Talking about Properties

Contents

Quite often we explicitly talk about properties. We refer to them with suitable singular terms, we predicate something of them, and we quantify over them. Or so it seems. Philosophers have a tendency to quarrel about whether we should take apparent reference to properties at face value, or whether we should better take a nominalistic stance towards such entities. I will not join this battlefield here. Instead, I simply presuppose for the present that things behave as they seem to do – that is, I will without discussion adopt a realist view about property discourse. My enterprise can be seen as a piece of *hypothetical, descriptive* metaphysics. It is hypothetical for the reason just sketched, i.e. it starts from a realist hypothesis taken for granted. It is descriptive in being an attempt to understand a certain part of our everyday conceptual scheme – that part which deals with properties and the like. Thus, I can formulate the main question which leads my enquiry as follows:

(Q)   Assuming we take our linguistic behaviour dealing with properties serious; how, then, should we understand the ontology of properties on which we rely in it?

To answer this question, we must clarify the conceptual resources which are relevant to our talking about properties and thus make up the ontological framework of properties. These resources divide into

    (i) *general* concepts for properties,

that is, concepts expressed by *general terms* ("property", "virtue") which are true of properties and

    (ii) *singular* concepts for properties,

i.e. concepts expressed by *singular terms* ("redness", "wisdom") which denote properties. Among the general concepts we may distinguish between

    (a) the *categorial* or *formal* concept [property],[1]

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[1] Here and elsewhere I use square brackets as a kind of *meaning marks*. The result of enclosing an expression *e* in such brackets denotes whatever *e* expresses, its (Fregean) sense. Thus, [snow is white] is the proposition expressed by "snow is white" and [snow] is the concept expressed by "snow".

and

(b) *material* concepts like [virtue], [colour], [ability], [form], [talent] etc.

Surely, it is not part of the examination of the overall conceptual framework of properties to clarify any particular material concept mentioned in (b). Our project does, however, call for the clarification of the *categorial* concept of a property (or: an attribute).[2] Nevertheless, it is not the categorial concept which I will be concerned with most; rather I will spend most of my efforts to investigate into the nature of singular concepts of properties, as [wisdom] or [the property of being red]. Such concepts exhibit, so I will argue, a common structure and they are pivotal to our acquisition of the whole conceptual framework of properties. Because of that an understanding of them is central to the general enterprise and will lay the basis for an understanding of the categorial concept.

What may we expect from an investigation of the concepts mentioned? Such an enquiry may result in a number of truths which constitute the identity of the concepts. In the ideal case, it may even provide us with a proper *analysis* of the concepts discussed. Indeed, the case is ideal – the property concepts I am concerned with allow, as I will show, for an illuminating analysis.

The only way to understand the peculiarity of both classes of concepts is to inquire into the *semantics* of the corresponding linguistic vehicles. Therefore, I will begin by examining in detail a fragment of the English language, which contains the linguistic tools for reference to properties - the fragment which comprises both singular and general terms for properties, as well as quantification about properties. I will mostly concentrate on *singular terms* (or: designators) of properties; let me begin.

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[2] There are several expressions apt for expressing the categorial concept of a property, as for example "property", "attribute", "quality", "feature", or "characteristic" (and arguably "state"). Though there might be certain differences in everyday usage with regard to these terms, I shall take the differences to be mainly pragmatic and thus treat the expressions as synonyms.

1. Canonical Designators of Properties

a. A Short Taxonomy of Designators of Properties

There is a variety of expressions which are apt for reference to attributes: First of all, we can refer to attributes with ordinary definite descriptions, as for example "the property most often mentioned by philosophers" or "the trait that Socrates was most famous for". This is not surprising, since it seems that we can refer by means of definite descriptions to everything whatsoever, if only it is in reach of our referential capacities at all.

Much more interesting are certain terms that are, it seems, more specifically designed for talk about properties and which, accordingly, are central to philosophers' treatments of them:

Here we have firstly fully-fledged substantives, as "redness", "wisdom", "tranquility", "brevity", or "courage". Though substantives in their own rights, the vast majority of these is obviously derived from adjectives ("courage", however, already shows that this is not a universally true thesis). It should be obvious from the examples that the derivation is not as uniform as some philosophers may suggest when they choose "F-ness" as a representative for this kind of expression the schematic. I will deviate from this habit to stress the non-uniformity and use "$F_{[SUB]}$" as a placeholder for the appropriate derived substantive corresponding to the general term "F".

Secondly, we have a wholly systematic way of deriving property terms from general terms by building a gerundive (after adding, if necessary, the copula "be") and prefixing the result by expressions like "the property of", "the quality of" etc. In this way we build expressions of the form "the property (or: quality etc.) of being F" as for example "the property of being naughty", or "the quality of being eatable".

Though many philosophers concentrate on these two forms of property-terms only,[3] there are other interesting ways of reference to attributes. We can, for example, refer to them by nominalized sentences, as in:

> He hath this property of an honest man, that his hand is as good as his word,

or in:

> It is a property of the triangle, that the sum of its angles equals 180 degrees.

The possibility of such constructions reveals the ontological generosity by which our common conception of properties is marked – layman's properties are far from sparse.[4]

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[3] A very positive exception to this rule is Strawson, see his 1974: 129 for an instructive list of various forms of terms suitable for reference to properties.

[4] Is this to say that sparse theories of properties of the kind developed and explored during the last two or three decades are mistaken? Not at all; such theories are, at least usually, not intended to interpret the conception of properties manifested in everyday discourse. Armstrong, one of the leading proponents of such theories, clearly sees that his theory is not apt for such a purpose, and he distinguishes between his sparse conception of properties and the common conception: "We shall have to accept that what ordinary discourse refers to as properties and relations are often not properties and relations in the sense in which the terms are used in this book." (Armstrong 1978 II: 18). While my enterprise is mainly *descriptive*, his is *revisionary*; no conflicts should be expected from results in enquiries as distinct as those (though one may possibly weigh the distinct purposes against each other).

Though the existence of other forms is important to notice, let us now concentrate on the two classes of property designators recognised most often: *Class I* comprises substantives (usually derived from adjectives), *Class II* comprises the complex gerundive expressions. Following a widespread practise I shall call expressions of these two kinds *canonical* – for the present, the legitimacy of this title may be seen as due to the pivotal role which these terms play both in everyday property talk and in the parlour of "experts", i.e. in ontological debates. Understood this way, the labelling of "canonical" just expresses a brute empirical observation about the frequency of use of the labelled terms. After the discussion of the following sections, in which I examine the semantics of canonical designators of properties, I will be able to lend some philosophically more important content to the use of the term "canonical" in the context of property talk.

b. Terms of the Form "the property of being F"

Definite descriptions and proper names form the two classes of singular terms most intensively discussed by philosophers. Indeed, sometimes philosophers seem to suggest that by these two classes, maybe together with the additional class of indexicals, we get an exhaustive subdivision of singular terms. Do property terms fit into the scheme?

