

## The Bearers of Psychological Properties

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### RESUMEN

La ejemplificación de una propiedad psicológica implica lógicamente que hay una sustancia individual que posee esa propiedad. El «sujeto de experiencia» de Kant y la teoría de la sustancia como «haz de percepciones» de Hume son dos modos de enfocar la cuestión. Pero, una vez analizadas en detalle, aparecen serios inconvenientes para su aceptación. Como alternativa, en lugar de insistir en el concepto de «sustancia», el autor pone el énfasis en la noción de «propiedad» —un concepto difícilmente prescindible en la relación mente-cuerpo—, considerando fuera de duda que el hecho de la intencionalidad presupone la existencia de sustancias individuales.

### DO PSYCHOLOGICAL PROPERTIES HAVE BEARERS?

Consider any conscious property – say, sensing, judging, wondering, wishing, or hoping. What kinds of thing could *have* such a property? If we can grasp the nature of such properties, and it is quite clear that we can, then we can see that they are properties that can be exemplified only by *individual things*. Judging, wondering, wishing, hoping cannot possibly be properties of *states* of things, or of *processes*. And they cannot be properties of *abstract objects* – of such things as properties, numbers, and relations. *You* can hope for rain, but no state or process or number or property or relation can hope for rain.

In other words, the fact that a certain psychological property is exemplified – the fact, say, that the property of hoping for rain is exemplified – logically implies that there is an *individual substance* that has that property. This is a fact about the property

itself: the property of hoping for rain is necessarily such that the only things that can have it are individual things. And analogously for other psychological properties.

It was typical of British empiricism, particularly that of Hume, to suppose that consciousness is essentially *sensible*. The objects of consciousness were thought to be primarily such objects as sensations and their imagined or dreamed counterparts. In the *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, Brentano makes clear that intentional phenomena need *not* be sensible.<sup>1</sup> He is aware that, even if intentional phenomena are always accompanied by sensible or sensational phenomena, they are not themselves sensational or sensible phenomena. And the presence of certain intentional attitudes is at least as certain and indubitable for us as is the presence of our sensations. If I make a certain judgment or ask myself a certain question, then I can know directly and immediately that I make that judgment or ask that question. (This is not to say, of course, that *every* intentional attitude may be the object of such certainty. Perhaps there is a sense in which you may be said to like or to dislike a certain thing without realizing that you like or dislike that thing.)

If I can know directly and immediately that I am making a certain judgment, then, I can know *what it is* to make such a judgment. And if I know what it is to make a judgment, then, in making the judgment I can know directly and immediately that there is a certain individual thing – namely, the one who makes the judgment. And *I*, of course, am the one who makes my judgments and does *my* thinking. The same is true, obviously, of my other intentional activities – such activities as wondering, fearing, hoping, desiring, considering, liking and disliking.

We may single out three different phases of this situation: (1) I can know that I hope for rain; (2) as a rational being, I can conceive what it is to hope for rain; and (3), in so doing, I can see that the only type of entity that can have the property of hoping for rain is an individual thing or substance.

Why should anyone deny this?

## KANT ON THE SUBJECT OF EXPERIENCE

Let us recall what Kant says about the subject of experience.

In discussing «the first paralogism» (the paralogism of «substantiality»), he uses this premise:

I, as a thinking being, am the *absolute subject* of all my possible judgments, and this representation of myself cannot be employed as predicate of any other thing<sup>2</sup>.

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1 Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, Band I (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1973), p. 124ff.; *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 88ff. This material was first published in 1874.

2 *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 433; A 348.

(The conclusion of the paralogism, which is the next sentence is: «Therefore I, as thinking being (soul), am *substance*.») In criticizing this reasoning, Kant says:

The 'I' is indeed in all thoughts, but there is not in this representation the least trace of intuition, distinguishing the 'I' from other objects of intuition<sup>3</sup>.

Kant's reasoning may be put this way:

- (1) If we have no concept of a thinking subject, then the existence of such a subject cannot be inferred from our consciousness.
- (2) We have a concept of a given type of thing only if we have an *empirical* or *sensory* concept of that type of thing.
- (3) But we have no empirical or sensory concept of the thinking subject.
- (4) Therefore the existence of a thinking subject cannot be inferred from our consciousness.

I have put this objection as an argument having premises and a conclusion.

Let us consider the second premise. We may call it Kant's *empirical* premise. It was taken for granted by those philosophers whom we think of as being primarily «empiricists» –for example, by Hume and Mach and by the members of the Vienna Circle prior to the turn to «physicalism.»

One could, of course, object to this argument by saying that, since the conclusion is false, therefore at least one of the premises is false. But we need not beg the question in this way. For we may give an independent reason for saying that the second premise, the empirical premise, is false.

