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DISPOSITIONS – A PROPERTY OR A WAY OF BEING

Abstract: When we inquire about the nature of dispositions, we are asking, “Is a disposition some property or a way of being?” But, in asking that, we already assume the difference between a property as an ontic character and a way of being as an ontological character or entity. In both cases, a disposition is viewed as a characteristic of something, and so as something predicable, and not substantial. Regardless, we now see that an adequate understanding of what a disposition is requires further investigation. In particular, it is necessary to examine whether the concept of ontological difference refers to something real. This concept involves the distinction between being itself—conceived as potentially manifold—and particular entities, such as properties or individual things. If ontological difference does indeed refer to something real, we must also ask whether it serves as a useful theoretical instrument in clarifying the nature of dispositions. If it does refer to something real and is helpful, then our task would be to determine whether a disposition is a property or a way of being. If it is a way of being, then which way is it, and what is its inner structure? If it is not a way of being, then our task would be to determine which type of property it is and what it means to say that something is a property of property. Thus, our inquiry will be twofold: we will attempt to explore, by investigating the subject of dispositions, the question of ontological difference, and by investigating ontological difference, we will attempt to grasp the essence of dispositions.

Keywords: disposition, property, way of being, ontology, semantics, logic

1. Introduction: The concept of ontological difference and ontic-ontological distinction

The question of whether some phenomenon is a *way of being* or a *property* presupposes the notion of an *ontological difference*¹ as the con-

1 According to Heidegger, the ontological difference is the oldest, primordial difference, which precedes all science and philosophy, which is as old as language and humans alike. That difference is always implicit, even in our everyday language. When we

ceptual articulation of the distinction between being and entities. We distinguish entities as substances, then according to species and genera, properties and relations, but we distinguish being according to its *ways*. The sphere of entities and its divisions is called *the ontic sphere*. The sphere of being and its ways is called *the ontological sphere*.

The ontological difference is expressed negatively by the thesis that being is not another entity among entities. If every entity is an entity because it is something existent, and if the sum of all entities has something in common in virtue of which they are called entities, then that is a fact of their *being*². Even though it is not some entity, being is not non-being; that is, it is not nothing. By saying so, we acknowledge that being, even if it is not a *something*, surely *somehow is*. The answer to the question of *how something is* has to be given through the exposition of the concrete *way of being of an entity*. *How something is* represents an interrogative form for *the structure of being*.

The conceptual articulation of the difference between the being (*Sein*) and entities (*Seiendes*) was taken up by Heidegger from his early days. Heidegger's term for this distinction is *Ontologische Differenz* or *Unterscheidung*. According to Heidegger, far from being a product of our capacity to distinguish between what is and what is not the case, this differentiation of being and entities is the basis of that distinction. Philosophers "have traditionally presupposed this difference but failed to ask how it is possible (GA 14: 87n.; GA 70: 68; GA 71: 121, 126)" (Dahlstrom, 2021, 227). Or as Heidegger himself puts it: "The ontological difference is ... the difference ... in which being is distinguished from entities, the being that determines the latter at the same time in the constitution of its being ..." (GA 29/30: 521).

So, Heidegger not only acknowledges this difference as something real in the sense that it is not a mere notion without a reference in the world, but he postulates it as the foundation of his philosophical project.

Based on the ontological difference, Heidegger goes on to postulate a new distinction between *ontic* (*ontisch*) and *ontological* (*ontologisch*). The ontic concerns concrete properties and characteristics of an entity, in contrast to the ontological, which pertains to the specific way an entity of a certain kind has its characteristics. The early to mid-Heidegger centrally distinguishes between the ontic and the ontological, as his foundational

try to distinguish between two entities (*Seiendes*) A and B, and when we say "A is different than B", we already make an implicit difference between that "is" as a word for being (*Sein*) as well as A and B. For more on this, see in (Heidegger, 1982, p. 17–19).

2 Or we could say the fact that they *are*.

move is to keep entities (*Seiendes*) conceptually distinct from being (*Sein*). The adjective “ontological” concerns being – i.e., what it is for a given entity or class of entities to be – in contrast to the adjective “ontic,” which applies to entities as such, i.e., their properties, their various arrangements and behaviors, whatever can be known empirically about them. When it comes to understanding the basic contours that delimit the possible ways for an entity of a certain kind to be, we are concerned with the ontological constitution of entities of this kind; when it comes to matters of this or that entity’s concrete condition and properties, we’re in the realm of the ontic. Thus, while physical objects, animals, and human beings are all entities, the ways in which they have characteristics – and accordingly the specific nature of their respective characteristics – differ fundamentally: physical objects are occurrent (*vorhanden*), animals live, *Dasein* exists. These terms indicate different ontological constitutions, each of which delineates a range of how entities of the respective types can be at all” (Slaby, 2021, 542).³

We do not need to go further in Heidegger’s way of differentiating and articulating ways of being because we do not here want to see what Heidegger’s concept of dispositions would be. Here, it is just important to stress the idea that when we are inquiring about the ontological status of some phenomenon, we have in mind the three possibilities: that the phenomenon can be an entity in a substantial sense, or some property, or some way of being of entity.