My answer will be different for the two classes of property terms mentioned before; to start with, I concentrate on terms of *Class II*, for which "the property of being verbose" may serve as a representative example. These terms bear a syntactic feature that can be seen as characteristic for definite expressions; they consist of the definite article followed by a complex noun phrase. But classifying an expression as a definite description, in the common philosophical sense of the phrase, is not a matter of purely syntactic considerations. In grouping expressions together under the title of *definite descriptions* one aims at demarcating a kind of expressions sharing a certain *semantical* feature.[5]

Though he agrees in principal with this diagnosis, Swoyer (1996) thinks there is nevertheless room for controversy. The reason is, he holds, that the less sparse a conception of properties is, the less will be its value for certain explanatory purposes. Assuming he is right about this; it would follow that the conception of properties which shows itself in everyday discourse is not a strong instrument for certain philosophical ways of theorizing. That would not be too surprising, just because it were never designed for that (it were not philosophers who coined the relevant locutions). But it would surely not deprave descriptive metayphysics of its interest.

[5] This can be seen clearly from the fact that one and the same *string of letters* may *function* as a definite description in one context while not in the other: the expression "the girl with the Michael Myers-mask" appears both in

(1)   Then the girl with the Michael Myers-mask went home.

and in

(2)   Chrille terrified the girl with the Michael Myers-mask which he had put on in a sudden.

But only in (1) the expression is used as singular term; in (2) it does not even form a semantic unit. If, to avoid such cases, one defines a definite description as an expression of a certain form, *which is furthermore used as a singular term*, one has already accepted the relevancy of semantic considerations for the classification of a term as a definite description – since the notion of a *singular term* itself is semantically laden (compare for example Hale 1987: 16-21 and Künne 1983: 26f. for approaches to this notion).

That a purely syntactic characterisation of definite descriptions is of doubtful value can furthermore be seen from (i) the possibility of using expressions of the form "the φ" for making general statements (as in "The

For sake of simplicity I will simply rely on a standard Russellian account of definite descriptions here. Then, an expression of the form "the φ",[6] to count as a definite description, should satisfy the following schema:[7]

(RD)   For all x: "the φ" denotes $x \leftrightarrow$ (i) x is a φ & (ii) apart from x there is no other φ.[8]

If terms of *Class II* are really definite descriptions, they seem to be special in being *rigid designators*. But of course rigidity does not deprive an expression of its status as a definite description, and it makes no difference to the applicability of (RD) whether a given expression is rigid or not. "The even prime number" obviously passes the test just as well as "the current prime minister of England".
So the crucial question is: can we apply (RD) to property terms of *Class II*? Let us give it a try:

(PD)   For all x: "the property of being verbose" denotes $x \leftrightarrow$ (i) x is a property of being verbose & (ii) apart from x there is no other property of being verbose.

The attempt seems to be a failure; clauses (i) and (ii) of (PD) can hardly be said to be correct English. The reason is basically that, while "property" functions as a count noun and thus combines well with the indefinite article (and allows for the plural form), the whole phrase "property of being verbose" is peculiar and only accepts the definite article as a determiner.

Nevertheless, I will argue, expressions of *Class II* are definite descriptions. But they are special in containing a singular term which is coextensive with the whole term, namely the gerundive construction "being *F*". Return to our standard example, "the property of being verbose". It is separable into the categorial prefix "the property of" and the gerundive expression "being verbose". That this latter can itself be used as a singular term for a property can be seen from statements as

> Being verbose, albeit helpful in general, is a rather tiring quality now and then.

> Being earnest is an indispensable quality in some social environments.

One thing should be evident from these constructions: being verbose (or: earnest etc.) is a *property* (or: quality etc.) – but then it is nothing different from *the property of being verbose* (earnest etc.). The following schema is generally valid:[9]

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woman who once will marry him must be a patient person," cp. Moore 1944: 214f. and Vendler 1967: 53) and (ii) from the possibility of using such terms as proper names (*The man who wasn't there* is a film, not a man).

[6] Though prototypical examples of definite descriptions are of the form "the φ", we should nevertheless not take the appearance of a definite article as a necessary condition for being a definite descriptions. There are English expressions of different forms that should reasonably counted as definite descriptions (e.g. genitive constructions as "Jennifer's husband"; cf. Neale 1990: 35) and there are languages lacking the definite article while not lacking the device of definite descriptions (think of Latin, which does not have an article but which allows for expressions like "pater Caesaris").

[7] Neale usefully reconstructs the core of Russell's theory (cf. Neale 1990: 28-33).

[8] Put more formally, (RD) can be expressed by the well-known schema:

(RD*) $\forall x$ ["the φ" denotes $x \leftrightarrow \forall y$ (y is a φ $\leftrightarrow y=x$)]

[9] I do not claim that *wherever* a gerundive occurs it is used as a designator of a property. A gerundive expression may well be systematically ambiguous (when it forms a part of the continuous tenses, for example, it does not seem to be used as a singular term at all). There is an instructive similarity here between

(=)   Being *F* = the property of being *F*.

Having noted that "the property of being verbose" contains the singular term "being verbose" we should ask ourselves about the status of the prefix, "the property of". Since, as we have said before, being verbose *is a property*, the prefix contains a general term *which is true of* the denotation of the prefixed singular term. And this is just the structure of appositive terms, with which we are familiar throughout language. We can talk about the poet Burns, the name "John" and the city of Westminster (in the last example we even find the appositive usage of "of"; used appositively, "of" may be substituted by a colon without harm). So a fairly natural idea suggests itself: what we have in the case of *Class II* terms are appositive singular terms.[10, 11] This diagnosis is further supported by the facts that we can also prefix property terms of *Class I*, like "wisdom", with the appositive expression "the property of" and talk of *the property of wisdom*, and that we can also use more specific general terms (as "virtue") for such constructions, or supplement these prefixes with further adjectival modifications (as in "the rare virtue of wisdom").

I suggested to regard the gerundive constructions, as contained in terms of the *Class II*, as singular terms for properties and stressed the correctness of schema (=). Now given an instance of (=) it is interesting to notice that the two expressions flanking the sign of equality cannot be substituted *salva veritate* in all contexts – indeed, they cannot even be substituted for each other *salva congruitate*, as the following pair of statements show:

(1)   Socrates had the property of being verbose.

(?1)   Socrates had being verbose.

But one should not be irritated too much by this observation. Especially, one should not be led into thinking that ascribing singular termhood to gerundive expressions was a failure. *Class II* expressions share the peculiarities they exhibit with other appositive expressions. As Wolterstorff has noted,[12] the expression

(J)   "John"

is indisputably a singular term which denotes a proper name. Its denotation is the name "John", and thus the term "John" is coextensive with the complex term

(J*)   the name "John".

But (J) and (J*) are, though coextensive, not exchangeable *salva congruitate*. Take the sentence:

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gerundives and phrases of the form "to be *F*". While those *can* be used as designators of properties ("To be an honest man is the virtue I long for."), they have other uses where they are substitutable for that-clauses and rather denote something propositional: "Belmondo believes himself to be charming".

[10] The appositive character of the prefix "the property of", as used in canonical property terms, is also recognised by Wolterstorff (1970: 70ff.), by Levinson (1978: 9f.), and by Wiggins (1984: 320). Teichmann (1989: 143f.; 1992: 67f.) apparently makes the same point, while using a somewhat different terminology.

[11] Notice that not every expression of the form "the φ of being *F*" is an appositive description, as can be seen from an example borrowed from Oscar Wilde: *Being earnest* is important, but it is not *an importance*. That is, the "of" in "the importance of being earnest" is *not* the appositive "of". We cannot substitute a colon for it, without destroying the sense of the expression.

[12] For the following cf. Wolterstorff 1970: 70f.

