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EXTRINSIC PROPERTIES

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I

Some properties of things are entirely *intrinsic*, or *internal*, to the things that have them: shape, charge, internal structure. Other properties are not entirely intrinsic: being a brother, being in debt, being within three miles of Carfax, thinking of Vienna. These properties are at least partly *extrinsic*, or *relational*. Properties may be more or less extrinsic; being a brother has more of an admixture of intrinsic structure than being a sibling does, yet both are extrinsic.

A sentence or statement or proposition that ascribes intrinsic properties to something is entirely about that thing; whereas an ascription of extrinsic properties to something is not entirely about that thing, though it may well be about some larger whole which includes that thing as part. A thing has its intrinsic properties in virtue of the way that thing itself, and nothing else, is. Not so for extrinsic properties, though a thing may well have these in virtue of the way some larger whole is. The intrinsic properties of something depend only on that thing; whereas the extrinsic properties of something may depend, wholly or partly, on something else. If something has an intrinsic property, then so does any perfect duplicate of that thing; whereas duplicates situated in different surroundings will differ in their extrinsic properties.

The circles close. Two things are perfect duplicates iff they have the very same intrinsic properties. The way something is is given by the totality of its intrinsic properties. To depend on something is to depend on the way that thing is. And a sentence or statement or proposition is entirely about something iff the intrinsic properties of that thing suffice to settle its truth value. We have a tight little family of interdefinables.

What to do? (1) We could Quine the lot, give over the entire family as unintelligible and dispensable. That would be absurd. (2) We could take one or another member of the family, it scarcely matters which, as primitive.

That would be quite acceptable, I think, but disappointing. Or (3) we could somehow break in from outside. That would be best.

II

Jaegwon Kim ([2], pp. 59–60), elaborating a suggestion of R. M. Chisholm ([1], p. 127), has proposed a chain of definitions that would indeed, if successful, break into the family.

D1 (Chisholm): *G is rooted outside times at which it is had* = df
Necessarily for any object *x* and any time *t*, *x* has the property *G* at *t* only if *x* exists at some time before or after *t*.

D2 (Kim): *G is rooted outside the objects that have it* = df
Necessarily any object *x* has *G* only if some contingent object wholly distinct from *x* exists.

(‘Wholly distinct’ means more than ‘nonidentical’; an object’s proper parts are neither identical with it nor wholly distinct from it. ‘Contingent’ is included lest the existence of necessary beings such as the numbers interfere.)

D3 (Kim): *G is internal* = df
G is neither rooted outside times at which it is had nor outside the objects that have it.

We can simplify. Let us suppose that things are divisible into temporal segments, and that possession of properties by things at times amounts to possession of properties by things that may be temporal segments of other things. Then if *G* is rooted outside times at which it is had, also it is rooted outside the objects that have it, so we can drop the first half of the *definiens* in D3. Substituting D2 for the second half and driving in the negation, we get

D4 *G is internal* = df
Possibly some object *x* has *G* although no contingent object wholly distinct from *x* exists.

Consider two properties, *accompaniment* and *loneliness*: something is *accompanied* iff it coexists with some wholly distinct contingent object, *lonely* iff not. Kim’s idea, in a nutshell, is that extrinsic properties are those that imply accompaniment, whereas intrinsic properties are compatible with loneliness.

(One property implies another iff it is impossible to have the first without the second; two properties are compatible iff it is possible to have both.) Indeed, accompaniment is an extrinsic property *par excellence*, with no admixture whatever of the intrinsic. And any property that implies it is likewise extrinsic – you can't wipe out the extrinsic information about accompaniment just by adding *more* information. Further, any intrinsic property is indeed compatible with loneliness – anything shares its intrinsic properties with a lonely duplicate, most likely at another possible world. So far, so good.

III

But the failure of Kim's proposal should now be plain to see. Loneliness is just as extrinsic as accompaniment, yet certainly it does not imply accompaniment and certainly it is compatible with itself. If something is lonely – the cosmos, or some lesser otherworldly thing – its loneliness remains unrooted.

We have seen two kinds of extrinsic properties. Kim has defined the *positive extrinsic properties*, as we may call them: accompaniment, and all other properties that imply it. We can with equal ease define the *negative extrinsic properties*: loneliness, and all other properties that imply it. But those are not all. Consider the disjunctive property of either being lonely or else coexisting with exactly six pigs (wholly distinct from oneself). This too is extrinsic; but it is not positive intrinsic in view of the first disjunct, and it is not negative extrinsic in view of the second. It is the disjunction of a negative extrinsic and a positive extrinsic, but in its mixed way it is still extrinsic. Likewise, consider the property of being the fattest pig; it is extrinsic, but it is neither positive nor negative extrinsic.

A property differs between duplicates iff its negation does so as well; so the extrinsic properties are closed under negation. The example just considered suggests that we also have closure under disjunction – our disjunction of extrinsic properties was itself extrinsic. And we might also expect closure of the extrinsic properties under converse implication: how can an intrinsic property imply an extrinsic one? So we might hope to build on Kim's proposal, making it the basis for an inductive definition that would cover all the extrinsic properties, leaving the (more important) intrinsic properties as residue.

No hope: a class of properties containing accompaniment closed under negation and disjunction and converse implication would be the class of *all*

properties. To show that squareness is extrinsic, for instance, we could use our supposed closure principles as follows. Accompaniment is extrinsic; then so is loneliness; then so are squareness-and-accompaniment and squareness-and-loneliness, which imply accompaniment and loneliness respectively; then so is squareness, which is the disjunction of squareness-and-accompaniment and squareness-and-loneliness. Our closure principles cannot all be right. In fact, two out of three are wrong. Closure under disjunction is refuted by the example just considered. Closure under converse implication also fails: squareness is intrinsic, but implies squareness-or-accompaniment; and the latter is extrinsic, since it can differ between duplicates. (This much is true: an intrinsic property cannot imply an *unconditionally* extrinsic property, that being a property such that whenever something has it, some perfect duplicate of that thing lacks it.)

Kim has come tantalizingly close. Almost any extrinsic property that a sensible person would ever mention is positive extrinsic. Nevertheless, I conjecture that there is no way to enlarge the opening made by Chisholm and Kim, and if we still want to break in we had best try another window.*

NOTE

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- [2] Jaegwon Kim: 1982, 'Psychophysical supervenience', *Philosophical Studies* 41, pp. 51-70.

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