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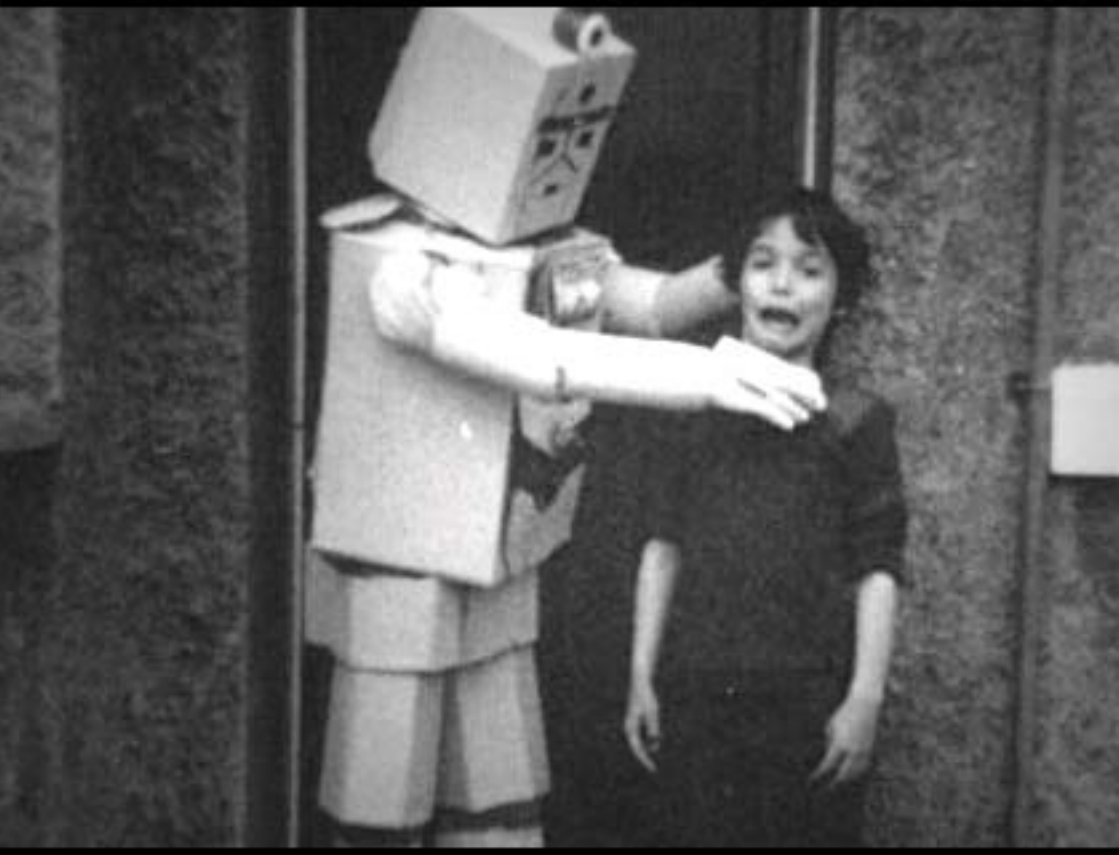

THE FUTURE

Issue 7
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CRITIQUE

Durham University Undergraduate Philosophy Journal

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ISSUE 7: THE FUTURE

Contents

INTRODUCTION

What will happen in the future is a matter which has recurrently engaged the imaginations of writers, artists, and scientists. But it is a topic of real significance for philosophers, too, as we continue to debate the possibility of Artificial Intelligence and what this might mean for our theories of the mind, the importance we should assign the future of the planet, and whether the sciences might one day offer us a complete explanation of the universe. In this issue, Dr Ian Kidd considers the future of philosophy itself; the question of personal identity and the way in which this affects how we should view our future selves is considered by Georgia Faherty; Jessica Jones writes about the potential impact of globalisation upon society; and Samuel Dennis offers a non-conditional analysis of dispositions, framed by the question "How do powers see the future?"

In keeping with this theme, I want to mention here that the future of Critique is also in your hands; we currently are looking for an editor for this academic year. If you are interested in taking over this position on the PhilSoc exec, please email either myself or the society at the email addresses given in the back of this issue.