Kant exaggerated the importance of *sensory* content – or, if you prefer, he exaggerated the importance of *the empirical*. Like most other philosophers of his time, he assumed that one is aware of a thing only if one has an *empirical* or *sensory* concept of that thing. He noted that we have no empirical or sensory concept of ourselves. And therefore he concluded that we are not *aware* of ourselves.

He was right in saying that «our experience of the self is not accompanied by any sensible intuition of the self.» And so we may accept the first premise of his argument. He failed to notice, however, that what he says about the self can be said about other familiar concepts. It can be said, in particular, of every *intentional* concept. There is no sensible intuition of judging; there is no sensory intuition of wondering or doubting or hoping or questioning. I may hope that certain steps will be taken soon to improve the environment, and it may be that, in having this hope now, I have a certain set of sensory images. But these images need not be the ones that I have had at other times when I had such a hope and they need not be the ones that I have next time I have such a hope. We

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3 Kemp Smith, p. 334; A350.

may say, then, of judging, wondering, hoping and questioning exactly what Kant had said about the self. For example: «Our awareness of judging is not accompanied by any *sensory intuition* of judging.» And so, too, for the other intentional phenomena. Our awareness of intentional phenomena need not be sensory – even if such awareness is always *accompanied by* some sensory experience or other.

If Kant's reasoning about the self were sound, it would justify us in saying that there aren't any intentional phenomena – which is, of course, absurd. The fact of intentionality, then, provides us with this refutation of the empirical premise in Kant's argument:

- (1) We are able to conceive what it is to judge, wonder, hope, question.
- (2) We have no empirical or sensory concept of what it is to judge, hope, wonder, question.

Therefore (3) to have a concept of a type of thing need not be to have *an empirical or sensory* concept of that type of thing.

We may conclude, therefore, that Kant's reasoning is fallacious.  
But «the bundle theory of substance» still survives.

## THE BUNDLE THEORY OF SUBSTANCE

The following quotation is from Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. . . I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement<sup>4</sup>.

One familiar criticism of this passage goes this way: «Hume uses the substantive 'I' to report his findings and thus seems to presuppose the existence, not only of the 'perceptions' to which he refers, but also of the individual subject that *has* those perceptions. Therefore, in citing his data, he gives his case away.»

A possible reply to this objection is to say that Hume didn't really *need* to refer to himself in reporting his findings. One says: «He could have said, more simply, 'There are only impressions,' for what he found was no more than that.»

But – *was* that what he found? There are two objections to this way of reporting his findings. They are, if you like, «phenomenological objections.»

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4 *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Section vi («Of Personal Identity»).



One objection is that some of his findings are *negative*; Hume reports what it is that he does *not* find. «I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.»

One cannot report this negative finding by saying merely, «There *are* only perceptions.» For that is not what is found. It's one thing to say «I don't perceive any electrons»; it is quite another thing to say, «There aren't any electrons.»

The other objection is that Hume leaves out are the *intentional* phenomena to which we have already referred. When, as he puts it, I «enter most intimately into what I call myself,» I stumble upon believings, hopings, desirings, and other such intentional acts. And, as just emphasized, I can know by reflections that these are properties that only *individuals* or *substances* can have.

These considerations may seem enough to finish off «the bundle theory of *the self*. But what was originally a theory about the self has come to be generalized as a theory about *individual substance*.

There are many who say that the concept of an individual substance is superfluous and may be replaced by the concept of a «bundle of properties.» The concept of a «bundle of properties» is thought to remove the need for supposing that there are things that are «bearers» of properties. According to «the bundle theory,» at least as some have put it, *no* properties have bearers; that is to say, there are no things that *have* properties. This, of course, does not seem very clear. And it turns out to be somewhat difficult to formulate the bundle theory coherently.

One must do more, of course, than just *say* that individuals or substances are bundles of properties. How, then, is one to *show* – or to give good reasons for believing – that the concept of an individual thing or substance is superfluous?

No one has ever suggested a way of *reducing* statements that are ostensibly about individual things to statements that refer to bundles of properties. Nor has anyone even suggested a way of deciding just *what* bundle of properties is to do duty for any particular individual thing. Indeed, it would seem to be impossible to do this without making clandestine use of the concept of an individual thing. One could not just say «The bundle of properties that constitutes *that* thing is just that set of properties that the thing happens to have.» For this would be to explicate the concept of a bundle in terms of that of an individual thing. But the point of the bundle theory is to do things the other way around.

Our present interest is in the contrast between the bundle theory and what we might call *substantialism* – the view according to which there is an irreducible distinction between *things* and their properties. According to the bundle theorist, things are no more than «bundles» of properties.

The bundle theory may seem to have the advantage of being extraordinarily parsimonious ontologically. «After all,» one may argue, «it requires only that we say that there are properties. To be sure, it says that individual things are no more than *bundles* of properties. But bundles are merely *classes*, or *sets*. And classes or sets, as Russell showed, are reducible to properties.» But the matter is not quite so simple.