(2)   They gave him the name "John",

and substitute the contained (J*) by (J). The result is ill-formed:

(?2)   They gave him "John".[13]

The lesson to be learned is that appositive terms sometimes follow rather peculiar rules and some generalisations about the behaviour of singular terms must be modified with care to account for such appositive terms.

It is no objection to my proposal that the function of an appositive prefix like "the property of" may seem obscure at first. Appositions can fulfil a variety of jobs: Used with proper names they often provide a hint at the reference of the proper name which may be shared by many people. But they may also be used to incorporate nasty asides ("George, this bastard, did it again."), to boast with one's broad knowledge ("That reminds me of a story about Danae, daughter of Akrisios and Eurydike.") or simply to provide some information less important than what is said with the main predicate of an utterance.

What is special about "the property of" is that this apposition seems to be redundant from an epistemic point of view. That the property of being verbose *is a property* is quite evident. Indeed, it expresses a certain kind of categorial knowledge which one can hardly lack if one knows what it is to be a property at all. But the same is true of "the number" in "the number 7". We thus have to acknowledge the existence of what can be called *pleonastic* appositions. I cannot give a detailed account of their functions here. But let me mention but one thing which appears to be important to their usage: the terms with which they are combined are often ambiguous and sometimes even allow for uses with differing *grammatical* status. An example might illustrate this: Imagine I am speculating about the mystical meaning of the number seven. Asked, what I am doing, I may answer

(3)   I am thinking about the number seven,

while I would not be understood by replying

(?3)   I am thinking about seven.

At best this would provoke the further question: "About seven *what*?" The apposition disambiguates the term "seven", which can both be used for counting and as a designator of a number. In the case of gerundives, the need for an apposition (which only arises if the gerundive does not open the sentence in which it is used) may have to do with the unusual syntax of the construction and prevent people from misunderstanding utterances containing it.

Now back to our property terms and our initial question: are they definite descriptions? We have seen that an expression of the form "the property of being *F*" contains a singular term, "being *F*", which denotes the very property denoted by the whole term, and an appositive prefix "the property of". What does this tell us about our question?

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[13] Sentence (1) of course contains an occurrence of (J) as well; if we substitute this by (J*), we also get an unacceptable result:

(?1*)   They gave him the name the name "John".

A short reflection shows that singular terms containing an appositive part may be seen as a special sort of definite descriptions. Though the Russellian apparatus, in the form provided by (RD), is not capable of dealing with them, a fairly natural expansion of it does the trick. The problem with appositive descriptions of the form "the φ *a*" is that the noun phrase following the definite article, "φ *a*", cannot be used as a count noun (as would be required to apply (RD) to them). But if we break it up into its two parts, we can handle both of them separately. The first easily fits into the existing scheme; the second is a singular term, and to build a predicate from it we can add the sign of identity. The poet Burns is someone, who is both a poet and *identical* with Burns. Thus, appositive terms can be given the following analysis:[14]

(RD*)　For all *x*:　　"the φ, *a*" denotes $x \leftrightarrow$ (i) *x* is a φ & (ii) $x = a$.[15]

An equivalent suggestion is made by Neale (1990: 116, n.55); in his alternative notation, we can symbolise "the φ *a*" by

　　　　[the *x*: *x* is φ & *x*=*a*].

Let me take stock here: Due to their form, property terms of *Class II* suggest their being definite descriptions. But there are obstacles to treat them by means of the usual Russellian apparatus. I have shown how we can hold on to our first inclination by recognising the appositive character of the prefix "the property of" and providing a special analysis for appositive descriptions (a tool we need independently of property terms as soon as we have realised the existence of appositive descriptions). So the question about the status of *Class II* terms like "the property of being verbose" has been answered sufficiently. But now a new question arises: what about the included property term, the gerundive expression? I will propound my answer to it in the following section.

c. Gerundive Expressions ("being F*") and Derived Substantives*

Because of the absence of the definite article, the form of a gerundive expression like "being verbose" does not immediately suggest that the term might be a definite description. But, as I have noted before, the article is not a *conditio sine qua non* when it comes to definite descriptions. What may still make one wonder whether the expression should be classified as a description is that it obviously contains descriptive elements. But these, and this is the reason that the verdict must be a clear "no description", do not describe the entity denoted by the expression – the property of being verbose is not itself verbose.[16] Rather, the descriptive parts of such a term describe those entities which *possess* the property denoted.

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[14] (RD*) is only meant as an instrument for appositive terms of the mentioned form "the φ *a*". Grammarians call this the kind of an apposition *restrictive* or *close* and distinguish it from several other kinds (see for example Meyer 1992).

[15] (RD*) can do without the second Russellian condition "apart from *x* there is no other φ", because uniqueness is already secured by the identity clause.

[16] This insight cannot be generalised with respect to all property terms, since some of them may contain material which is true of the denoted property. The attribute of being abstract is itself abstract and the property of thinking about properties is not itself thinking, of course, but is at least itself a property.

If the distinction between proper names and definite descriptions were a strict dichotomy, it would follow that gerundives are proper names. But this is utterly implausible. They bear distinctive marks which proper names typically lack:

(G-1)   Gerundives are *semantically complex*, and they are complex in a way that the conditions of understanding them systematically depend upon the conditions of understanding the involved terms. Whoever understands the general term $\ulcorner F \urcorner$ and who knows the derivational rules of building gerunds can understand the corresponding expression $\ulcorner$ being $F \urcorner$. Furthermore, whoever understands $\ulcorner$ being $F \urcorner$ (used to denote a property) must know that exactly those things have the denoted property, of which the embedded general term $\ulcorner F \urcorner$ is true.

(G-2)   The reference of a gerund is a function of the meaning of the embedded general term(s). Thus, the meaning of "verbose" determines the reference of "being verbose".[17]

(G-3)   Knowledge of the meaning of a gerund suffices for knowledge of its referent. Understanding "being verbose" is enough for knowing to what it refers.[18, 19]

Principle (G-3) knows some exceptions due to the existence of predicates which are paradox-engendering when being nominalised. The Russellian property of not exemplifying itself, cannot, on pain of contradiction, exist. For if it existed, we could ask whether it exemplifies itself or not. But, as is well known, both assumptions would lead into serious trouble. So there is no such property and the term "exemplifying itself" lacks reference. But this is far from evident, and one may well err in believing the term to have a reference; so (G-3) may fail for cases in which the gerund lacks reference for reasons of logic.

The way I chose for demonstrating that there is no Russellian property (which seems to be the common way) implicitly relies on principles (G-1) and (G-2): we understand the gerund "exemplifying itself" because we understand the verb "to exemplify" and we know by this understanding that the term, if it had any denotation at all, would denote a property which all those

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[17] Strawson once exploited this feature of certain terms (that-clauses for an example share it with gerundives) when he proposed to distinguish between particular and general entities on the grounds that we may refer to an entity of the latter kind "by a singular substantival expression, a unique reference for which is determined solely by the meaning of the words making up the expression" (Strawson 1953/54: 256f.).

[18] (G-2) and (G-3), though obviously connected, are nevertheless to be distinguished. (G-2) is a purely semantic principle while (G-3) in addition deals with an epistemic notion.