Finally, a warm welcome to all freshers starting at Durham this year. I hope you enjoy this issue of Critique.

Rhiannon Bull
Editor

HAS PHILOSOPHY A FUTURE?

Dr Ian James Kidd

Dr Kidd here proposes a way for the discipline of Philosophy to proceed into the future through appeal to the impact its history can have upon this.

Philosophy is an essentially historical subject. Like all disciplines, it is shaped by its history – debates and controversies, patterns of conflict and consensus – but, unlike many disciplines, most notably science, philosophy cannot be done in isolation from its history. Or perhaps to put the point another way, one could do philosophy without 'going historical' – perhaps by drawing a line at 1900 or taking the Scientific Revolution as the cut-off – but that would be an impoverished form of philosophising. For one thing, any proposed demarcation point would require justification, and the ensuing process of justification would initiate philosophical debates which would almost immediately demand that one look further back in history. For another thing, any proposed cut-off points would be arbitrary, for they would imply that no philosophical figures or traditions prior to that point could be of value to future philosophising – surely an absurd claim, given the rich traditions of thought and practice bequeathed by even the most ancient philosophers. So the future of philosophy is necessarily bound up with its history.

Does the history of philosophy offer any indication of what its future might look like? An answer to that question cannot take the form of prognostication – predicting when this-or-that tradition will emerge, for example – especially given the fact that

the future of philosophy will depend in part upon wider historical and cultural changes, which cannot be foreseen. But certainly there are some stable patterns evident throughout the history of philosophy which, though they do not determine the future direction that philosophy may take, do at least help us to appreciate something of the concerns and impetus guiding its development. Consider the longstanding debates over the nature of the good life, of whether it lies in stern duty, virtuous piety, or communion with the natural world, to take just three. It seems certain that this concern – with the good life – will persist, for it has not only endured since ancient Greek, Indian and Chinese philosophy, but is a topic of abiding interest. There is some truth in Socrates' judgement that reflective persons cannot successfully evade the question of what a good life is and whether one is living it, even if few people, including professional philosophers, do manage for much of the time to suppress it. But since that concern 'goes deep', into our sense of ourselves, the world, and our relationship, it will recur and philosophers, one hopes, will continue to conceive and consider it. At the least, if philosophy does interest itself in the good life – and, indeed, it did until the mid-twentieth-century – one can confidently predict that it will eventually reappear on the agenda—and in any case, perhaps periods of neglect are just as important as periods of attentive scrutiny.

The second concern which has marked philosophy's past and looks set to inform its future lies in the metaphilosophical question of what philosophy is, how it relates to wider bodies of thought and practice, and what its place is within society. If this concern seems narcissistic, it shouldn't, for two reasons. The first is that every discipline does, or at least should, attend to questions concerning its aims, methods, and motivations, for as the world changes the status and place of disciplines shifts. So the social sciences and the arts, to take two examples, enjoy vigorous debates over their status – about their disciplinary status, or their role in public life – and there is no reason why philosophy should not be similarly attentive and vigilant. The second is that philosophy deals with the most fundamental concepts and beliefs that inform and underlie human life, and as society and history plough on, new philosophical work is constantly being generated. So philosophy has to attend to its aims and methods and status because its objects – concepts, society, and so on – are constantly changing, thereby perpetually renewing it. So the future of philosophy will continue to be a self-reflexively critical discipline, challenging itself, forming and

dissolving schools and traditions, and continuing to respond to and act upon both society at large and, one hopes, individuals too.

The future of philosophy, then, assuming it has one, will likely be shaped by two historically enduring concerns – first with the good life, and second with its own aims and methods. Those two concerns converge, of course, in the idea of philosophy as the 'love of wisdom', where that latter term means the cultivated ability of pursuing the good life within the world as one finds it – and, perhaps, as one might change it. Since that ethical impetus will not dissolve – unless people become hopelessly unreflective and submerged in ignorance – philosophy will have a future. The further question of how diverse, fertile and active the subject will be is, of course, one for the present and future generations of philosophers to address. Although many features of contemporary academic philosophy and wider social and political trends cast shadows upon that future – including the imperatives to 'publish or perish' and myopic focus on economic 'outputs' – there is at least one reason for hope: namely the long list of previous obituaries reporting the death of philosophy. It is a masochistic sort of optimism, but perhaps it is the best we have.