We are inquiring about dispositions here. Are they some being or a way of being? If they are some entity, it seems that it should be a property. If disposition is a property, what kind of property is it? If a disposition is not an entity but a way of being, what is its structure? How does a disposition determine the being of entities to which it belongs?

However, before we answer all these questions, we can wonder about the very manner in which we asked. **Is the concept of ontological difference ultimately justified, and if it is, what reasons can be given in support of its legitimacy?** What is this distinction for? Is the discourse about being and its ways even necessary, or is it reducible to the discourse about entities and their properties and relations?

3 Here, it is important not to identify Heidegger’s ontic-ontological distinction with Peter Van Inwagen’s distinction of the same name since for him, that difference concerns the division of arguments. Inwagen calls ontic that infinite class of valid arguments in which one starts from a premise that sets some set of properties as a sum of certain conditions, which, if fulfilled, in the conclusion, it turns out that there is something that exemplifies those properties. On the other hand, he calls ontological arguments that start from the same premises ontic, but in the conclusion, the exemplifying entity turns out to be God (Van Inwagen, 1977, 375).

Therefore, the purpose of this inquiry is twofold. On the one hand, concerning the example of dispositions, we want to examine the justification and appropriateness of the concept of ontological difference. On the other hand, the examination of the ontological difference and eventual legitimization of the discourse on the ways of being should help us illuminate the nature of dispositions.

2. The grounding puzzle of the question of dispositions

What does it mean to say that something is dispositional? In the philosophical literature, dispositions are typically understood to be properties. They are either regarded as a specific kind of property or as expressing the general nature common to all properties. Alternatively, some accounts interpret dispositions not merely as properties, but as a distinct way of being.

This means that, on the assumption of the ontological difference, the question of the nature of dispositions is the question of its ontic or ontological character.

But actually, the real puzzle in the question of the nature of dispositions lies in its ontological status. By this, we mean that because nobody would deny the existence of the phenomena that are recognized as realizations or manifestations of dispositions, the difficulty becomes the task of articulation of the being of the dispositions when they are not yet realized. So, if we accept that dispositions *somehow are* (that they are real) when they are not realized, then the question is whether they are properties, way of being of properties, or ways of being of entities themselves.

Some suggest that dispositions, when they are not realized, are nothing real, but simply our way of talking about entities and their future events. That is the grounding puzzle.

The same problem was at the center of the Antic discussion about the ontological status of δύναναις. Let's take a brief look at that subject.

3. Origin of the concept: Aristotle's articulation of δύναναις against Megarians reductionism

We owe the concept of a disposition, like many others, to the very beginnings of ontological thinking. We find the first clear articulation of this notion in Aristotle's concept of δύναναις, which was originally understood in unity with ἐνέργεια and/or ἐντελέχεια and according to move-

ment (κίνησις). Before Aristotle, δύναμις meant force, power, strength, possibility, ability. In Aristotle's interpretation, δύναμις becomes one of the fundamental ontological concepts used to name the specific way of being of almost all entities in the world⁴. For Aristotle, therefore, what we call a disposition is undoubtedly the way of being⁵.

With this concept of δύναμις Aristotle tried to avoid, on the one hand, Parmenides' static ontology⁶ and to defend the phenomenon of *movement* (in all its modes of "emergence, decay, multiplication, diminution, transformation, change according to place" (*Cat.* 15a13)) from banishment to bare appearance and illusion, and on the other hand to deny the Megarian thesis of the identity of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια by reduction to the absurd consequences⁷. By this, Aristotle wanted to show that between being and non-being, *there are* (manifoldness – πολλά/πολλαχῶς) *ways* (τρόπον/τρόποι) *of being* (εἶναι) that enable the transition from one to the other through movement. He listed the most fundamental ways of being in the scheme of categories.⁸ Apart from categories, Aristotle dealt with other ways of being in almost all other writings, and among the fundamental ones he placed four: being in the sense of the scheme of categories (κατὰ τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατογορίας), being in the sense of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, being in the sense of truth and lies (ὡς ἀληθὲς ἢ ψεῦδος), and being as an accident (κατὰ συμβηβικός)⁹. Aristotle's understanding of δύναμις as a way of being will also be illustrated by the example of the fragility of a glass.

4 Aristotle explicitly writes (*Meta.* Θ, 1046a8): "καὶ δυνατὰ καὶ ἀδύνατα λέγομεν τῷ εἶναι πῶς ἢ εἶναι" – "We also speak of this way of 'powerful', and 'powerless' to the extent that something is or is not in a certain manner".