[19] The importance of (G-3) has been seen before; here are some references: Künne (1983: 177f.) takes up Strawson's idea mentioned in footnote 17 but adds the epistemic component relevant to (G-3), when he calls canonical property terms *presenting singular terms*, where a presenting singular term $\ulcorner a \urcorner$ is a term such that no one can believe what he says with an utterance of $\ulcorner ... a ... \urcorner$ unless he knows the reference of $\ulcorner a \urcorner$. (Künne explicitly only deals with terms of *Class I*, but he surely would say the same about those of *Class II*.) Levinson seems to have the same point in mind when he makes out a crucial contrast between gerunds and ordinary definite descriptions for properties (like "Socrates most famous virtue") in the circumstance, that dictionaries will contain enough information to know the referents of gerunds, while they cannot provide the information needed for knowing the referents of ordinary descriptions (Levinson 1978: 16). Finally, Schiffer also makes this point when he writes: "[...] subject to certain qualifications, the singular term 'the property of being F', a pleonastic gift of the predicate 'F', is not liable to reference failure. If 'F' is a meaningful predicate phrase, then we know that 'the property of being F' refers to the property of being F." (Schiffer 1990: 604).

things have in common that do not exemplify itself. But there cannot be such a property, and thus the meaning of the term rules out its having a reference.

What I have said above gerundives directly applies most property designators of *Class I*, namely to all *derived* substantives. We do understand "redness", "verbosity", "wisdom" etc. on the basis of our understanding of the corresponding general terms, "red", verbose", wise" etc. Principles (G1) to (G-3) thus have the following equivalents for derived substantives:

(D-1) *Class I* terms are *semantically complex*. The conditions of understanding them systematically depend upon the conditions of understanding the corresponding general term: whoever understands the general term $\ulcorner F \urcorner$ and who knows how to derive the corresponding designator $\ulcorner F_{\text{SUB}} \urcorner$ will also understand this expression. Furthermore, whoever understands $\ulcorner F_{\text{SUB}} \urcorner$ must know that exactly those things have the denoted property, of which the embedded general term $\ulcorner F \urcorner$ is true.

(D-2) The reference of a *Class I* term is a function of the meaning of the embedded general term(s). Thus, the meaning of "verbose" determines the reference of "verbosity".

(D-3) Knowledge of the meaning of a *Class I* term suffices for knowledge of its referent. Understanding "verbosity" is enough for knowing to what it refers.

It seems plausible, indeed, to treat corresponding gerundives and derived substantives (i.e. designators which are derived from the same general term) as synonyms. They are co-referential (being wise is a property which we may also call wisdom) and they share the semantic characteristics discussed above.[20]

What consequences may we draw from the observations above to the question about how canonical designators of properties should be classified? In the light of their semantic peculiarities, it seems needlessly egalitarian to side them either with descriptions or with proper names. Instead, we

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[20] Nevertheless, there are interesting differences between expressions of the two sorts. First of all we have seen that gerundives underlie heavy restrictions as to the positions in which they may appear in a sentence (it is correct to say that Socrates had wisdom, but it is gibberish to say that Socrates had being wise). I take it that such syntactic restrictions should not hinder us from treating the expressions as synonyms.
But there is another difference which weighs heavier against the synonymy idea (cp. Wolterstorff 1970: 78 and Levinson 1978: 10): derived substantives behave in important aspects as *mass* terms, since they do admit of quantization in several ways: a person may have *some* tenacity, *much* charity, *more* patience than another etc. Gerundives do not share this feature. Though this may be connected with their limited syntactic flexibility, the difference does not exhaust itself in it. We can enlarge the syntactic possibilities by using a categorial apposition ("the property of"), but still, quantization sounds rather awkward in most cases. There may be at least acceptable cases: "Being wise was a much admired virtue in the days of Socrates. But though he possessed this quality *to a high degree*, he was not everybody's darling."
It is a delicate question how to react to such observations; I for my part tend to take these differences as *semantically* insignificant peculiarities properly treated as stylistic and pragmatic phenomena (I do it with Wolterstorff, op. cit., and *pace* Levinson 1978: 10ff. Levinson decided to take the linguistic differences as indicating an ontological difference; for his quite ingenious, albeit somewhat strange, account see also his 1980; in a recent, unpublished manuscript, however, Levinson abandoned his former theory).

should acknowledge that they belong to a *sui generis* class of singular terms – non-descriptive, semantically complex terms.[21]

d. *An Analysis of Canonical Singular Concepts of Properties*

I have drawn attention to the semantic complexity of designators of properties. This complexity suggests that they express *complex concepts*; indeed, the suggestion is, I will argue, correct. Whoever understands the term "wisdom" must know that it denotes a property which is possessed by all wise men and only by them – we cannot attribute a proper understanding of the term to anyone who fails to see this fact. Thus, the following expresses a substantial truth fixing the identity of the concept of wisdom:

(Wis) $x =$ wisdom $\rightarrow \forall y$ (y possesses $x \leftrightarrow y$ is wise)

This truth opens the way for a conceptual analysis, but cannot provide one as it stands. If we simply turned (Wis) into a biconditional, we would get an inadequate result. Contrary to sets, properties are not individuated by their actual bearers. But we may take them as being *intensionally* (in the sense propagated by Carnap) individuated, via their potential bearers. Then we get the following cut-and-dried analysis of the concept of wisdom:

(Analysis Wisdom)

   $x =$ wisdom $\leftrightarrow \Box \ \forall y$ (y possesses $x \leftrightarrow y$ is wise).

Generalising the idea behind (Analysis Wisdom) we can construct a schema whose instances provide analyses like the one proposed in a row:

(Schema Property Analysis)

   $x = F_{[SUB]} \leftrightarrow \Box \ \forall y$ (y possesses $x \leftrightarrow y$ is F).[22]

To meet a possible misunderstanding I should add the following: I have proposed a method to generate a series of analyses of property concepts, which answer questions like "What is wisdom?", "What is redness?", etc. Of course, by my proposal I did not mean to provide answers to typical Socratic questions – though these may be put in exactly the same words. Now, if the addressee of Socrates' asking "What is wisdom?" were to answer: "Well, it is a property which all and only wise people have in common," Socrates would surely remain unsatisfied, and rightly so. But this doesn't

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[21] Property designators are not the only members of this kind of singular terms; that-clauses, where they are used as singular terms for propositional entities, will constitute another subclass of it.

[22] My proposal is based on a certain view about the *individuation* of properties – I take them to be individuated *intensionally*, and thus to be individuated in a more coarse-grained manner than meanings. Non-synonymous general terms may signify the same property (while differing in meaning). Though I am willing to defend the appropriateness of this approach (see below), this is not essential to the general idea behind my proposal. It could be modified to accommodate for a more fine-grained conception of properties, if one replaced the modality-constraint by some stronger notion. My basic tenet is that concepts expressed by property designator are derived from the concepts expressed by the associated general terms, such that an understanding of the property term requires knowledge about what it is to have the property; into the content of such knowledge will the general concept enter.

mean that there is anything wrong with the answer. An answer may be unsatisfying for several reasons, one of them being that it falls short of providing all the knowledge the questioner would like to acquire. Being offered the answer described, Socrates may reply: "Your answer seems to be true but trivial. What I wanted to know is: what makes wise people wise?" The question he now poses asks for an analysis of the concept expressed by the general term "wise". Such an analysis I have not in stock; but I never claimed to do. Socratic questions, as commonly understood, ask not for an analysis of a property-concept [$F_{[SUB]}$] *as a property-concept*, but for an analysis of the involved general concept [F]. I just wanted to provide the former. (By the way: That my answer may appear to be a triviality, speaks – at least in my eyes – in favour of it, not against it. It may appear trivial only because it exploits a very basic fact about our conceptual framework of properties.)