CARPE DIEM? : AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE SELVES, AND WHETHER IT IS RATIONAL OR MORAL TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE

Georgia Faherty

This essay investigates how we might be related to our future selves, and then considers further the potential impact of these conclusions.

In 1953, Janis and Feshbach studied the effects of fear arousal in health promotion campaigns.[1] Students at a large Connecticut school attended lectures about the importance of dental hygiene. Some attended a strong fear appeal lecture which emphasised the painful, long term consequences of poor dental hygiene, such as throat cancer, while others attended a minimal fear appeal lecture which only described the short term consequences such as decayed teeth and cavities. A week later, questionnaire results revealed that while only 8% of the strong fear group had reported a change in behaviour, 36% of the minimal fear group described a positive change from previous dental hygiene. In a similar study of 300 Scottish

[1] Janis, & Feshbach (1953) 'Effects of Fear Arousing Communications', in *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 48 (1), pp. 78-92.

teenagers, Abraham, Sheeran and Johnston found that the perceived seriousness of HIV and the perceived effectiveness of condoms had little effect on behaviour; beliefs about pleasure reduction and awkwardness were much more important.[2]

The tendency of human beings to focus on the short term rather than the long term consequences of their actions is not a new phenomenon, and is not confined to teenagers. We frequently engage in behaviour which can be damaging to our future self in order to give our present self some temporary gratification. The negative side effects of alcohol range from a bad hangover to liver cirrhosis, throat cancer and even death, yet recent statistics show that over a third of the population in the UK regularly drink more than the recommended amount.[3] Putting an essay off until the last minute, buying something on impulse when you really should be saving, as well as more harmful behaviour, such as smoking, are all examples of occasions where we put our present self before our future self, and prioritise the short term consequences of our actions over the long term effects they will have.

Yale economist Keith Chen claims that the reason why we engage in these 'bad habits' is due to the fact that the English language uses grammar to make a strong distinction between the present and the future; that it has a strong 'future time reference' (FTR). Not all languages make this distinction; some, such as Mandarin, blur the present and the future. While you might say 'I am going to eat potato' in English, you would say 'I eat potato' in Mandarin. Interestingly, Chen revealed that weak FTR speakers such as Mandarin speakers are 24% less likely to smoke and 29% more likely to exercise, while strong FTR speakers, such as English speakers, save far less money for the future. Chen argues that because strong FTR speakers think of the future as radically different from the present, it is hard to envisage that the problems that come from too much smoking, eating and drinking will really have any effect on them.

However, the idea that our language influences or determines the

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[2] Abraham, Sheeran, & Johnston (1998) 'From health beliefs to self-regulation: theoretical advances in the psychology of action control', in *Psychology and Health*, Vol. 13, pp. 569–591.
[3] http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/may/26/alcohol-consumption-statistics.

way we see the world is a very contentious idea. Perhaps it is the society and culture in which we live that determines both our grammar and our behaviour, rather than the other way round? While American culture, specifically male WASP American culture, promotes an idealised, independent, autonomous view of the self, other cultures such as Southern European, African and Asian, support the idea of a different sort of self; a relational, familial self, which emphasises harmonious behaviour rather than individuality.[4] In seeing the self as something fluid and communal rather than separate and individual, it may be easier to view the future self as something connected to the present self, and not as something entirely detached to the present that doesn't warrant consideration.

Taking a slightly different approach, Derek Parfit argues that it is rational to care less about one's future self than one's present self, since the psychological connections and continuity between one's present and future selves weaken over time.[5] While I may share a large amount of psychological material with my 'tomorrow' self, it is likely that there will be a much smaller amount of connectedness to my 'self' in ten years time. According to Parfit, if there is no psychological connectedness or continuity between myself today and my future self, then we are different people, and so it is not rational to care about the effect that smoking will have on them.

