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The Determinable-Determinate Relation Can't Save Adverbialism

Abstract

Adverbialist theories of thought such as those advanced by Hare (1969) and Sellars (1969) promise an ontologically sleek understanding of a variety of intentional states, but such theories have been largely abandoned due to the ‘many-property problem’. In an attempt to revitalize this otherwise attractive theory, in a series of papers as well as his recent book, Uriah Kriegel has offered a novel reply to the ‘many-property problem’ and on its basis he argues that ‘adverbialism about intentionality is alive and well’. If true, Kriegel will have shown that the logical landscape has long been unnecessarily constrained. His key idea is that the many-property problem can be overcome by appreciating that mental states stand in the determinable-determinate relation to one another. The present paper shows that this relation can’t save adverbialism because it would require thinkers to think more thoughts than they need be thinking.

KEY WORDS: intentionality, adverbialism, determinable-determinate relation, intentional objects

1. Introduction

The ‘many-property problem’ looks to be a decisive reason for abandoning adverbialist theories of intentionality. Although adverbialism promises an ontologically sleek understanding of various intentional states, the ‘many-property problem’, first offered by Jackson (1977) but many times repeated, appears to provide a recipe for creating cases in which adverbialists conflate clearly distinct mental states. Jackson’s original presentation was aimed at adverbialist theories of perceptual experience, but once one

sees how the recipe works, problem cases can be created for adverbialism about thought as well.¹ If the many-property problem could be overcome, a once popular theory that has very nearly been abandoned would deserve careful reconsideration. It is both striking and important, then, that Kriegel (2007, 2008, and 2011) has offered what looks to be a new and promising solution to Jackson's objection, particularly as it applies to thought.² Kriegel believes that 'adverbialism about intentionality is alive and well' (2008, 89) and that by adopting the theory not only can one quickly solve the problem of intentional non-existence, but one can greatly streamline one's ontological commitments. According to Kriegel, the answer to the many-property problem lies in appreciating that some thoughts stand in the determinable-determinate relation to one another. Although *prima facie* promising, the present paper shows that appealing to the determinable-determinate relation can't save adverbialism for it creates a pernicious problem of its own. Adverbialism is still dead.³

2. The Many-Property Problem

¹ Adverbialism about thought has been advanced by Goldstein (1982), Hare (1969), Kriegel (2007, 2008 and 2011), Rapport (1979), and Sellars (1969).

² The present paper will primarily follow Kriegel's focus, but at the end of the paper I will give some reasons for thinking that his putative solution would be no better if we were to try to apply it to perceptual experiences.

³ This is not to say that no other approaches could become available. For example, by developing an extended predicate logic, Tye (1989) offers yet another adverbialist reply to the many property problem. That approach is beyond the scope of the present essay, though it is noteworthy that Dinges (2015) levels a persuasive objection against it. The present paper may be seen as an allied paper to Dinges's in that both are pressuring the adverbialists' hopes of overcoming the many property problem. It is also worth noting that Kriegel himself suggests another approach in 2008, footnote 25 and in 2011, footnote 110. A detailed treatment of that approach would require a paper of its own. At issue presently is the idea that the determinable-determinate relation might provide a solution for adverbialists.

One of the most powerful motivations for an adverbialist theory of thought is that it handles the problem of intentional inexistence in an extremely elegant way. The problem is this: intuitively, thinkers can think about things that don't exist. But on the face of things, to think of something is to enter into a relation with it. But to enter into a relation with a thing, that thing must exist. So our thoughts about things that don't exist seem to demand that we add to our ontology non-existent objects, merely intentional objects, or some other kind of proxy entities that many philosophers have found unacceptable.