5 One author who agrees with our reading of Aristotle, but only with different terminology, is Witt: "... Witt (2003) argues that Θ investigates potentiality and actuality as ways of being, which may apply to any of the kinds of beings" (Louise Gill, 2005: p. 30); and also: "According to Witt, Q contains two main arguments, first concerning the existence of δύναμις (Θ, 3), which she thinks can mean either causal power or potentiality (= inactive power), and second concerning the priority of actuality or activity in relation to δύναμις (Θ, 8)" ... (Louise Gill, 2005: p. 64).

6 For a classic interpretation of Parmenides ontology see in: (Anscombe, 1981, p. 3–9), (Arsenijević, 2007, p. 133–140).

7 More on this topic, precisely on the so-called Megarians and their teaching, see in: Chame, S. (2024), On the Megarians of *Metaphysics* IX 3. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 106 (2), 177–206.

8 I showed that in the paper *Aristotle's teaching on categories in light of question of the relation of language and reality* presented on student conference in Belgrade in 2024 (text is still in print), that the scheme of categories has its own ontological foundation and that the categories have their ontological and even ontic sense in addition to their linguistic-logical meaning.

9 The question about the prior unity of these four senses of being was the problem of special attention in Aristotle, but for answering it, we have no time now.

Namely, when we say that a glass is fragile, we mean that it can break. It has fragility as its internal possibility. Fragility is part of its δύναμις. However, while the glass is fragile, it means that it is not broken. How is it that when something does not yet exist, we can attribute it positively? This upset Parmenides and Megarians. Parmenides declared it as a *contradictio in adiecto* and therefore dismissed it as meaningless discourse. The Megarians denied the difference and, through reduction, identified the dispositions with their actuality (ἐνέργεια). That is, according to Parmenides the glass is not breakable, because breaking as such is not possible, because it represents a kind of process or change that implies movement, and movement is the transition from being to non-being, and any discourse about non-being is meaningless and false, for the Megarians the glass is breakable, but only when and while it breaks (*Meta.* 1046b29–30). There is no such thing as a fragility that precedes the breaking itself. Fragility and breaking differ linguistically, *but only linguistically*, and this difference tempts us to attribute it to reality itself. For the Megarians, the discourse on fragility before and independently of actual breaking does not refer to anything actual, so is, strictly speaking, either unnecessary and meaningless or reducible to the discourse on actual breaking. Aristotle rejects both solutions.

As a principle element of his philosophy, Aristotle accepted the thesis of “saving phenomena”¹⁰ and the so-called “common-sense intuitions of the sacred” whenever and as much as possible. Since the discourse on dispositions is implicit in everyday life, which takes place in parallel and independently of any philosophical and scientific theory, according to Aristotle, it should be preserved if possible. We mark the difference between movements and changes and breaking and fragility in everyday life. So, one must see what the difference is if he wants to neglect the Parmenides-Megarian thesis.

3.1. Aristotle’s positive solution

To reject a Megarian¹¹ identification of, or reduction of δύναμις to actuality (ἐνέργεια), Aristotle provides a few arguments with the same logical structure. They are constructed in such a way that from the (Megarians) premise that δύναμις is identical with actuality, and that when there

10 This refers to the self-evidency and reality of the ways in which thing looks (appears) to us before any theoretical considerations.

11 “The traditional view of the Megarian school takes Diogenes’s testimony at face value; that is, it holds that the school’s doctrine resulted from a synthesis between Socratism and Eleaticism” (Chame, 2024, 3).

is no actuality, there is also no such a thing as δύναις, we come to the absurd consequences.

Aristotle starts from the example of learnable skills, which are acquired dispositions (δύναις) (1046b30–1047a5). In the case of painting, if we accept that there is no skill of painting in a painter, or more precisely that a painter does not possess it when he does not paint, then we are forced to conclude that whenever a painter starts to paint again, he in some way re-acquires the skill. Because that “mysterious” re-acquiring of skill appears absurd, Aristotle concludes that the premise is absurd. This is the case for all learnable skills.

The second argument is about the dispositions of non-living entities, and the third considers natural dispositions of living beings (1047a5–1047a10). The second argument is more complex because it refers to Aristotle’s theory of sensual perception and denies Protagoras’ theory of perception. This argument could be considered circular because already in his work on the soul *De Anima*, Aristotle uses the distinction of δύναις-ἐνέργεια as grounds for neglecting Protagoras’ teaching. So, we can’t go deep here about that.

In the case of the natural dispositions of living beings, the argument is structurally analogous to the first one. If we accept that when some man or animal does not possess the faculty of perceiving, we are then forced to conclude that a sleeping man is blind and deaf and that he immediately acquires that faculty when he gets up. This goes for all dispositions that are natural as a type of δύναις, such as fertility, physical strength, the capacity for speaking, walking, etc.

