

24.119 Minds and Machines

Handout 4: Properties and Particulars

Socrates is a philosopher, is snub-nosed, is the teacher of Plato, is a corrupter of youth, and is the teacher of Plato. In other words, his *properties* (or *qualities* or *features* or *attributes*) include the property of being a philosopher, the property of being snub-nosed, the property of being a corrupter of youth, the property of being the teacher of Plato.

These properties -- the property of being a philosopher, and so on -- are *instantiated in* or *exemplified by* Socrates (this is just another way of saying that Socrates has these properties). Socrates himself is not instantiated in anything -- he is a *particular*, or an *individual*, not a *property*.

Properties themselves, as well as particulars, have properties. For example, *being in pain* has the property of being a mental property, *being a fairy* has the property of not being instantiated.

Stated in the terminology just explained, *substance* dualism is the view that minds or selves are non-physical particulars. Thus the substance dualist (e.g., Descartes) must deny that minds are, for example, brains of a certain kind. But the *attribute* or *property* dualist (see previous handout) need not deny this. According to her, the mental properties exemplified by minds are not physical properties. And that is consistent with the view that minds just are brains.

The sorts of properties mentioned so far are *monadic* properties: they just need one thing to be instantiated. But there are also polyadic (e.g. dyadic, triadic, etc.) properties, sometimes called *relations*. Socrates and Plato jointly exemplify various relations, for example the relation *being a student of*, or *being born earlier than* (Plato is a student of Socrates and Socrates was born earlier than Plato).

A property P is an *essential* property of x just in case it is impossible for x to exist without having P. So, for example, being a philosopher is not an essential property of Socrates, because he could have existed without being a philosopher (he might have been a plumber). However, being odd is an essential property of the number seven, being trilateral is an essential property of all triangles, and (somewhat controversially) being human is an essential property of Socrates.

A property P is an *intrinsic* property just in case: if an object x has P, then necessarily any *perfect duplicate* of x has P. (A perfect duplicate of your copy of *Elements of Mind* is a "molecule-for-molecule replica" of your copy.) If property P is not intrinsic it is *extrinsic*. Being red, having mass 1kg, being square, being in pain are plausibly intrinsic; being Fred's copy of *Elements of Mind*, having weight 1kg, being a student at MIT, being a parent, are extrinsic. Putnam's "twin earth" thought experiment is often thought to show that properties like believing that water is wet are extrinsic (see Crane, 4.36-8; Chalmers 3C). [For an indication of how complicated the discussion of the intrinsic/extrinsic

distinction has become, see the Stanford Encyclopedia entry on [Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties](#).]

In fact, the very existence of properties is a matter of philosophical dispute. Fortunately, for the purposes of this course we can just speak with the vulgar and assume that there are such things.