Adverbialists have a simple solution: deny that thinking about a thing requires entering into a relation. Taking a cue from adverbialists about perceptual experience, adverbialists about thought hold that what look to be relations are in fact non-relational *ways of thinking*. According to adverbialists, 'Sally thinks about Pegasus', despite appearances, makes no reference to Pegasus and posits no relation between Sally and anything else. Rather, such sentences should be treated along the lines of 'Sally thinks Pegasus-ly', for when so treated they better reflect the non-relational nature of the states they ascribe. When seen in this light, thinking about something is to think in a way rather than to enter into a relation with a thing thought about.⁴

⁴ See Woodling (2016) for an argument to the effect that, despite appearances, adverbialism depends on the act-object model for its intelligibility. Of special importance to Woodling's argument is that intentional objects are what subjects take their thoughts to be about, which finds support in Crane (2001). I see (along with Dingess above) an ally in Woodling, though his arguments are not mine. In reply to Woodling, an adverbialist might find fault with the understanding of an intentional object which lies at the heart of his paper. For example, suppose one thought that some intentional states could fail to be open to introspection and so fall outside the purview of the idea that intentional objects are what a thinker takes her thoughts to be about. One might then aim to depart from Woodling's understanding in favour of a

The theory is attractive, but it faces a version of Jackson's famous 'many-property problem'. Consider the following distinct thoughts:

(1) Thinking about a red square and a green circle.

(2) Thinking about a red circle and a green square.

Act-object theories can capture this distinction in terms of distinct entities thought about. Adverbialists, however, have a difficult time drawing a distinction between (1) and (2). According to adverbialists, the truth-conditions of 'S is thinking about a red square and a green circle' are the same as the truth-conditions of 'S is thinking red-ly, square-ly, green-ly, circle-ly'. For clarity, we can represent those truth-conditions as follows, where 's' names our subject, 'T' expresses the property of thinking and 'R', 'S', 'G', and 'C' express second-order colour and shape properties that the adverbialist takes to be true of the act of thinking:

$$T(s) \ \& \ R(T) \ \& \ S(T) \ \& \ G(T) \ \& \ C(T)^5$$

The problem for the adverbialist is that the thought just represented, the thought about a red circle and a green square, fails to be distinguished from a thought about a red square and a green circle. Given the commutativity of conjunction, 'S is thinking red-ly, circle-ly, green-ly, square-ly' has the same truth-conditions as those just represented above. Adverbialists predict one type of thought where there should be two.

Perhaps the most obvious solution is to offer additional properties that, as it were, 'fuse' the properties that we want to cluster together (the colours and shapes in

referential treatment of intentional object. But even so, the many-properties problem would still remain.

⁵ An adverbialist could also opt for a treatment of adverbial modification in a Davidsonian event semantics: $\exists e (T(e) \ \& \ R(e) \ \& \ S(e) \ \& \ G(e) \ \& \ C(e) \ \& \ Subj(e, s))$. Doing so would allow the adverbialist to avoid second-order properties. Jackson's objection doesn't turn on this decision.

this case) so that the needed distinction between (1) and (2) can be drawn. For example, the adverbialist might make use of the property of thinking red-square-ly, thinking red-circle-ly and so on. But as Jackson points out, such a move runs into immediate problems. From the fact that one is thinking about a red square, it follows that one is thinking about a red thing. From the fact that one is thinking about a green circle, it follows that one is thinking about a circular thing. But these inferences apparently fail on the fusion view. Because the ‘fused’ adverbs are syntactically simple (which is supposed to reflect the existence of wholly distinct properties), there seems to be no way to recover the property of being red from the property of being red-square. So, the adverbialist either faces the problem of failing to differentiate thoughts that are quite clearly distinct, or the adverbialist loses the ability to capture perfectly good inferences.

2. Determinable and Determinate Thoughts

Uriah Kriegel (2007, 2008, and 2011) has offered a clever reply to the many-property problem. When faced with the pairs of thoughts that need differentiating, he suggests we adopt the fusion view. When then faced with the hard-to-capture inferences, we should look to a non-syntactic explanation. More specifically, Kriegel argues that some thought pairs stand in the determinable-determinate relation, and it is this relation that explains the inferences. To illustrate the idea, Kriegel asks why we should hold that an inference such as the following is a good one: Jill ate a raspberry; so Jill ate a berry. It is not the case that ‘berry’ is a syntactic constituent of ‘raspberry’, but the inference is a good one nevertheless. What underwrites the quality of the inference, argues Kriegel, is the fact that the property of being a raspberry is a determinate of the determinable property of being a berry. Adverbialists about thoughts can and should make use of a

similar move. Kriegel suggests, for example, that thinking red-square-ly is a determinate of the determinable thinking red-ly. Because anything that instantiates a determinate property also instantiates every determinable under which the determinate falls, we can see how to capture the inferences adverbialists have had a hard time capturing: John is thinking red-square-ly; *whatever is a red-square-ly thinking is a red-ly thinking* (by virtue of the determinable-determinate relation); so John is thinking red-ly.⁶