Consider a chair and a table and the two relevant bundles of properties, T and C:

T	C
being brown	being red
being a table	being a chair
having 4 legs	having 4 legs
weighing 100 pounds	weighing 5 pounds
.....	.....
.....	.....

The bundle theorist may now say: «Here we have just two sets of properties, T and C. We don't need to appeal to any entities other than to *properties* and to *sets* of properties. Bundle T» (he will continue) will do duty for what we think of as the table and bundle C for what we think of as the chair.»

Suppose, however, that we are concerned just with the one table T and the one chair C. The bundle theorist will say that the situation involves two relevant bundles. But it is not the case that the situation involves just two sets of properties. If we consider only the four table properties we have explicitly listed and the four chair properties, the situation we are considering involves *sixty-four* sets of properties. One such, set, for example is this:

D	E
being brown	being red
being a chair	being a table
weighing 100 pounds	
weighing 5 pounds	

Perhaps one will reply that T and S are *genuine* bundles and that D and E are *defective* bundles. Not every bundle of physical properties, therefore, constitutes an individual thing. For clearly defective bundles such as D and C do not constitute physical things. What, then, is the distinction between the genuine bundles and the defective ones? The problem for the bundle-theorist is to draw this distinction *without* falling back upon the concept of an individual thing.

The substantialist would say: «What makes T and C genuine bundles is the fact that each is a set of properties all belonging to *the same thing*.» But this answer is not available to the bundle theorist.

Shall we say that a bundle is a set of properties all occupying the same *place*? Then we will have given up the simple ontology with which the bundle theorist had hoped to begin. We will be saying that, in addition to properties, there are also *places* and that properties may be located *in these places*. We will have replaced the substantial concept of *individual thing* with the substantial concept of *place*. (And we will not be

able to carry out the empirical program of reducing *space* to the *spatial relations* that obtain among individual things).

What of properties themselves? Consider the property *being green*. It, too, is a thing that *has* properties. Thus it has the following properties among others: being a 1-place property; being necessarily such that it can be exemplified only if the property of being colored is exemplified. Should we say, then, that any given property is a superfluous entity that may be replaced by the bundle of *its* properties?

If there is no need to distinguish an *individual thing* from the bundle of its properties, then why must we distinguish a *property* from the bundle of its properties? But if we do *not* distinguish a property from the bundle of its properties, then shall we say that a first order property (a property of individual things) is merely a bundle of second-order properties (of properties of first-order properties)? And then shall we go on to say that third-order properties are merely bundles of second-order properties, . . . and so on, *ad indefinitum*? What becomes, then, of our ontology?

Why would one suppose that we cannot validly distinguish a thing from its properties?

Ernst Haeckel had referred, in this connection, to what he called «the riddle of substance.»<sup>5</sup> Christian von Ehrenfels discusses this riddle in detail, in his *Gedanken über die Religion der Zukunft* (1929)<sup>6</sup>. He seems to believe that, once we free ourselves from our linguistic prejudices, we will no longer be substantialists.

He sets forth this strikingly contemporary thought experiment:

Consider two people, Hans and Peter, who are both in a dreamless sleep. Suppose now that a person possessed with supernatural powers enters the place where they are sleeping and that without awakening them he switches their soul-substances. He sends the soul of Hans to the body of Peter, with the result that the soul of Hans now has all the properties, dispositions and memories of Peter; and analogously for the soul of Peter and the body of Hans. The two awake and neither of them notices anything different.

The supposition has the absurd consequence that «Hans is now the person who is falsely named 'Peter.'»

To see that the presuppositions are at least questionable, we can construct a similar thought experiment for whatever entity that the anti-substantialist may countenance. Let *his* category be that of *property*.

Consider two properties, *red* and *blue*. A magician endowed with supernatu-

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5 Ernst Haeckel, *Die Welträtsel* (Bonn: 1899).

6 To appear in Christian von Ehrenfels, *Philosophische Schriften*, Volume IV: *Kosmogonie und Vermischte Schriften*, ed., Reinhard Fabian.

ral powers switches *their* properties. He does this in such a way that the original property *red* remains but with all the properties of the original property *blue*; and in such a way that *blue* remains but with all the properties of the original property *red*. In such a case, the property *red* would become the property *blue* and would be falsely called «red»; and analogously for *blue*.

One cannot reply to this second argument without, *ipso facto*, undermining the first. Properties, after all, *have* properties. The property *red*, for example, has such properties as: being a property; being other than *blue*; being exemplified only in what is colored; and being the color of ripe strawberries. The puzzle has to do, not with the concept of *substance*, but with the concept of a *property* – a concept we can hardly dispense with if we are concerned with the relation between mind and body.

It would seem to be clear, therefore, that the fact of intentionality presupposes the existence of individual substances.

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