The last argument is modal, and it is about postulating a real (ontological, not just linguistical or conceptual) difference between δύναις and ἐνέργεια, and to again reduce the absurd the thesis about the identity δύναις and ἐνέργεια (1047a10–1047a20). **For if possibility is identical with actuality, then we must deny that anything which is not actual can exist in any way whatsoever.** By that, we are left only with the distinction of actual and impossible. As Aristotle suggests, this thesis implies that motion and generation are impossible because that which is standing will always stand, and that which is sitting will always sit; because if it is sitting it will not get up. Because of Aristotle’s principle of the preserving phenomena and the self-evidence of being of motion, change, and generation in experience, Aristotle concludes δύναις and ἐνέργεια are different.

With these arguments, Aristotle succeeded in making space for accepting the necessity of differentiating δύναις from ἐνέργεια. But we still do not see clearly how δύναις should be understood, whether as some

property, type of properties, some entity in a substantial sense, or as a way of being.

But one thing is certain: The Crucial point about this debate is not Aristotle's counter-argument, but that debate is still alive, and continues on the same grounds. *A Megarian thesis is implicit in all modern reductionist views on the nature of dispositions* such as Carnap's or Ryle's (1949) views. And so, if it can be decided whether Aristotle can stand up against it, then neglecting modern versions of reductionism may have to be grounded on Aristotle's concept of δύναναι.

We believe it is so. Thus, we will first show in which aspect Aristotle's concept of δύναναι is better and different from the modern dispositionalist view, and then in what way it can be made stronger.

So, first of all, let's take a brief look at two basic contemporary views on dispositions. One, which is in line with the Megarian thesis in some sense, says that dispositions in a non-actualized state are nothing more than a special type of statement – a discursive category. Then, the other view, on which dispositions are taken to exist before their realizations, but as some property.

4. Contemporary debate

To the question of dispositions in the contemporary discussion have come two groups of possible answers¹². For the first group, which I call *the linguistic view*¹³ on dispositions, dispositional terms are just linguistic categories. It's a way of talking – a special type of ascription about objects, their properties, and future events¹⁴. For them, there is not anything in the world to which the predicate “dispositional” refers, besides objects and their behavior. For the other group, which I call *the property view*, dispo-

12 Clark has a similar view: “And the first thing to point out about the contemporary distinction is that there is not just one, but in fact (at least) two distinctions that use the language of ‘categorical’ versus ‘dispositional’; and each of those two distinctions has a different subject matter. One of them does not have any direct implications on metaphysics but rather is a distinction between two sorts of ascription or two sorts of truths. The second distinction concerns the nature of properties, and thus does purport to be straightforwardly metaphysical” (Clark, 2014).

13 This idea can be traced back to the early 20th century, when philosophers from the Wien circle had a construction of a totally “empiricist language in which all meaningful sentences including dispositional sentences can be analyzed in observational and extensional-logical terms” (Fara & Choi, 2018).

14 For example, Carnap or Ryle (1949).

sitional terms do have reference, and they refer to actual properties possessed by objects¹⁵.

Of course, these main two groups are very divided in themselves by questions such as what kind of ascriptions are sufficient for speaking about dispositions or whether all properties are dispositional versus just some of them, etc.

I will be defending the thesis that claims the following things about the nature of dispositions:

- 1) *The discourse about dispositions does not consist just in special types of ascriptions about future events, but it has reference even when dispositions are not yet realized.*
- 2) *Dispositions are not properties at all.*
- 3) *Dispositionality consists of a way of being of entities.*

4.1. Dispositions are not just a type of ascriptions

I have two major objections to *the linguistic view* on dispositions:

- a) The purpose for this kind of reduction of dispositions to ascriptions of the future events and possible behaviors of objects lies in the quest to deny the thesis that dispositions are some existing properties, even when they are not realized. So, the problem with this strategy is that reduction is based on the assumption that dispositions are properties, which is, in my opinion, wrong. The whole strength of the *linguicist* argument lies in the weakness of the *property view*. Arguments for this thesis will be given in the next section.
- b) As I already mentioned, *the linguistic view* is just a more sophisticated version of the Megarian thesis. Even if it is a more sophisticated version, I still mean that Aristotelian contra-arguments hold for them in the same sense as for the Megarians because Aristotle didn't hold the property view on dispositions, but he considered δύναμις a way of being.

