

Essential Determination

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Introduction

Determination is not a modal notion: it is properly intermediate in strength between material and strict implication. It is stronger than mere truth and weaker than necessity because it is truth grounded in essences of contingently existing things. It is not conditional necessity neither, at least if this is taken to be a species of *necessity*, because no suitable antecedent for the modalised clause can be found. In my view, it is determination, not modality, that is the philosophers' guide to what is real and what is fundamental.

Such determination is ubiquitous in philosophy. It's influence is to be felt not only in metaphysics, but in areas as different as are the philosophies of language and mind and the philosophy of physics. Here is a list of some cases of determination:

Varieties of determination

Rigid designation

A rigid designator, one might say, is determined by its referent: the name is a *mere* tag, without descriptive content, *nothing but* a name for its bearer: two rigid designators for the same thing only differ notationally. It therefore seems natural to say that, at least in paradigmatic cases, the rigid designator is *determined* by its referent – it is the referent itself, not any descriptive condition, that tells us how and what the designator is. Language, however, is conventional, and linguistic signs are differentiated not just by their semantics, but by their syntax as well. We cannot say, therefore, that names supervene on their referents: there may be changes in the syntactic-lexical form of a name that leave its semantics untouched.

Names are, however, links in a complicated chain leading back in time to some baptism event: they are *entia successiva* that are individuated and essentially determined by the thing to which their reference has been fixed.

Truthmaking

Truth supervenes on being – nothing actually true could be false without there being a difference in being. But what kind of supervenience is in play here? It is not local (intra-world), for some properties are extrinsic: things can differ with respect to them without there being a difference in *their* being. It is not inter-world supervenience neither, for some properties are relational: they may vary among things in virtue of differences in different, and alien, things. It is not global supervenience, finally, because some truths are negative or quantified: they can vary across complete situations, that differ only in that one of them contains some extra stuff. It is, however, a form of determination.

Supervenience too is intimately connected with truthmaking. Whenever some properties *A* supervene on other properties *B*, what makes that something has a *B*-property *ipso facto*

makes it true that it has a *A*-property. There is just one truthmaking involved, nothing further is required: Jackson often frames supervenience in terms of one account of the world making true another account of the world; the physicalists' commitment, in his view, is "to the physical nature of the world making true the psychological account of the world" (Jackson 1998: 68).

Truthmaking, however, can be analysed as a species of determination: the truthmakers determine the truth of the truthbearer it makes true. Each and every dog determines (but does not necessitate) the truth of "There is a dog", the totality of Theatetus' properties determines (but does not necessitate) the truth of "Theatetus is not flying", the totality of the world's existents determines (but does not necessitate) the truth of "There are no unicorns".

Resemblance

Do two similar things have something in common? Realists (as this word will here be used) believe so: resemblance, according to them, supervenes on or is determined by properties. But is it the (literal!) sharing of properties that is in question here, or another, more fundamental relation between them (exact resemblance between tropes, e.g.)? And is the determination always direct, or are some resemblances more fundamental than others?

Properties determine resemblance in virtue of exemplifying higher-order properties. Sometimes these higher-order properties are nil, as when two things have the same lowest determinate property. Usually, however, things resemble by having (different) properties of the same type, as when two things both have a reddish, but slightly different colour. These types are determined by the lowest determinable properties, though they are not always necessitated by them.

Properties and qua-objects

Properties are qualitative: they characterise things. Whether Socrates is white or blue, is determined by Socrates on the one, and the properties of whiteness and blueness on the other hand – but both Socrates and these properties can exist without standing in an exemplification relation: Socrates may be red, and other things white and blue respectively. So we do not have supervenience – but it seems that we have determination, at least of a qualitative kind. Picasso was more successful as a painter than as a writer. Picasso as a painter was more successful than Picasso as a writer, but Picasso was not more successful than Picasso. By Leibniz' Law, Picasso as a painter and Picasso are two different objects. Contrary to the determination of things by their properties, the determination of Picasso as a painter by the property of being a painter seems essential. But again we do not have supervenience: Picasso as a painter could have been worse than he actually was while still being a painter.