Let me finally add some remarks about the individuation of properties (and why I take them to be individuated intensionally):

Many philosophers assimilate properties to *meanings* or meaning-like entities (these philosophers might want to reject my proposal on ground of this view).[23] Thus they speak about properties being *expressed* by predicates (or general terms), being *grasped* in acts of thinking, or being *components* of *propositions*, where propositions are introduced as assertibles and thinkables (i.e. as that what may be asserted, doubted, judged etc.)[24] The significance of this habit may vary from philosopher to philosopher, though. It may either be just a terminological convention or it may express a conviction about the proper use of the word "property" and the like (thus, the habit would be part of a *descriptive* account of properties).

Obviously, only the last alternative would be relevant to my current discussion. What reasons could there be for placing properties and propositions on one level? There is one possible motive which I shall just mention in passing, because only at the very first glance it may seem to be any good: both *expressions*, "proposition" and "property", resemble each other in that they begin by the four letters "prop-". Probably, no one would take this as a serious point – and surely, no one should, since the words differ in origin and meaning.[25]

A better reason is provided by intuitions about certain identity statements concerning properties. To use a threadbare example which has been taken to speak against an intensional account of properties: don't we say that the property of being an equilateral triangle is to be distinguished from the property of being an equiangular triangle? The proper answer, it seems to me, has been given by Lewis: "Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't." (Lewis 1986: 55). The relevant intuitions are not reliable since the linguistic data are inconclusive.[26]

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[23] See for example Tye 1981 and 1982.

[24] Though some philosophers, of course, use "proposition" for the *intension* of a sentence (see for example Carnap 1956). While thus defined the notion cannot play the cognitive role it is usually taken to play, no conflict with my position about properties will arise from it.

[25] "Proposition" stems from the Latin verb "propono" (meaning: to expose, to place before, to set out) while "property" has its root in the Latin substantive "proprietas", which is in turn derived from "proprius" (meaning something like "one's own" or "belonging", either in the sense of material possession or of characteristics).

[26] Tendencies to deny the identification may not only arise because we tie the identity of properties to the cognitive value of the associated terms. We might, of course, simply overlook the intensional equivalence of the relevant expressions. Indeed, where this equivalence directly meets the eye, the temptation to speak of

But identity statements are not the only relevant data. While natural language expressions for propositions (general terms like "doubt", "belief", "assertion", "statement" and that-clauses ruled by opaque contexts) are linked to epistemic notions, no such link exists between epistemic notions and uses of "quality", "state", "property" etc. Were such links entrenched in language, purely intensional individuation of properties would be barred by that fact. But they are not. Indeed, we have other terms for the relevant purposes; we talk about the *idea*, the *concept*, the *notion* of something, and these terms are linked in the necessary ways. Ideas can be grasped, understood, conveyed, and they can be coherent, confused etc.[27]

Qualities are treated as ways things are. They constitute (possible) differences between things. Intensional entities fit this role. If there are two attributes P and P^*, intensionally individuated, then there must be a possible world in which the set of things possessing P differs from the set of things possessing P^*. That is, attributes (intensionally conceived) potentially constitute differences in the world (or, to use a slogan: properties are in the world, concepts are in head – which is not to say that concepts are *mental* entities, but that they constitute *epistemic* differences, while not necessarily wordly ones). It seems to me that this feature is central to everyday talk of properties and this is why I opt for the intensional individuation. The sketched reasoning, I should add, is of course far from being a *proof* of my position. I do not expect something like that to be available; but the data that are available seem to support my view quite well.

2. Ascriptions of Properties and Canonical Singular Concepts of Properties

So far it were singular property terms that I was concerned with, whereas in general I was not discussing whole sentences in which they occur. Here it is this latter task which I will attend to. I will be interested in two forms of sentences and their semantic relation:

Property terms may be combined with some linking word, as "have" or "possess" to form whole predicates. Indeed from every *simple predication*, by which I mean a statement of the form:

(SP) a is F,

we can build what I call an *explicit property-ascription*, a statement of the form:

(EP) a has (or: possesses) the property of being F (or: $F_{[SUB]}$).

Obviously corresponding statements of the two forms (SP) and (EP) are intimately related in meaning. In non-philosophical contexts we will usually accept any one of them as a correct paraphrase of the other. Though this alone does not tell us exactly in what kind of semantic relation they stand, it at least suggests that the relation in question is simply that of *synonymy* – the claim that this suggestion is true we may call the *Synonymy Thesis*.

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two properties seems much weaker: think of the property of having 3 children and the property of having 1 plus 2 children. Would we not say that it is one and the same property, which I referred to twice? But the expressions "3" and "1+2" are not synonymous, and the important difference to the triangular case is that we have an *evident* intensional equivalence here.

[27] As Strawson pointed out; cp. 1987: 404.

Many a philosopher will find this idea attractive, if not evidently true: Quine and Strawson for example forget about their usual animosities when it comes to the semantic relation between what I have called a *simple predication* and the corresponding *explicit property ascription*. They wholeheartedly agree upon the thesis that those two forms are nothing but *stylistic variants* of each other; which is to say, they are synonyms in the strictest sense of the word.[28]

So Strawson writes (in a passage which probably is critically addressed to Quine):

> The idea is that (A) ["Socrates performs swimming"] or (B) ["Socrates possesses bravery"] *commit* us, as regards swimming and bravery, in a way in which we are not at all committed by (a) "Socrates swims" or (b) "Socrates is brave".
> But this is absurd. The theory of "commitment" by noun, but not by adjective or verb, is as absolutely implausible as any philosophical view could be. (Strawson 1974: 33)[29]

Quine does not hesitate to admit the absurdity of the position under attack by Strawson and gives voice to his unusual agreement in the following citation:

> He was right about the implausibility and absurdity of the idea, but wrong in supposing, if he did, that the idea was mine. The difference between (A) and (a) or between (B) and (b) is, as he rightly suggests, "simply a matter of stylistic variation". Clearly it is too frail a reed to bear the weight of an ontology. Occurrence of a word in a meaningful sentence gives no presumption that the word designates anything, and the circumstance that the word is a singular term is still too casual a circumstance to make the difference. (Quine 1980: 164)

So here we have the seldom opportunity to side with both Strawson and Quine – unfortunately, though, I must reject this chance. By denying the *Synonymy Thesis*, I part company with Strawson and Quine at the same time.[30]

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[28] There are several ways of how to enrich the content of the *Synonymy Thesis*. One might think the statements in question to be synonymous while denying that they are *merely stylistic variants* of each other. Thus one might hold that one of them is preferable from the philosophical point of view, because its grammatical form depicts its *logical form* in a more perspicuous way than the alternative formulation. Thus, for example, Bernard Bolzano, holds that statements of the forms (EP), while strictly synonymous with those of the from (SP), nevertheless are logically more perspicuous (cf. his *Theory of Science*, volume II, §127). And indeed, though speaking of mere stylistic variance, Quine seems to hold something like the reverse of Bolzano's thesis. Be this as it may – because I reject the *Synonymy Thesis* right away, I will not discuss such differentiations any further.

[29] Cp. also Strawson 1984: 405, where he writes: "Surely it is more plausible to say that the two members of the pair ["Socrates is courageous" and "Socrates has courage"] say the same thing about Socrates; and that, if anything, besides Socrates himself, is referred to in each case, it is one and the same in each [...].