15 "So to be categorical is to be actual or occurrent —"here and now." Dispositionality, by contrast, is a matter of *what things do owing to their circumstances*. Heil's view of properties differs from Lowe in that, for Heil, dispositionality is, indeed, "built into the properties." That is to say that properties themselves are irreducibly dispositional... So, like Lowe, Heil understands the categorical—dispositional distinction to *reside at the level of predication*. He states that: "A property's dispositionality and its qualitativity are ... the selfsame property differently considered." ... For Heil there is nothing beyond the properties' natures themselves that make dispositional ascriptions true" (Clark, 2014).

4.2. Dispositions are not properties

The main problems with any *property view* on the nature of dispositions are these:

- a) It does not recognize the (ontological) difference between a way of being and a property.
- b) It does not possess a clear concept of property.
- c) It has trouble explaining the being of dispositional properties when they are not actualized, which is needed to avoid reduction to categorial properties.

These three theses are connected such that the second and the third follow from the first one. It all starts with ignoring ontological difference and the ontic-ontological distinction. It's not important here to consider or even accept a Heideggerian way of distinguishing ways of being. It is sufficient to accept this difference itself as the starting point of inquiry, and then to argue that the question of dispositions lies in the ontological sphere. That is, it is the question of the ontological status of entities, their way of being, and not of the ontic sphere, which considers the properties and other ontic characteristics of entities in a way that science approaches it.

So, from the assumption of ontological difference, the identification of a property with a way of being is possible only in the numerical, but not structural, sense. By that we mean, because every entity has its way of being, every property has a way of being. And in a numerical sense, we can't differentiate between a property and its way of being like we differentiate one property or entity from another. But that does not mean that the property is the same "thing" as its way of being. The reason for this is two-fold. First, all ontic characteristics of entities, with entities themselves, are somehow grounded in their ways of being. And second, from the ontic point of view, besides properties, we can't find anything else in entities, but properties are not all characteristics that could be found in the entities because there is another ontological point of view.

So, if we want to prove that dispositions are not properties, we only have to look at entities to which we ascribe dispositions from the ontic point of view and to look to where dispositions are. Briefly, we will find nothing. Look at the glass, for example, when it is not broken. Where is its fragility? Or look at any of the five senses of a man when he is sleeping. Where are perceptions? Or take a look at the man who is good at football whether he is lying in bed or playing the game. Where is that ability, in his feet or in his head?

But if we can't find these dispositional "properties" beside the "categorical" properties of entities, we can say that dispositional properties are the same properties that some call categorical. From this step, we can conclude, as some *property view* defenders do, that all properties are dispositional and that their dispositionality consists in its casual powers, or some inner nature, or ability to manifest itself under certain circumstances. But in this we didn't achieve anything. Because we again fall on *the linguistic view* which stresses discourse on future events and conditions for manifestations, with the difference that dispositional properties do exist as characteristics of entities independently of their manifestations, but their ontological status – the way in which dispositional properties are – remain in "fog".

This step also reveals that for the clear concept of property, whether "categorical" or "dispositional", it's necessary to have already articulated a way of being in virtue of which something is a property and not a relation or particular entity. And the importance of accepting the ontological difference becomes more obvious.

So, the main task here is to escape reduction of any sort. Both *linguistic* and *property views* involve reduction. The *linguistic view* is more explicit: they openly say that there is no such thing as a disposition without a realization, there are just things in the world that can do something under certain conditions, and some that cannot. This means dispositional ascriptions have their reference only when comes to realization, i.e., in the future.

Defenders of the *property view*, because they operate with only ontic view on dispositions, actually do the same thing because they connect dispositions with realizations, with the only difference being that they claim that dispositional terms have reference before realization. But that reference is "some mysterious inner essence" that they call dispositional, or it is about non-claimed reduction to the actual properties or states of affairs of objects.

From this it follows that the only solution for escaping reduction of any sort is to postulate dispositions as a way of being, which somehow are present in the ontological structure of entities before realization. The reason for that option is the same as Aristotle's, which we already mentioned.

5. Dispositions as a way of being

And now we come to the crucial question of this work: Is a disposition a way of being of entities, or properties, or relations, or all three of them? But, before this, let's briefly elucidate the concept of a way of being.

5.1. Aristotle's criteria

The first, but not the most clear and sufficient articulation of the concept of a way of being, as far as I know, is found in Aristotle's work. Often, in his text, we find the question of *the way* or *the manner in which* some phenomenon *is*. For Aristotle, that was one of the most basic and important philosophical questions. In his probably first or earliest work, *Categories*, he implicitly used what I call *ontological criteria* for differentiating things under the different categories. *That criteria consist of revealing the way of being of some phenomenon, by which that thing can be put under some of the categories. Expressed in reverse order*, every category, as part of its concept, has conditions that the entity has to fulfill to get subsumed under it¹⁶. We are now focusing on the ontological.