Part-whole

The part-whole relation has been taken to be the paradigm of determination:

"The part-whole relation is also important: however, its importance seems to derive largely from the belief that many crucial aspects of a whole including its existence and nature are dependent on those of its parts." (Kim 1984: 54)

A unified solution

I will argue that

1. every qualitative determination is essential
2. every essential determination is existential

Every qualitative determination is essential

There is a metaphysical asymmetry between the property of exemplifying F (which is the property of being F) and the second-level property of being exemplified by a which consists in that the second, but not the first, is always had essentially when it is had at all.

Whenever a exemplifies F , two relational properties are exemplified by a and F respectively, namely *having F as a property* and *being a property of a* . The first of these just mimics F in modal behaviour. The latter, however, differs from F in at least one important respect, or so I want to claim: whenever it is had by a property G , it is an essential property of G . How is this possible? Here are some arguments from authority that it better had be possible: Aquinas thought that it is essential to the world to have been created by God but it is not essential to God to have created the world. Kripke thought that it is essential to me to have the parents I have, while it is presumably not essential to my parents to have begotten me. Fine thinks that it is essential to the set $\{a, b\}$ that a is its member while it is not essential to a to be a member of the set.

Suppose we are modal realists and convinced by the argument from accidental intrinsics that anything having a property contingently can exist only in worlds where it has that property. This commits us to a counterpart theory of ordinary particular: what makes it true that some a could have lacked its intrinsic property F , is some counterpart a' of a in other world that is not F . But is it F a' fails to have, one and the same property? It better had be the case, for if there were no literal identity of type among things in different possible worlds, there would be no way of saying why a' should count as a counterpart of a . If 'loose identity' or counterparthood is a matter of similarity, not every respect of similarity or counterpart relation can be something else then identity. There must be something unifying the counterparts, and this must be a 'one over many' – genuine, not surrogate unity.

Every essential determination is existential

Qua objects entered the contemporary philosophical stage in 1982, when Kit Fine wrote a short note entitled "Acts, Events and Things". They have, though, a much longer history, dating back at least as far as to Aristotle, though this is not something that will concern me here. A qua object, according to Fine, is a special kind of intensional entity, consisting of a particular, say a (its 'basis'), together with a property, say F (its 'gloss'), and denoted by " a qua F " (Fine 1982: 100). For any particular a and any property F there is such a qua object, which exists at times and in worlds when and where a is F . Qua objects in Fine's sense are intensional entities: they are identical only if they have the same glosses and they are distinct from their bases, though they have them as constituents¹ and exemplify, at any given time and in any given world, all the properties of their bases which are not 'formal', i.e. which are not about the time or world in question.

The crucial properties of qua objects, compared with their bases, are that they, on the one hand, have some *privileged* properties, properties which must be mentioned to give a full account of what that object is, while being *impoverished* in properties on the other. Qua

¹This is not Fine's term: he says that "the qua object should be regarded as some sort of amalgam of the given object and the property..." (Fine 1982: 100).

objects are, in a sense to be made more precise later, description-relative. They are, however, existentially dependent on properties, not on predicates. So far, this does not tell us much about the ontological status of qua objects. Kit Fine, e.g., is wary not to assign them too high a grade of being:

“The acts, as qua objects, are in an obvious sense artificial and derivative. They are not genuinely ‘out there’ in the world, but are formed from what is out there by means of an alliance with a purely intensional element. (It is tempting to say that they are partly formed in our own minds, but this would be too psychologistic).”
(Fine 1982: 103)

I would prefer a much more robust realistic construal. The usefulness, however, of qua objects does not depend on their ultimate ontological status, but on their following properties:

- a qua F is *essentially* F .
- a qua F has different modal and temporal persistence conditions than its base and any other qua object a qua G (for F and G not necessarily coextensive).
- a qua F depends existentially on the state of affairs of a 's being F .

For the present, I will call a “qua object” whatever satisfies these conditions.

Lewis has given a different, but compatible account of qua-objects, based on his theory of counterparts (b in a possible world v is a counterpart of a in w iff a would be b if w turned out to be v). Different counterpart relations are distinguished by the fact that they place more relative importance on some of the properties of one and the same thing.