3. Why The Determinable-Determinate Relation Won't Work

The determinable-determinate relation cannot save adverbialism. Property types that stand in the determinable-determinate relation adhere to some widely agreed upon

⁶ Notice that Kriegel's view is *not* that a thought's being determinate or being determinable is read off of whether what is thought about is determinable/determinate. To illustrate, I might think about a red thing (*i.e.* instantiate the property of thinking red-ly) and I might think about a red and round thing (*i.e.* instantiate the property of thinking red-round-ly). On Kriegel's view, the latter *thought property* is a determination of the former, but notice that being red and round (what is thought about) is *not* a determination of being red (Funkhouser 2006 and Prior 1949 both offer further discussion of determination *along a dimension*). And related to this point, Kriegel can also allow that even if a thought is *about* a determinable property, the property of being that thought might be highly determinate. Now, on what grounds and under exactly which conditions Kriegel thinks one thought is a determination of another is less than clear, but it is clear that he needs it to be the case that the relation holds when certain inferential patterns are in place.

As suggested by an anonymous referee, even though Kriegel does not read off properties of thoughts from what is thought about or represented, perhaps he should. For example, if the property represented is squareness it is a represented property that falls under the determinable quadrilaterality. But ultimately Kriegel and other adverbialists should *not* take this line since this view would have it that anyone who thinks about squareness thinks about quadrilaterality which isn't correct. There are lots of thinkers who possess the concept **square** but do not possess the concept **quadrilateral**.

truisms.⁷ We just saw one of them in the preceding paragraph, which Kriegel himself makes crucial use of:

(T1) An object instantiating a determinate also necessarily instantiates every determinable that determinate falls under.

Here is another truism, commonly accepted in the literature, but which is far less favourable for the adverbialist:

(T2) An object instantiating a determinable must also instantiate some determinate under that determinable.

Colour properties are often taken to be the touchstone case of properties that stand in the determinable-determinate relation to one another and they serve here to illustrate (T2). Consider an object that instantiates the property of being blue. There are more determinate properties that fall under the determinable of being blue such as being cerulean, being turquoise, and so on. According to (T2), since being blue is a determinable property, there must be some or other determinate under that determinable that any blue object also instantiates.⁸ Any stone that is blue is also some more determinate shade of blue such as turquoise or cerulean.

(T2) yields an absurd view of thoughts. Kriegel provides us with pairs of thoughts that he says stand in the determinable-determinate relation. Thinking about something red is a determinable of thinking about something red and square on his view. Presumably there are many more. Given the good inference from thinking about a

⁷ The classical discussions are Johnson (1921) and Prior (1949). Funkhouser (2006) offers a detailed, recent discussion from which I here draw the crucial truisms (T1) and (T2).

⁸ This needn't go on forever. The truism would fail to apply to properties that are determinate but not themselves determinables of any further determinates ('super-determinates' as Funkhouser 2006 calls them) should there be any.

bumpy red square to thinking about a red square, thinking red-square-ly must be a determinable of thinking red-square-bumpy-ly, for instance. But now suppose that Mary is thinking about a square, *i.e.* she is thinking square-ly. There are, according to Kriegel, more determinate thoughts that fall under the determinable thinking square-ly such as thinking red-square-ly. By T2, there must be some more determinate thought of Mary's by virtue of which she is thinking the determinable thought. But this demands too much of a thinker. Surely even Kriegel agrees that it is possible to think square-ly without thinking, say, red-square-ly or thinking round-square-ly, or Suppose Mary knows that someone has left simple puzzle pieces all over her desk and she comes to believe that there is a square on her desk. Mary is thinking about a square, but she needn't think any of the thoughts Kriegel would deem more determinate.⁹ But it is *in the nature of* the determinable-determinate relation that (T2) holds. So Kriegel's view has the very unwelcome consequence that any thought that qualifies (according to him) as a determinable thought isn't one that thinkers can think without thinking some other more determinate thought that falls under it.¹⁰ At a minimum, that's one thought too many.¹¹