Take, for example, the two categories, the first category of substance (οὐσία), and the second, of relation (τὰ πρὸς τι). Things from the world that can be named as substances have to fulfill these ontological criteria; i.e., they have to be in this way:

- The thing has to be only in virtue of itself, that is, to have independent existence
- The thing has to be as one and indivisible in its being
- The thing in virtue of its being has to be capable of possessing other things which can change, without losing its identity, etc..

16 I think that we can find three senses of the category:

1. *The grammatical sense* of categories: Categories are uncomposed linguistic expressions, from which sentences are created by assembling, like any claims about something.
2. *The logical sense* of categories: Categories are those unassembled linguistic expressions, by combining which judgments are formed. Bringing about judgments about being it is determined (κατηγορεῖν) in a potentially true or false way. Categories outside judgments have no truth value, and in judgments they can occupy two possible logical functions, of subject or predicate.
3. *The ontological sense* of the categories is divided into two parts, hierarchically arranged as follows:
 - α) *The purely ontological sense* of the category consists in the presentation of way of being of the thing, grounded in two basic ways of being as subject or as predicate.
 - β) *The ontic sense* of categories consists in naming and thus referring to entities and their characteristics.

What has puzzled interpreters for centuries is that Aristotle names linguistic expressions with categories that refer to reality and the logical functions of those expressions and the very aspects of reality that are named by the expressions, without clearly explaining in the text which of these meanings the category signifies, but it must be inferred from the context of occurrence.

So, for a thing to be called a substance, a way of being of an entity has to be constituted like this.

Also, for the category of relations, conditions are such that things are something only in relation to something else. That being only in relation to its other way of being (relational) from the substantial one.

And we agree with Aristotle that a disposition or *δύναμις* is a term that refers to some specific way of being that does not fall under any of the categories, but is present in every category of being, i.e., in some sense, present in almost everything. Now we have come to the point when we have to describe this peculiar dispositional way of being.

What Aristotle failed to recognize — regardless of whether he was on the right path in his investigation — was precisely what Heidegger succeeded in discerning. Heidegger recognizes that every way of being has its constitution or structure. But also, there is one big and basic difference between the human way of being and the ways of being of all other entities in the world.

5.2. Heideggerian concept of the structure of the way of being

For Heidegger, every way of being (*Sein*) of entities (*Seiendes*) consists of some structure. Because of that, “Heidegger’s approach to ontology is structural in the sense that he generally proceeds by identifying the structural features constitutive of the being of entities ...” (Wrathall, 2021, 705). As Mark A. Wrathall rightly continues: “A structure is an organization of constituent features of a whole – an organization in virtue of which that whole can perform a function. Thus, Heidegger explains, structure is “read off” of a function (GA 1:417/BH 62). “One formally describes a structure by specifying the types of relationship that necessarily must obtain between types of elements in order for the whole to perform its function. Thus, everything that performs a certain function will possess those types of elements standing in that type of relation ... The structure opens up and constrains the function that the entity can perform” (Wrathall, 2021, 705).

We do not here go deep into Heidegger’s ontology and his differentiation of different ways of being. Most importantly, we must make explicit the basic differences between Heidegger’s and Aristotle’s articulation of the notion of the way of being (i.e., actually the whole metaphysical tradition between the two mentioned thinkers).

The basic differences are:

a) *Absolute difference between human and non-human¹⁷ ways of being*

For Heidegger, *existence* (*Existenz*) is a term that denotes only the human way of being. That means that only humans *exist*, while all other entities *are* in some other ways. Heidegger's technical term for human entities is *Dasein*. Literally, this German word means *being-there*. Before Heidegger, the term *Dasein* had almost the same meaning as the terms *Existenz* (existence) or *Sein* (being), and all three of them were used for all entities without any difference.

The basic difference between humans and all other entities is that despite the fact that all entities somehow are, only humans are “conscious” of their being and being in general. That is, only humans possess some understanding (*Verstehen*) of being (*Sein*). This fact is a ground point for human possibility, not just in philosophy, but for being human at all. That's why humans are called *Dasein* or being-there, because they are constituted in such a way that we are “the place” on which being itself comes to the word, the appearance, revelation, and understanding of itself.

So, human beings possess their own structure of their way of being. That structure is called ontological-existential because existence is the name for humans' way of being. This leads us to the second basic difference:

b) *Ontological and epistemic primacy of articulation of the human way of being over the conceptual articulation of the ways of being of non-human entities and the concept of being in general*

In the first chapters of *Being and Time*, Heidegger gives an argument on why it is necessary, in order to get a full understanding of being in general, to start from analyzing one peculiar entity and its way of being. That entity is, of course, *Dasein*, and its way of being is called *existence*. **The idea is the following: due to the inseparability of any way of being from the concrete entity that is in that way, it is necessary, for the sake of obtaining the concept of being in general, to first determine which**

