order to individuate a categorical property, we need to postulate that it is capable of dispositional relations, namely, certain ways in which the property interacts with an observer.

Thus, it is natural to define a categorical property as that entity which, under normal conditions, is disposed to bring about certain sensory or conceptual experiences in a subject. *Being red* will bring about, under certain standard conditions, the visual experience of red; *Being an equilateral triangle* will bring about, under certain standard conditions, the conceptual experience of an equilateral triangle.<sup>15</sup>

The disposition to bring about a sensory or conceptual experience will not be the defining aspect of a categorical property. However, if we would not allow the property to have such an aspect, we could not account for its capacity of being individuated. This capacity need not be an essential aspect of the property; that is, the property might exist, even if unknowable. Still, it seems to be an essential aspect to the individuation of the property.

We should – at this point – mention an alternative explanation, which does not compel the acceptance of the second way of defining categorical and relational properties. Perhaps, individuation is not a dispositional relation between an individuating subject and an individuated entity; rather, it is just a state of the subject. In other words: epistemic attitudes are not part of the qualitative aspects of a property. So, there is no dispositional relation involved and no need to attribute dispositional aspects to categorical properties.<sup>16</sup>

I shall, for the time being, leave open the choice as to which explanation has more merit. Either way, the individuation of a categorical property will involve some form of evidence remarking the existence of categorical aspects. And, for present purposes, it is relevant to stress that such evidence may be achieved through the senses. We cannot make a similar claim with respect to dispositional aspects. This is what puzzles their detractors.

## 5. On The Individuation Of Properties II: Dispositional Properties

If dispositional aspects cannot be individuated in terms of the way they reveal to our senses – as, indeed, they might never be revealed – how then shall we account for their individuation? This is where invoking the *intentional character* of a disposition comes in handy.

15. Different, but related arguments, are offered also in Franklin 1988 and Blackburn 1990.

16. For this view, see Ducasse 1942, Chisholm 1957, Sellars 1967, Tye 1984, and Thomas 2003.

The intention of a disposition is, simply, the situation that the property is disposed to bring about, if the right conditions obtain. Fragility has the intention of breaking, were the right conditions to obtain. It is important to stress that no self-consciousness is typically attributed to the intentional character of dispositions.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the defenders of the intentional character of dispositions reject the so-called Brentano thesis, according to which intentionality is both necessary and sufficient for telling apart the psychological and the non-psychological. (For a detailed discussion, see Molnar 2003, 60–81.)

I believe that Martin and Pfeifer, Place, and Molnar's aim is noble. Having to defend the relatively novel Dispositional Realism, they attempted to clarify the concept of a disposition in order to clarify the conditions under which dispositions may be singled out. However, it is my conviction that a mistake lies at the foundation of their explanation.

The problem with singling out dispositions does not call Dispositional Realists to revise the primitive modal character of dispositions. It is not a metaphysical clarification that is called for. As primitive modal entities, dispositions are no more mysterious than re-combinations, *empty* linguistic entities or worlds other than our own. Each of those categories is supposed to possess an irreducibly modal character: they are combinations, propositions, worlds that *could* have been actual.

Rather, the problem with singling out dispositions has to do with the difficulty in individuating them. Dispositions may lie hidden for their entire existence: how can we even start talking about them? It is here that one can appeal to the situation that a disposition intends to bring about. Intentional talk is a conceptual ladder used to individuate dispositions.

In connection with the difficulties associated with the individuation of dispositions, we shall now consider a problem affecting the definition of the qualitative character of a property. Thus far, we have taken for granted that the qualitative character is made out by a multiplicity of aspects. But, when we move to consider INQ, this claim reveals to be not as innocuous as it might at first appear.

Suppose that each instance of a property has multiple aspects (be them dispositional or categorical). Suppose also that the aspects are such that they are shared among different properties. Then, in order to individuate a property one would have to individuate all of its aspects; to individuate some but not all, might leave indeterminate which property is under consideration. But, aspects might be infinite. Hence, individuation might never be achieved.

We could, then, suppose that properties can share aspects only to a limited extent. This, however, burdens the theory with the task of finding out those aspects of a property that can be shared and those that are specific. The

17. See Martin and Pfeifer 1986, Place 1999, Place 1996, and Molnar 2003.



risk is that, in order to ease the task of individuation, we end up positing *ad hoc* aspects for each property.

Finally, we could suppose that aspects are exclusive: they cannot be shared at all among different properties. This would render the theory even more unpalatable, though. Even assuming that intrinsic aspects can be regarded as exclusive to each property, it seems to run against evidence to say that relations among properties are exclusive. For example *Being a mother* and *Being a father* seem to share a relationship with *Being a child*.

Then, why not to consider each aspect a property on its own? For example, *Being a mother* would not count, under this view, as a genuine property; rather, it would be the name of two properties: *Being a parent* and *Being a female*; each of those properties would have just one aspect: *Being a parent* would have a relationship to *Being a child*, *Being a female* would have a relationship to – say – the property of being a certain reproductive organ.

This proposal implies a bizarre ontology of properties: a property would be entirely constituted either by an intrinsic or by a relational aspect. No property could entertain more than one relation with another. This seems to run counter to our evidence too. Consider, for example, a dispositional property; on the face of it, such a property seems to require a relation to a vast number of other properties in order to be manifested.

So, which option should we choose? I shall make a plea for the first one. To individuate a property is a hard task and, perhaps, it cannot ever be fully achieved. Dispositional properties offer a handy illustration. Determining the properties to which a dispositional property is related proved to be hopeless, in most cases. It is for this reason that disposition ascriptions cannot be analyzed in terms of conditionals. And, it is for this reason that the conceptual ladder of the intentional character comes in handy when we want to individuate a disposition.

Invoking the intentional character is a tool to focus the task of individuation on a small number of properties: those embedded in the situation for which the dispositional property has an intention. Talk of intentions, however, does not affect the identity conditions of a dispositional property; and it does not solve the *impasse* of spelling out all the aspects included in the qualitative character of a property; more modestly, it alleviates the *impasse*, by focusing only on those aspects that the property seems to have an active role in bringing about.

## 6. Conclusions

A debate has spanned on whether Dispositional Realists' attribution of an intentional character to dispositions made of them panpsychists or mei-

nopyschists. I believe both of those allegations can be rejected. Dispositions are modal primitives. As such, they do not compel us to the literal existence of intentions or to entities that exist in a different sense than actual entities. More simply, dispositions compel us to the existence of entities (i.e., dispositional aspects) that bring about changes in reality, but not in a permanent way.

However, we invoke intentions in order to individuate dispositions. This has to do with the general business of singling out the entities we are dealing with, not with the business of defining the identity of such entities. Talk of intentions helps to alleviate the difficulties we face in individuating a dispositional property.

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