This new conception of one's relation to one's future self has been viewed by some philosophers as 'utterly destructive'[6] of morality. It has also been suggested that a lack of concern for the future could lead to a radical revision of society in which people do not aspire to or achieve certain ideals,[7] and that if we do not care about our future selves, then 'nothing' can matter about the future.[8] These objections seem to be unfounded, however, as Parfit does not suggest that one should have no concern about the future at all. In fact, he argues that 'like future generations, future selves have no vote,

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[4] Marcus & Kitayama (1991) 'Cultural Variation of Self', in *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Self*. New York: Springer-Verlag. p. 58.
[5] Parfit (1987) *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 215.
[6] Madell (1981) *The Identity of the Self*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 116.
[7] Wolf (1986) 'Self Interest and Interest in Selves', in *Ethics*, Vol. 96 (4). p. 709.
[8] Martin (1988) 'Identity's Crisis' in *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 53 (2). p.301.

so their interests need to be specially protected.'[9] He believes that one has a moral duty to act in a way that will benefit one's future self if one is able to do so without causing one's current self to suffer. While it has been suggested that a behaviour that only harms oneself cannot be deemed morally wrong,[10] Parfit disagrees. He refers to self-destructive actions, such as smoking, as 'immoral', rather than 'irrational', because it will cause someone to suffer in the future, and because one is able to prevent this suffering from occurring.

Therefore, whether our lack of concern for the future is due to the separation between the future and the present in our language, the way our culture or society views the self generally, or because our present self and future self are in fact different entities, it seems that we should care about the future, as our actions today will have a serious impact; whether that be on our future self, or on somebody else.

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[9] Parfit (1987) p. 319.

[10] Langsam (2001) 'Pain, Personal Identity and the deep further fact' in *Erkenntnis*, Vol. 54.

GLOBALISATION AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Jessica Jones

Jessica Jones here provides an assessment of the tension between the theory of globalisation, and the theory of cultural relativism.

The theory of globalisation suggests, in its most extreme form, that humanity is moving towards a single homogenous society. In spite of whether or not that will be realised, it is agreed that the spatial and temporal notions relevant to human social existence are being fundamentally altered through their reduction, and this in turn has a dramatic affect on the type and manifestation of human activity.[1] This seems to pose a problem for any theory that relativises the truth of a moral statement to a culture.

Maria Baghramian identifies three different criteria which all formulations of cultural relativism participate in: one empirical, one epistemological, and one nomological.[2] An analysis of each of these three with regard to globalisation theory will be shown to suggest that cultural relativism fails on each point.

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[1] Scheuerman, W. (Summer 2010 Ed.). Globalisation. 'The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy'. Zalta, E. N (Ed.) URL=<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/globalization/>.

[2] Baghramian, M. (2004) 'Relativism'. *The Problems of Philosophy Series*. Abingdon: Routledge. p89.

However, the majority of this essay will be a discussion of what shall be referred to as postmodernist cultural relativism, that is, those theories that in part utilise the work of Wittgenstein (and others) in order to make a claim that it is conceptually impossible to construct an objective account of life, due to the nature of concepts and their relation to a particular social upbringing.[3]

The first of the three conditions, empirical fact, is the traditional claim of the relativist that it is an observable fact that different societies have different belief-systems. This empirical fact leads to the second, epistemic demand. However, if this observation was true (and this is contended), it seems that the increasing rate of globalisation presents a challenge to this. The spatial and temporal reduction indicates a process of deterritorialisation, one that makes geographical location irrelevant as numerous social activities become independent of location.[4]

Therefore it seems that the cultural divide, upon which the cultural relativist is in part dependant, is no longer apparent. For if social activities are independent of location, then if epistemic relativism is true, those sharing in those social activities have a common (or partially common) social background. This would indicate progress towards a homogenous society, in which case cultural relativism becomes superfluous. Or, cultural relativism is wrong, and despite different backgrounds, the reduced spatial and temporal demands are enough to allow conducive social activity. However, whether the former or the latter is more accurate depends on the epistemic component.

It is a question then, of whether it is possible to reconcile opposing world views via some method or criteria, so as to disprove the epistemic demand that moral statements are relativised to a particular culture, due to the fact that 'linguistic communication is a rule-governed social activity that takes place in the context of...purposive social behaviour'.[5] Thus, the postmodernist cultural relativist argues that due to the nature of how concepts are formed, maintained and used in language, there is no way in which they can be communicated across different societies and languages.