[30] In the following discussion I will concentrate on the question of *synonymy* and avoid the notion of *ontological commitments* for the most parts, since it seems to me laden with obscurity. But maybe there is a tight connection between the two notions: presumably, sentences with different commitments cannot be synonymous. On the other hand, synonymous sentences will have different commitments. (Still, the two notions would not collapse; non-synonymous sentences may or may not *share* their commitments.)
If this connection holds, a verdict regarding the synonymy will also yield one regarding ontological commitments. Be this as it may, I will not speak about commitments in my main text, but I shall hark back to this notion in footnote 40.

a. *Against the Synonymy Thesis*

My basic argument against the *Synonymy Thesis* is quite simple:

(P1)   Simple predications and corresponding property-ascriptions differ in their conditions of understanding.

(P2)   If two statements differ in their conditions of understanding, then they express different propositions and accordingly they are not synonymous.

(C)   A simple predication is not synonymous with the corresponding property-ascription.

The truth of the crucial premise (P1) follows from what I have said about canonical designators of properties. Understanding them is sufficient for knowledge of their reference. Thus, whoever understands a property ascription knows what property it is about; and thus, he has some knowledge about properties. But the same is not true for simple predications. One need not have any idea about a correspondence between predicates and some kind of entity to understand them. Especially, one no knowledge about properties is required for mastering these statements. Thus, a simple predication and its corresponding property-ascription essentially differ in their condition of understanding (*P1*), and since this is a sufficient condition for non-synonymy (*P2*), they are not synonymous (*C*).

But how do we acquire the conceptual framework of properties? We do so by learning to use new linguistic forms, a new fragment of our language. This fragment is essentially constituted by a bunch of (a) statements of specific forms and (b) relevant inferential relations between such statements and simple predications. An outline of this fragment is given by the following forms and rules of inference:[31]

(1) INTRODUCTION OF DESIGNATORS OF PROPERTIES IN PROPERTY-ASCRIPTIONS.

From any simple predication,

(i) *a* is *F*.

you can conclude to the corresponding property-ascription (where the implication, fo course, also holds in the other direction):

(ii-a) *a* has (possesses) $F_{[SUB]}$.
(ii-b) *a* has the property of being *F*.

(2) USING DESIGNATORS OF PROPERTIES *AS SINGULAR TERMS* BY ALLOWING QUANTIFICATION INTO THEIR POSITION.

Relevant inferences are for example the steps from statements of form

(i) *a* possesses $F_{[SUB]}$ and *b* possesses $F_{[SUB]}$ too,

to those of form:

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[31] Cp. also Brandt (1957) on the build-up of realistic languages.

(ii) There is something which *a* and *b* have in common.

(3) USING DESIGNATORS OF PROPERTIES IN SUBJECT POSITION IN STATEMENTS *ABOUT* PROPERTIES.

Apart from statements involving predicates custom-made for properties, as for example:

Wisdom is a virtue,
Red is a colour,

another important class are identity statements, both *contingent* ones, as

Wisdom is the virtue which Socrates was most famous for,

and *necessary* ones, as for example:

Being a bachelor is being a male who has never been married.

Our knowledge of properties requires mastery of the outlined fragment of English,[32] and this mastery is in turn everything that is required.[33] Talking about wisdom, intelligence, thickness, thinness etc. requires knowledge about properties and thus mastery of the relevant linguistic forms. But, and this is the crucial point, no such mastery is required for the ability to talk about wise, intelligent, thick, and thin people by using simple predications. *Therefore*, since a property-ascription involves richer conceptual than the corresponding simple predication, they are not the synonyms one might think they are.

Here an advocate of the *Synonymy Thesis* might try the following defence: Predication may, at least in simple cases, be described as the ascription of properties. Knowing this, one cannot understand a simple predication without being aware of which property is ascribed in it to the subject of the statement.

I can agree with nearly everything produced here by my opponent – only it doesn't affect my argument. The principle to which he draws attention and which I am willing to admit has the form of a conditional:

(SP)   Whoever understands a simple predication of the form "*a* is *F*", and who also knows that in such a predication one ascribes a property to the subject of the predication, must know *which* property is ascribed in it.

The antecedent of this conditional is itself composed of two conjuncts, the second of which is not trivially true of every competent user of simple predications. One need not know anything about properties to master simple predications. *Not anything*, and thus especially one need not know that

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[32] To avoid a kind of anglocentric fallacy I should add: or a corresponding fragment of another language.

[33] Hereby I do *not* imply that knowledge about properties is *meta-linguistic* knowledge. Properties are not linguistic entities and therefore knowledge about properties is not to be construed as knowledge about language. Nevertheless, *mastery* of certain linguistic forms *constitutes* knowledge about properties (where this constitution may or may not be in need of some additional constituting circumstances). Similarly, knowledge about natural numbers is no meta-linguistic knowledge, while at the same time mastery of certain linguistic forms (idioms relevant to counting) constitutes knowledge about numbers (where some such knowledge will not require much more than the mastery of certain linguistic forms while other requires most complicated processes of reasoning).

one ascribes properties with them.[34] The mastery of the general conceptual framework of properties, especially the possession of the concept of a property, is obviously a preliminary requirement for the acquisition of the knowledge relevant to (SP).

Of course, after my denial of the *Synonymy Thesis* one may confront me with the following question:

> What then, on your view, *is* the semantic relation between simple predications and property-ascriptions? And choose your answer carefully: If you cannot explain what the obviously very close relation consists in, if *not* in synonymy, you will render your position highly implausible.

Fair enough. My answer to this question follows straightforwardly from the analysis of property designators which I proposed in the first part of this paper (see (Schema Property Analysis)). A property-ascription employs a complex concept analysable in recourse to a general concept employed in the simple predication. Thus we may analyse a property ascription of the form

(EP)   *a* has the property of being *F* (or: $F_{[SUB]}$).

as follows:

(EP*)   *a* has the property which, of necessity, all and only *Fs* possess.

As can now be seen, on my account the meanings of simple predications and property-ascriptions are modelled as intimately related, while not the same.[35]

b. *Concessions – Virtual Set Theory and Virtual Property Talk*

To deny that simple predications and corresponding property-ascriptions are *very close* in meaning would surely be absurd; but this absurdity is nothing which my account could be accused of, since in fact it involves an explanation of the close semantic connections between these statements.
As can be seen from the quotations above, Quine would nevertheless sense absurdity here; it is already the denial of the *Synonymy Thesis* which he regards not only as false, but as absurd. The strong intuitions on which Quine is relying here (and which might well be shared some of those

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[34] Apparently the point I make is easily overseen. At least, it is *often* overseen; so for example by McGinn, when he writes: "When a predicate is understood what is known is precisely the identity of the property expressed by the predicate; just as understanding a name involves knowledge of the identity of its bearer." (McGinn 2000: 64) *Pace* McGinn I hold that to know the identity of a property, one must know that there are properties – one need not know the latter to understand the meaning of the general term "wise".