17 Here it is important to note one thing about the “human” and “non-human” way of being distinction. Namely, Heidegger consciously and deliberately refrains from using the term “human” when he talks about the beings that we ourselves always are, but instead uses the already mentioned technical term *Dasein*. He thereby wants to avoid the traditional metaphysical assumptions and implications with which the term “human” is saturated. Another reason for such a decision is the possibility, which Heidegger shows, that human is spoken of in all three senses (or ways) of being, which are *presence-at-hand* (*Vorhandenheit*), *readiness-to-hand* (*Zuhandenheit*) and *existentiality* (*Existenzialität*), while *Dasein* can only be attributed to existentiality. However, in order to aide the potential reader, we will not stick strictly to Heidegger's terminological guidelines, and will retain the discourse on “man”.

entity can serve as the exemplar for acquiring this concept. Reasons for depicting *Dasein* and analyzing its existence are as follows:

- Dasein is a unique entity in that it alone is capable of raising the question of being.
- This possibility lies in the core of the structure of *Daseins'* way of being (existence)
- The structure of Dasein's way of being is most accessible to Dasein itself.

This is why for Heidegger, in place of “first philosophy” should be what he called *fundamental ontology* or *existential analytics of Dasein*, and not the conceptual articulation of being as such (*being qua being*) as it is in Aristotle.

These things cannot be found in Aristotle's ontology. For Aristotle, the difference between human and non-human entities is not philosophically that fundamental. The way of being of humans is not radically different from the ways of being of other entities; in fact, for Aristotle, humans exist as a special type of living inanimate entity who have some higher properties than “regular” animals.

These two assumptions have special implications for comprehending the nature of dispositions, which we see as a further development of the Aristotelian ground. We will make this clear in the final part of the paper.

Keeping this in mind, we will first try to prove the necessity of comprehending dispositions as ways of being of entities and not as some property or discursive category. Then, in the final section we will see how we can get to the final articulation of the concept of a disposition as a way of being through a kind of synthesis of Aristotle's and Heidegger's ontological achievements.

6. Three examples to prove dispositions as ways of being

There are three basic types of dispositions, and by analyzing exemplary cases of each type, we will show that dispositionality consists of a special way of being of an entity and that it is not a matter of properties or a mere linguistic category. The basic types of dispositions are natural or innate dispositions of living beings, acquired dispositions of human beings, and “natural” dispositions of inanimate beings such as natural elements or objects of the human world.

We will take examples of the three basic types of dispositions: the *disposition of motion* as a natural disposition of living beings, *reading ability* as an acquired ability of humans, and *freezeability* as the “natural” disposition of water as one nonliving entity.

6.1. Disposition of motion

One of the fundamental dispositions of all living beings is the capacity for movement in the sense of change of place. Let's consider the disposition to move to be a mere linguistic ascription about the future that speaks of how living beings can behave under certain circumstances, without saying anything positive about them when they are at rest. This can be answered as Aristotle did, by noting that it follows from there that if the disposition to move does not exist outside of movement itself, then living beings actually and “mysteriously” acquire this disposition every time they move.

But does it follow that the disposition of motion is some kind of property? We will easily see that it is not. Because nowhere on any part of the body of living beings do we find the disposition of movement among other ontic characteristics such as size, shape, color, arrangement of organs, etc.

The disposition of movement must then be the way of being of living beings. They are the ones that can move or be at rest. The *being* of living beings, as inseparable from the entities themselves, is that which passes from the mode of rest to the activation of its innate disposition of movement and *vice versa*. Movement as a function is a structural moment of the way in which living beings are.

6.2. Reading ability

People have the disposition to read. It is about the ability to interpret the sign system. It is unnecessary to give a precise and complete definition of the phenomenon of reading here. We are interested only in the ontological status of this disposition when it is not realized, i.e., when a person does not read either because he is sleeping or doing something else while awake. Is reading, taken as a paradigmatic example of an acquired human disposition, at all something real beyond its realization, and if so, is it some kind of property or a way of human beings?

Let's again consider the ability to read as a linguistic ascription of the future that speaks to how a person can behave under certain circumstances,

without saying anything positive about a person when he does not read. This can also be answered as Aristotle did, by noting that it follows that if the ability to read does not exist outside of reading itself, then every time a person starts to read, he suddenly learns or “mysteriously” remembers or learn these skills.

That is, of course, absurd. How, then, is reading then a property? It seems that it is not, because if we look at the human body, and its organs used for reading – eyes, brain, and hands – we will not come across the ability to read anywhere. If it is not even a property, therefore, something ontic, then it seems must be a way of being.

The disposition to read is, therefore, one way in which a previously literate person exists. This disposition is the name of an acquired function, through the acquisition of which man enriched the structure of his existence, with an additional possibility of his existence. And indeed, it is absurd to attribute the disposition of reading to any part of man, instead of to man as a whole individual being. Human existence is not something material and ontic, and its structural moments, functions, and dispositions cannot be located among its ontic and material characteristics.