If we allow for different counterpart relations we might say that one and the same thing, e.g. the lump of matter and the statue, might have counterparts in one respect which are not counterparts of it in another respect, e.g. melted-down counterparts which are sufficiently similar to it with respect to lump-hood, but not to statue-hood. The difficulty is, of course, to say how such counterpart relations are selected and why their difference does not violate Leibniz's Law. Letting, as ? does, the appropriate counterpart relation by the sense of the proper name used, not only riddles us with senses of proper names, but neither gives us a general procedure.² For sometimes, Lewis says, the appropriate counterpart relation is selected by a special clause like “regarded as an F ”. We are very close to qua objects indeed. Different counterpart relations are distinguished by the fact that they derive from different properties of one and the same thing:

“...counterpart relations are a matter of over-all resemblance in a variety of respects. If we vary the relative importances of different respects of similarity and dissimilarity, we will get different counterpart relations. Two respects of similarity and dissimilarity among enduring things are, first, personhood and personal traits, and, second, bodyhood and bodily traits. If we assign great weight to the former, we get the *personal counterpart* relation. Only a person, or something very like a person, can resemble a person in respect of personhood and personal traits enough to be his personal counterpart. But if we assign great weight to the latter, we get the *bodily counterpart* relation. Only a body, or something very like a body, can resemble a body in respect to bodyhood and bodily traits enough to be its bodily counterpart.” (? : 51–52)

The multiplicity of counterpart relations provides a solution to the essentiality of constitution problem:

²Lewis (2003: 28) speaks of names evoking counterpart relations.

“Is [the thing that survives squashing] a counterpart of Lump!Goliath? Yes and no. It is a counterpart under the counterpart relation that is called to mind when we describe Lump!Goliath as a lump, but not under the different counterpart relation that is called to mind when we describe the very same thing as a statue. Is it a counterpart of Lump!Goliath? Yes and no. It is a counterpart under the counterpart relation that is called to mind when we describe Lump!Goliath as a lump, but not under the different counterpart relation that is called to mind when we describe the very same thing as a statue. [...] Thanks to the multiplicity of counterpart relations, we have no need to multiply entities. [...] One identical thing can have different potentialities and different essences if it has them relative to different counterpart relations.” (Lewis 2003: 28)

Because glosses of qua objects are precisely what constrains their similarity relations, the different-counterpart-relations theory is just a variant of the full-blown qua object theory, perhaps preferable to the ontologically cautious. As always where there is a trade-off between what Quine calls 'ontology' and 'ideology', however, there is a price to pay: even *de re* modal predications, when couched in a multiple counterpart theory, will not be referentially transparent and the great advantage of counterpart theory in the first place will be lost. By accepting qua objects we will restore referential transparency and gain much more.

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Rather than multiplying essences, I'd prefer to define essence in terms of counterparts:

A property F is essential to a iff a and a qua F have the same counterparts.

Qua objects are all the truthmakers we need:

“Imagine something, call it *Long qua black*, that is very like Long in most ways, but differs from him in essence. Long is accidentally black, and might have been striped, orange all over, or even green. Long qua black, however, is essentially black. Long has counterparts of many colours, whereas all counterparts of Long qua black are black. Indeed, the counterparts of Long qua black are all and only the black counterparts of Long. Long qua black, if there were such a thing, would be a truthmaker for the truth that Long is black. Every world where Long qua black had a counterpart would be a world where Long is black.” (Lewis 2003: 30)

Suppose now that Long's blackness supervenes on his surface having a certain reflectance property ϕ . What makes it true that he has this reflectance property *ipso facto* makes it true that he is black. If this supervenience holds contingently, Long qua black and Long qua ϕ are different things. They stand, however, in a relation of existential dependence if, and only if, his blackness supervenes on his being ϕ . This supervenience is anchored to real things, not analysed in modal terms and asymmetric. It is a genuine dependence relation, but does not depend on the structure of modal space but rather on how we trace our counterparts to them. We seem finally to have found a relation which is deep, objective, contingent, non-reductionist, non-modal and non-accidental all at the same time. Too good to be true?

References

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