[35] The position I defend is immune against certain regress-arguments favoured by advocates of anti-realist views concerning properties, as for example by Teichmann (1989: 157f.). His argument presupposes that someone who (like myself) holds that designators of properties denote properties while predicates do not should also hold that a property-ascription somehow shows the logical form of the corresponding simple predication. I disagree. At least it is likely that I do – it depends, of course, upon how the notoriously obscure phrase of "logical form" is to be understood. In the most reasonable reading, a sentence *S* shows the logical form of another sentence *S** only if *S* and *S** express the same proposition (cf. Strawson 1974b). But since a simple predication and the corresponding property ascription do express different propositions neither of them depicts the logical form of the other (and furthermore, it is the simple predication which involves the more fundamental concepts).

who read the present article) must be taken serious. I shall show in this section how I can accommodate for them within my position (or rather, an extension of it that I am going to present in a minute). Notice that part of what is required has already been accomplished; the proximity in meaning which my account attributes to simple predications and property ascriptions may well be called upon to explain how the (albeit misguided) intuitions in question may arise. But there is more to be said; I am going to argue that the intuitions are not only close to the truth, but that they are true indeed – the apparent clash between them and my theses may be dissolved. To show how this is possible I will exploit Quine's idea of *Virtual Set Theory* (hereafter *VST*), an outline of which I will now present.[36]

Imagine a fragment of English not containing any idioms related to mathematical set theory; let us call it this language $\Re_S$ (for: English **r**educed with respect to **s**et-theory). By the following stipulation we may introduce some new linguistic forms into $\Re_S$:[37]

(Df. *Set*) $y \in \{x: Fx\} \leftrightarrow_{df.} Fy$.

What is introduced by (Df. *Set*) is the predicate "$\in \{x: Fx\}$" – it is introduced *as an unbreakable whole* by a kind of contextual definition. The new statements by which we thus enlarge our language are, by definition, nothing but *stylistic variants* of statements which had already been available to the speakers of $\Re_S$. We may go on and define some additional symbols, which are commonly used as predicates and functors for sets; for example we may have

(Df. $\subseteq$) $a \subseteq b \leftrightarrow_{df.} \forall x \, (x \in a \rightarrow x \in b)$

(Df. $\cup$)   "$a \cup b$" abbreviates "$\{x: x \in a \lor x \in b\}$".

While he have thus enriched the vocabulary of $\Re_S$, it is important to see that this only means an enrichments of stock of *phrases* available in $\Re_S$, while leaving its conceptual resources exactly as they were before. Especially, the new phrases of $\Re_S$, though look-alikes of set-theoretic statements, *are not about sets*. They are just about whatever those statements of $\Re_S$ were about that were used to define them. The sentence

(1)   Socrates $\in \{x: x$ is wise$\}$,

for example, will involve no more reference to a set than

(1*)   Socrates is wise,

does – none at all. The new sentences of $\Re_S$ just *simulate* certain parts of set-theory by their looks and thus form a *virtual* set theory. The set-theoretic sentences common to *VST* and genuine Set Theory (*GST* for short) therefore differ in meaning; while interpreted as a sentence of *GST*, (1) mentions a set, interpreted as a sentence of *VST*, it does not. And similar remarks apply to sentential components in *VST* and *GST*: just as the sentences in *VST* only seem to be about sets, *VST*'s expressions of the form "$\{ \dots \}$" only seem to be singular terms. Equally, the membership sign, "$\in$", only seems to signify a relation. No sets are recognised in *VST*, and thus there is no

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[36] Cp. Quine 1963: 15-21; 1970: 69f.

[37] (Df. *Set*) is not really a definition, but rather a definitional *schema*.

reference to them and nothing truly predicable of them – but of course, things are different with *GST*, where terms of the sort "{ … }" are singular terms referring to sets.

But not only do *Virtual Set Theory* and genuine one differ in their conceptual and referential resources, they also differ in the richness of their expressions. Some statements of *GST* do not have equivalents in *VST*. In *GST*, singular terms for sets may flank the membership expression "$\in$" on either side; in *VST* only the right-hand side allows for their occurrence. Furthermore, the existential quantifier in *GST* ranges over sets (among other things, if there are *Urelements*). It does not in *VST*, since *VST* does not recognise sets at all.

A last word on these issues: we may imagine a *hybrid* language incorporating both *VST* and *GST*. Indeed, we do not have to engage our fantasy to do so. Since every reader of these lines should be familiar by now with *VST* and *GST*, her idiolect will be the language sought-after. This implies that *some* set-theoretic statements have become ambiguous – they allow for different readings, depending on whether we interpret them by the standards of *VST* or by those of *GST*. Indeed, sentences containing more than one term of the form "{ … }" may even be interpreted as *hybrid statements*. As an example take the sentence (where "$\varnothing$" abbreviates "$\{x: x \neq x\}$"):

(3) $\varnothing \in \{x: x \notin x\}$.

Interpreted as a sentence of *VST*, (3) is ungrammatical (remember, in that dialect, terms of the form "$\{x: \ldots x \ldots\}$" appear only on the right-hand side of the membership sign); interpreted as belonging to *GST* it is either false or lacks a truth-value, because there is no set that contains everything which is not a member of itself. But if we give it a mixed reading, taking the grammatical predicate to be virtual set talk and the subject to be genuine, we get a plain and simple truth:

(3*) $\varnothing \notin \varnothing$.

Let me come back to the issue of properties now. Imagine a fragment of English not not containing any expressions for properties; let us call it this language $\mathfrak{R}_P$ (for: English **r**educed with respect to **p**roperty-talk). We may adopt the following stipulation to introduce some new linguistic forms into $\mathfrak{R}_P$:

(Df. *Property*) y has the property of being $F \leftrightarrow_{df.} Fy$.[38]

What is generated by (Df. *Property*) may be called *Virtual Property Talk* (*VPT*). We get a language containing expressions which, on their surface, seem to refer to properties. But they are introduced as nothing but stylistic variants of expressions not dealing with properties at all. Property terms of *VPT* are not used as singular terms, but they form inseparable parts of predicates. So *VST* simulates property talk; however, the fragment of English language which deals with properties allows for far more locutions than those introduced by (Df. *Property*).[39]

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[38] And, equally:

(Df. *Property**) y has $F_{[SUB]} \leftrightarrow_{df.} Fy$.

[39] Antirealists with regard to properties would usually hold that such phrases may be paraphrased away and produce the required transformation-rules. That is, they would try to convince us that property talk as a whole is nothing but virtual. Now as I have said in the beginning, I am not interested here in the controversy between realist and anti-realist conceptions of property talk. I chose realism as a working hypothesis and my

As you may expect, I could go on repeating much of what I have said about the difference between *VST* and *GST* now, just applying it this time to virtual *property* talk and genuine one. I will save some of my breath – the analogy between the cases should be evident.

Now for the explanatory value of the analogy. The coherence of *Virtual Property Talk* cannot be disputed – (Df. *Property*) is a perfectly sound way of introducing property locutions into a language. But not only is it coherent, it is also quite an obvious possibility. So realists about properties should acknowledge that a virtual understanding of property-ascriptions is available to natural speakers just as anti-realists should.

What I want to suggest is that the availability of virtual property talk may well play a role in our mastering of genuine property talk – we may *learn* basic idioms of genuine property talk *in their virtual reading* (equally, the availability of virtual set theory may play a role in learning genuine set theory). But the process of learning which a native English speaker undergoes will not be completed until he also learns to use property designators *as singular terms*. And the use of property designators as components of predicates is just one of a pattern of interlocking uses in which the status of these terms as singular terms consist.[40] That is, he will learn predicates applicable to them, quantify into their position and so on (see above for a list of linguistic forms that are crucial to this). By doing this, he also learns to use property terms with a meaning *different* from the meaning they had in *VPT*. So then, some English expressions containing property designators will be *ambiguous*; they allow for a reading according to *VPT* as well as for a different one, according to *GPT*.

