
Dispositions, Bundles and Essences

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Abstract

Dispositions, Bundles and Essences
Dispositions are usually thought to be properties of objects (e.g. Bird 1998, Molnar 2003, Vetter 2015, among many others). They are not free-floating properties. When they are instantiated, they are instantiated by an object. This may appear as a platitude. Dispositionalists tend to have a conservatist ontology composed of two categories : objects and properties. And the category of a objects appears to be prior : the dispositions are constrained by their bearer. This latter grounds which properties it may instantiate. Even when dispositionalists argue that dispositions play a fundamental role, objects seems to be always the underlying basis. An important example is modal dispositionalism (Borghini and Williams 2008, Jacobs 2010, Vetter 2015), i.e. the theory according to which metaphysical modality is grounded on dispositions. According to this theory, dispositions play a fundamental role, and yet, as Vetter (2021) argued, they are in turn constrained by the essence of their bearers. Put in another way, an object cannot have a disposition which goes against its own essence. Socrates cannot have the disposition to be turned into a sparrow. Objects are still the metaphysical basis. In this talk, I argue that dispositionalists may endorse a different view, where dispositions are the only fundamental category. I defend a bundle theory based on dispositions. If successful, this theory would have important consequences concerning the relationship between dispositions, essences and de re modality. The talk is structured as follows. In section 2, I explore how dispositions might account for the compresence of the properties compositing the bundle. This question is made complex by the fact that bundle theories usually rely on a Humean metaphysics. My aim here is to account for the compresence

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of properties by using a specific type of dispositions, structural dispositions, which glues them together and constitutes thereby the object. But what are structural dispositions ? In section 3, I argue that they are a special case of structural universals. I detail how they manifest and what type of unification they provide. They appear to be polyadic second-order properties. In order to account for how they work, and how they may build objects, I develop in section 4 a dispositional bundle theory based on a higher-order language. This language enables me to precisely distinguish between different levels of properties, which is crucial to our understanding of how structural dispositions work. However, I consider a major objection to the theory in section 5 : if the properties which are in the bundle are all necessary to generate the object, it would seem that a bundle cannot change its properties without thereby becoming another bundle (cf. Van Cleve 1985). I argue that structural dispositions only unifies properties which are constitutive of the object, and the theory is thus not subject to this objection. Finally, this enables me to reconsider the relationship between dispositions and essences in section 6 and argue that dispositions are the more fundamental. And more than that, it turns out that this theory allows us to account for the possibility of non-existence, a *de re* possibility which modal dispositionalists had trouble grounding (cf. Leech 2017) unlike essentialists. I take dispositions here to be the properties underlying dispositional predicates. Some authors prefer to use the term ‘powers’, but I use this more general term.

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