The way in which a disposition exists when it is not active is *possession*. By moving into actuality, changes occur again in the way of existence. That is, the same human existence changes from passive possession to active disposal of that power when a person gets hold of a text. The very existence of an entity that is the subject of an acquired disposition is *dispositional*.

6.3. Freezeability of water

As for the dispositions of inanimate entities, let's take, for example, the disposition of water to freeze at a certain temperature. For the same Aristotelian reasons, we see that it is absurd to claim that the freezeability is merely an ascription of possible future responses to temperature. Because that would mean that the water is freezable only when it freezes. This is not the case because when it's cold, water freezes, and it freezes in the cold because as such, and therefore by itself, it freezes in cold conditions.

Also, it is obvious that we cannot find such a thing as freezeability among the properties of water when it is in a liquid or gaseous state. Each aggregate state of water is a way of its being, i.e., a set of functions of possible behavior under certain conditions. We see that the disposition to freeze, therefore, is the way in which water is in a liquid state.

7. Conclusion

– Final articulation of the concept of a disposition (on the relationship between Aristotle's and Heideggers approach)

So, if it is rightly justified that disposition should be seen as a way of being, we now have to see where the differences are between Aristotle's and Heidegger's concepta of a disposition as a way of being. And most important, we will ask: are these differences in contradiction or can they be synthesized in a wider picture?

We will start from the common points on which Aristotle and Heidegger are in agreement:

- Dispositional terms denote the various ways of beings of entities and not some properties or just linguistic categories
- The dispositional way of being is one of the fundamental ways of being common to almost all entities
- Dispositions are something "real", that is, something which is grounded in the entities themselves even before its realization and manifestation
- There are various types of dispositions

This list could surely be longer, but this is sufficient for us now. So, let's take stock of the differences.

- Aristotle does not mark the difference between human and non-human ways of being in the way that Heidegger does, and because of that, he does not make that radical distinction between humans' and non-humans' dispositions.
- While for Aristotle ἐνέργεια have ontological, temporal, and logical priority over the δύναμις in the case of dispositions, **Heidegger does not accept this primacy. For Heidegger, things are opposite in that for Daseins, dispositions have ontological primacy over their actualization.**
- This is because of human freedom. By contrast, according to non-human entities, Dasein does not have priviously determinated purposes of its existence, but has the freedom to choose and even create it on his own. Heidegger says: "In each case Dasein *is* its possibility, and it 'has' this possibility, but not just as a property [*eigenschaftlich*], as something present-at-hand would. And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can*, in its very Being, "choose" itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only "seem" to do so" (Heidegger, 1962, 68).

Is this a problem for a task of synthesis of this sort? Can Aristotle's and Heidegger's notions on dispositions be made coherent?

In my opinion it can be done.

Although they are using different terminology, Heidegger and Aristotle reach many common results via different paths. Nevertheless, on the example of dispositions, there were manifestations of those basic differences in approaches between the two thinkers. Aristotle could not distinguish between dispositions as Heidegger does because the ontological difference was not laid down and illuminated to the extent that it was for Heidegger. Then, in terms of understanding the nature of man and the difference between humans and non-human beings, Aristotle did not see such a gap as Heidegger posited.

That is, the teleology that Aristotle discovered on objects of human production, he used as an explanatory ontological model for the whole of the cosmos, and thus in return for human nature itself, and this is what Heidegger tries to avoid. For him, such extensions are an example of "forgetting of being" because in these cases there is always a tacit and often unconscious identification of human and non-human ways of being. That is, the absolute difference between them is forgotten, in order to move from the difference in "*esse*" to the differences in terms of "*res*", i.e. properties, which represents a fall into the ontic in science and a fall into the *reification* of human nature in the ontological plane.

But by accepting Heidegger's insistence on the primacy of possibility over actuality in the case of human dispositions, the scope of Aristotle's principle of the primacy of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις is just narrowed to essentially nothing else. This narrowing is justified on the assumption of prior acceptance of radicality in the difference between human existence and the ways in which other non-human entities exist. Acceptance of this difference can also be understood as a supplement and a deeper and further elaboration of Aristotle's attempt to demarcate humans and non-humans by means of λόγος, νοῦς, political association, etc.

In this sense, I think that concerning the ontological status of dispositions, after Aristotle and Heidegger, there is nothing more significant to say, which does not mean that there is nothing more significant to say and discover about dispositions in general. I believe that the approach to dispositions must be focused on research concerning concrete phenomena, primarily in the human world of spirituality, culture, politics, etc., which after an ontological examination were revealed as dispositional. Through such analysis, we pave the way for further scientific investigations and better understanding of the thematized phenomena.

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