Recognising this kind of ambiguity allows for a smooth explanation of the intuitions behind the *Synonymy Thesis*. It is grounded in the availability and importance of *virtual property talk*. And it is furthermore just *true*, but its truth does not conflict with my denial of the *Synonymy Thesis*. The intuition is correct *under one reading* of property terms, namely the virtual reading. It is false, however, under the reading along the lines of *genuine property talk*. Thus, I can now directly integrate Quine's and Strawson's intuition into my proposal.[41]

A last remark on the current picture: on reflection, it nicely fits with a certain awkwardness some people may feel about a consequence which should be drawn from the discovery of the Russellian property of not exemplifying itself. As we know, such a property cannot exist. So, although courage certainly is not courageous and therefore does not exemplify itself, there is nevertheless good reason to deny the following statement:

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leading question is *what* a realist should say about property talk (and not whether he should hold his tongue in the first place).

[40] This has been clearly seen by Quine; cp. his 1960: 119.

[41] Remember that they phrased their thesis partly in terms of *ontological commitments*. I chose to avoid this terminology in my discussion; but I may now add some remarks on it. With the picture drawn, we may lend good sense to their claim that by using property ascriptions one does not commit oneself to anything except that which one is committed to by the use of simple predications. Indeed, if one starts from simple predications and acquires as new linguistic forms property ascriptions, one is not *by that* committed to the acceptance of properties. The commitment will arise until one proceeds to use property designators *as singular terms*, thus adopting genuine property talk instead of virtual one.

(5)   Courage possesses the property of not exemplifying itself.

What does not exist cannot be exemplified; one of the existential presuppositions of (5) is not fulfilled.
Nevertheless, someone who was first willing to assent to (5) may, after being told about the lurking threat of inconsistency, take refuge in the following answer:

> Well, I see your point. There cannot be such a property. But still it seems that we may say something true by using (5). For could we not simply mean by it that courage does not exemplify itself?

Now if the picture I have drawn is on the right track, then so is this answer. Indeed, (5) has different readings; if we interpret it by the standards of *GPT*, the statement comes out false, for it presupposes there being a property which there cannot be. If we interpret it by the standards of *VPT* it yields non-sense. But if we interpret (5) as a *hybrid* sentence, by reading *only* the predicate *virtually*, but not the subject, then (5) is equivalent to the *true* statement

(5*)   Courage does not exemplify itself.

The parallels with the two readings of (3) is obvious.

3. The Categorial Concept of a Property

Let us look back at the most important steps in the acquisition of our conceptual framework of properties: we learn how to systematically derive, from general terms, other terms which have the look of singular terms, but which may be learned as components of unbreakable predicates (which is why the *Synonymy Thesis* has a true reading and its proponents can meet me halfway). But we also start using them *as* singular terms (which is why the *Synonymy Thesis* has also a false reading). Now this linguistic behaviour may be described as our (implicitly) adopting the premise that, apart from those things of which general terms are true, *there are things of another sort*, systematically related to general terms. Put metaphorically, we curdle predication to obtain properties.
But metaphors may led us astray; I do not want to suggest that properties are dependent upon language. Indeed, they are not. But the acquisition of the conception of properties is mediated by our acquisition of certain linguistic practises (which may or may not distinguish them from, say, spatio-temporal things; in any event, the kinds of linguistic forms relevant to both cases will differ significantly).

Now I want to conclude by showing what consequences we may draw about the categorial concept: [property] (this will be only a sketch). That I did not start my investigation from the categorial concept, but rather from singular concepts of properties, has a systematic reason: I hold that we can acquire the categorial concept neither *before* nor *independently* of acquiring singular property concepts. Of course, no particular concept out of the variety of singular property concepts we might learn plays any special role in acquiring the categorial concept. But we must acquire *some* such concepts to get a grip upon the categorial one. (The case is similar with the general concept of a

colour and singular concepts of colours; we cannot acquire the former concept without possessing some concepts of the latter kind. But we do not have to possess the concept of any colour in particular to learn to classify things as colours.)

We come to understand the categorial concept, I maintain, by generalising the way we learn property concepts. Singular property concepts are learned on the basis of their relations to corresponding general concepts. We understand the concept of wisdom as the concept of some entity which, of necessity, all and only wise things have in common. Similarly, redness is something shared by all and only red things etc. (we could carry on like this *ad infinitum*). We may now abstract from such a list and conclude that we can correctly say about any property, that it is something shared by all and only those things which are *thus and so*. Helping ourselves to a kind of non-standard quantification, we may then give the following analysis of the categorial concept of a property:

(Prop) x is a property $\leftrightarrow \exists F$ (being $F = x$ & $\square \, \forall y$ (y possesses $x \leftrightarrow y$ is F))

More needs to be said about the quantifier used here. Especially, the objection has to be considered that because I quantify into predicate position, the quantifier must be understood as ranging over properties, thus rendering my account circular. I can only hint at my answers:

(i)   first and foremost, we must distinguish between quantification into *predicate* position and predication into the position of a general term.[42] It is the latter which I make use of in (Prop).

(ii)   Contrary to quantification into predicate position, the quantification relevant to (Prop) has a proper translation into natural idiom. We may say that Socrates is *something* which we would like to be ourselves; *namely* wise. Or we may say that John is something truly admirable (namely honest), that Peter is something we never noticed before (namely courageous) etc. So we may recast (Prop) as follows:

(Prop*) x is a property if and only if there is *something*, such that being *it* is nothing but x and, necessarily, whatever possesses x, is *it*.

I agree that we would have difficulties to make proper sense of this, if we were not guided by the symbolic representation (Prop) – which is of course why I put it first. But the point I want to stress is that we do have the relevant quantificational idiom at our disposal. I suggest that by this means we manage to carry out the generalisation, by which we reach the categorial concept of a property from understanding the common form of singular property concepts.

(iii)   But, one may object, we know only of two kinds of quantification, objectual and substitutional one. The first kind cannot be relevant for (Prop), since an objectual variable has the position of a singular term. We can make sense of (Prop) by reading the quantifier substitutionally; but substitutional quantification is nothing but disguised objectual quantification over expressions. Thus, (Prop) renders properties language-dependent, a consequence I would not welcome.

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[42] While the difference between the two kinds of quantification are often blurred (especially in informal or semi-formal treatments of higher-order logic), it is clearly seen by Sellars (1960).

My answer is twofold; firstly, there are proponents of substitutional quantification who take it to range over expressions of possible extensions of natural languages; but neither are merely possible extensions of languages themselves languages, nor are expressions in merely possible languages really expressions. To think otherwise is to be confused by some philosophers' habit of misusing modal expressions (how nice it would be, if merely possible winners would be a sort of winners after all; but, as we all know, they are not). Thus, properties would not depend upon languages and expressions on this account. Nevertheless, I prefer a second reaction. It consists in rejecting the dichotomy of objectual and substitutional quantification. As Peter Simons put it, this dichotomy may be seen as an ungrounded article of faith.[43] A third kind of quantification, neither equivalent to objectual nor to substitutional one may be defended. But it may neither now nor at this place.[44]

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[43] Simons 1997: 263.

[44] Some efforts have already been spent on defending such a third kind of quantification (by quite respectable philosophers, I may add). See for example Künne 1992: 232f., van Cleve 1994: 588, Williamson 1999: 263, and Simons, op. cit., who cites Boolos and Prior as further proponents of the view in question.

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