⁹ Depending on the demands one places on having thoughts, things might be worse still. A thinker who lacks various concepts may not even be in a position to adhere to truism (T2). Imagine a thinker who has only two concepts, one is a concept of an object he calls 'Tony' and the other is the concept of redness. Our thinker thinks that Tony is red but isn't in a position to form any other thoughts at all such as that Tony is a red square.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that the issue here isn't about the *specificity* or *particularity* of thoughts. One might be thinking a specific thought or a non-specific thought and the trouble for Kriegel still goes through. Suppose John is thinking that there is a particular red square on his desk, the very square that he saw there when he left the house earlier today, say. Kriegel might aim to capture this as a particular-red-square-ly thinking. Thinking about a particular red square entails thinking about a particular square, so Kriegel will appeal to the determinate-determinable relation for particular thoughts. We can then run the line of argument in the main text that shows that the view demands too

4. Perceptual Experiences

As noted above, Kriegel doesn't offer his suggestion as a way of saving adverbialism about perceptual experience, but one might wonder whether his suggestion could succeed on that front. For reasons analogous to those just given, such an extension would be no better off. If I look at a black, square puzzle piece on my desk, I am visually presented with blackness and squareness. As adverbialists would put it, I am visually

many thoughts of John. If, on the other hand, John thinks there is some or other red square on his desk, but he has no particular red square in mind, Kriegel might capture this as a red-square-but-none-in-particular-ly thinking. But again, the same kind of inference to thinking about a square but none in particular is available, so Kriegel will hold that there are non-specific thoughts that stand in the determinable-determinate relation to one another too. We then run the now familiar objection. The moral is that the problem for Kriegel's view cross-cuts issues about specificity or particularity.

¹¹ Kriegel's suggestion concerns the determinable-determinate relation but one might suspect that there is a more general strategy here: look for other metaphysical relations that might make room for the desired inferential patterns. For example, as suggested by an anonymous referee, we might consider the relationship holding between being a bachelor and being unmarried. The view would presumably say that certain pairs of thinkings or thought episodes are related in the way being a bachelor and being unmarried are related, namely that it is analytic that anything that is a bachelor is unmarried. In the case of thought we might hold that it is analytic that red-round-thinkings are red-thinkings. Such an approach would avoid the criticisms in the main text and perhaps adverbialists should consider the view seriously. The present paper is concerned with the determinable-determinate relation, so I won't pursue the thought in detail. There is, however, a general point worth making that differentiates the relationalist approach from both the determinable-determinate approach as well as the analyticity approach just mentioned. Whereas the relational theory *explains* why our thought pairs stand in various entailment relations, the non-relationalist approaches take those relations to be brute facts – brute analyticities or brute facts about thought and determination. Relationalists can appeal to the following: any red and round *object* is a red object, so any thinking of a red and round object will be a thinking of a red object (since thoughts are individuated in part by the objects they are about). I don't wish to here suggest that we must avoid brute facts wherever possible, though some philosophers may have such scruples. Important presently is that even if we take the determination relations amongst thoughts to be brute (and admissible all the same), those relations make bad predictions. Perhaps other metaphysical relations are more up to the task and adverbialists would do well to pursue such a thought.

presented to black-square-ly. But it seems to follow from being visually presented with blackness and squareness that I am thereby visually presented with blackness.

Following Kriegel's line, this will be captured by taking the property of being visually presented to black-square-ly to be more determinate than being visually presented to black-ly. But if that relation holds, the view predicts that if I am visually presented to black-ly, I must also be visually presented to in some or other more determinate way such as black-square-ly. But it seems that one can simply be visually presented with blackness as when one is in a pitch-black room. In such a case, one is not visually presented with any shape properties at all. Indeed, for *any* additional visual presenting that Kriegel would deem more determinate, it seems unlikely that it need be a way I'm presented to when in the dark room. Intuitively, I'm simply presented with blackness, but Kriegel's view can't make sense of this.¹²

¹² Thanks are due to two anonymous referees for their feedback and helpful guidance. I also benefitted a great deal from discussions with Tim Button, Craig French, Laura Gow, Uriah Kriegel, Bence Nanay, and David Sosa. Special thanks are due to Cody Porter who first brought this issue to my attention.

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