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[3] Baghramian (2004) p. 98-9.
[4] Scheuerman (2010).
[5] Baghramian (2004) p. 99.

However, globalisation to the extent that people from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds do participate in such social activities indicates that such a rigid outlook upon conceptual schemes and limitations of language is mistaken. For, cultures do not appear isolated, given the way in which language and globalisation has affected these apparently distinct epochs. Instead, they are designed in such a way as to adapt to changes, social and linguistic, and to instinctively amalgamate with other cultures.[6] If it is 'our interpretation of the rules, that determines when an inference...is in accord with a rule',[7] how could it be possible for two supposedly incommensurable sets of belief-systems and linguistic rules to participate in a social activity ignorant of spatial obligations?

Furthermore, globalisation creates problems for other variations of cultural relativism. Such an example would be that purported by David Wong, who acknowledges that 'customs sometimes change under the pressure of moral criticism'.[8] However, his relativist stance develops from the belief that any society presents an answer to a question about individual rights and the common good, and that moralities evolve as a response to certain needs.

Yet, these needs are defined according to geography and development (both economic and social). Although it cannot be denied that the terrain in which a society develops results in different manifestations of human behaviours, and that there are severe discrepancies between cultures economically, the fact remains that globalisation is reducing space and time to such an extent that it is dubious to what extent this position can be maintained. As already mentioned, deterritorialisation marks a disintegration of foreign borders and furthermore, the speed at which resources can be shared across substantial differences is beginning to universalise the needs of people. Geography is no longer defining the manifestation of needs.

The final demand of cultural relativism is the nomological one, asserted on the belief that if the descriptive and epistemic conditions are true then there is an obligation of tolerance, and implied non-involvement, as we cannot have an understanding of them.

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[6] Feyerabend, P. (1999) *Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction Versus the Richness of Being*. London: University of Chicago Press. p. 123.
[7] Baghramian (2004) p. 101.
[8] Wong, D. (1991). 'Relativism' in P. Singer (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell. p443.

However, I have hoped to suggest in this essay that it is conceptually feasible to have an understanding of other cultures, and therefore that engagement with belief-systems other than our own is possible.

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HOW DO POWERS SEE THE FUTURE?

Samuel Dennis

Samuel Dennis here presents a construction of the dispositional theory of properties which aims to address Williams' 'Problem of Fit'.

'Powers' are properties in virtue of which their bearers are 'ready for action'.[1] They essentially dispose their objects to behave in certain ways. Given certain 'stimuli', a relevantly empowered particular will elicit a certain response called a 'manifestation' of that power. Hume taught us that causation is, as Rudge says of history in Bennett's play, just 'one bloody thing after another'. We cannot know what will follow what with deductive certainty. Yet, on a powers view, it seems that if we know that an object has a certain power and the nature of that power is directed towards a certain class of manifestations, then we can validly infer from cause to effect. If we know that treacle is sticky in virtue of its peculiar viscosity, then we can correctly infer that it will be difficult to wash off the tablecloth, should we spill some.

You don't have to be a genius to make an inference from 'stickiness' to 'sticking'. Powers, however, might seem like ontological boffins- psychic, even. Not only is the treacle ready to stick to the tablecloth, or my hands, or the back of a spoon, but it also

[1] Martin. C. B. (2007). The Mind in Nature. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

'knows' what it would do if the spoon was coated in oil, or if I had wet hands, or if the tablecloth was on fire. In fact, powers make their objects ready-to-act in response to any other power, and any combination of powers. I, on the other hand- a cognitively able, evolutionarily advanced primate- don't know how I would react if I ate an oyster, or discovered a moose in the bathroom. So how is that powers can have so much information encoded in their very nature? My answer to this question seeks to resolve any potential problems by removing any conditional reference to the future from the nature of powers. Powers are actual, independent, intrinsic properties of their bearers.[2] Everything that is metaphysically significant about powers can be put in presentist-speak. The view considered here is that powers 'see the future' only insofar as empowered objects stand in certain relations to one another.

More seriously stated, the problem in question is that which Williams dubs The Problem of Fit.[3] He asks how it is that powers can work together in a reciprocal manner, despite being intrinsic and thus (he assumes) non-relational. Treacle's being disposed to stick to my hands cannot be a relation holding between the treacle and me; the treacle's stickiness is an intrinsic property of it. And, surely, an adequate description of what it is to be a human hand need make no reference to the nature of treacle. As Williams puts it, 'the fact that [powers] are causally harmonious is without explanation'.[4]

Bafflement in this respect is actually rather old-hat, dating back to Locke, who writes:

> *I confess Power includes in it some kind of relation, (a relation to Action or Change,) as indeed which of our Ideas, of what kind so-ever, when attentively considered, does not? [...D]o they not all contain in them a secret relation of the Parts?*
> (Locke, Essay: II, XXI: §3)

This is a 'confession' insofar the idea that powers 'contain' relations posits un-empiricist necessary connections between distinct existences. From an historical perspective, what Locke refers to are

[2] Molnar, G. (2003). Powers: A Study in Metaphysics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[3] Williams, N.E. (2010). 'Puzzling Powers: The Problem of Fit'. In A. Marmodoro (ed.), The Metaphysics of Powers: Their Grounding and Their Manifestations. London: Routledge.
[4] Williams (2010) p. 89.

(polyadic) relations between primary qualities of objects, perceived as (monadic) secondary qualities, our ascription of which to objects is dispositional.[5] But from a modern perspective, perhaps there is more to be gained from consideration of the above quotation.

One immediate absurdity can be done away with. If powers 'contain' relations, then it seems they will be relational properties of powers qua properties: properties of properties. We might analyse these away as 'second order' and thus second-class properties, but in any case the thought is an uncomfortable one- powers were meant to 'fit' intrinsically, not in virtue of something further. A more sensible analysis which avoids this would relativize the relations 'contained' in powers to the empowered objects. That is my hands are related to treacle in a certain way in virtue of their intrinsic powers.

So far, so good, but does it not still seem odd that additional, relational properties need to be specified? Not so, once we question what type of relations we are dealing with. Relations divide into two classes. External relations, such as 'being higher than', hold only when two objects are in certain situations. If I am at the top of the stairs and you are at the bottom, then I am higher than you. Internal relations, such as 'being taller than', hold in virtue of the very nature of their relata. If I am 5'9" and you are 5'7", then I am taller than you. That's all there is to it: you and me. Internal relations, therefore, do not make any addition to being in the same way that external relations do. If you describe the natures of everything in the world, you get the internal relations for free, but you will not have captured the external relations holding between things in your description.

My proposal, then, is that powers 'fit' with one another, insofar as their possession instantiates internal relations between empowered objects. Powers internally relate objects to each other with respect to the possible causal events in which they may feature. The ubiquity of this can be compared to the thought that if I am 5'9", then I am taller or shorter in relation to any other object of a determinate height and any combination of objects.

What does this claim really amount to? Well, I think it gives the

[5] Cf. Lowe, E.J. (1995). Locke on Human Understanding. London: Routledge. pp. 47-53.

the advocate of powers a way of analysing dispositions non-conditionally. The classic and heavily criticised view of disposition statements is subjunctive: 'If I spill the treacle, then it will stick to the tablecloth'.[6] On the view of dispositions as internal relations, you get the relevant conditionals for free. Let me illustrate once more. If I am 5'9" and you are 5'7" and we stand next to each other on a flat surface, then I will appear taller than you to a nearby observer. If, however, an observer is the subject of a clever optical illusion of forced perspective, then you may seem taller than I seem. In each case, nothing in our natures has altered, despite the change in circumstance. I suggest, then, that this case is analogous with the manifestation of powers (though powers may be gained or lost, masked or made redundant).

This view makes gains in terms of both explanatory power and economy. Powers do not have to be viewed as relations, nor as relata; they are intrinsic to their bearers. There is no sense in which they 'see the future'; they are either in a situation in which they manifest in a particular way, or they are not. Dispositions need no longer be reduced to conditionals. Moreover, the solution to the problem of fit proposed here make no addition to being. Everything is as it was, and the future remains as yet unwritten.

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[6] For an instructive discussion of dispositions as conditionals, cf. Lowe, E.J. (2011). 'How Not to Think of Powers: A Deconstruction of the 'Dispositions and Conditionals' Debate'. The Monist 94 (1): 19-33.

CRITIQUE EDITOR

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