

## Introduction

Both ordinary language and scientific language are filled with dispositional terms and expressions, such as ‘soluble’, ‘elastic’, ‘conductive’, or ‘brave’. People ordinarily and spontaneously characterise objects – physical objects as well as human beings – using dispositional expressions. We say that we should be careful in touching this particular crystal glass because it is *fragile*, and we describe people as *shy*, *irascible* or *jealous*. Again, people normally act – even implicitly – by referring to dispositions: we expect the little lump of sugar to dissolve when we put it in our cup of hot tea because we know it is soluble, and we carefully protect our new set of crystal glasses because we know that they are fragile and they could easily break when struck. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the concept of disposition has played a central role in different areas of philosophy from ancient times to the more recent debates within the analytic tradition, ranging from metaphysics to semantics, epistemology and ethics. Already Aristotle offered a rich analysis of dispositions and dispositional concepts; he influenced and shaped our thinking of dispositions and even recent theories on dispositions. We owe to Aristotle both a first sketch of a realist and causal view of dispositions according to which dispositions are real causal properties of the world, and a pluralistic conception of dispositional terms, according to which there is a variety of dispositional predicates and not all of them refer to natural capacities.

Yet, the metaphysical status of dispositions and the meaning of the term ‘disposition’ are still a matter of debate. Not only that, since modern times dispositions have been treated with suspect. Generally speaking, the main problem was the empirical inaccessibility of dispositions: dispositions are not observable, for we can only observe their manifestations. We do see that a lump of sugar actually dissolves in a glass of water but we do not see its solubility; we do see that a particular piece of wood catches fire if put next to a source of fire, but we do not see its flammability. From the standpoint of the 17th and 18th century mechanistic science, dispositions were inac-

ceptable occult qualities of no explanatory help about the way our world works. Decisive was also Hume's critique of causal powers which informed the idea that dispositional properties are not ontologically autonomous entities. This idea was at the basis of the programme – typically endorsed by logical positivists – of analysing and reducing dispositional concepts in terms of semantically less problematic notions, but none of the proposed analyses seems to be without problems.

However, nowadays the attitude is radically changed and dispositions are at the centre of a flourishing debate within the analytic tradition. There is the widespread recognition that, *pace* Hume, we cannot completely renounce to the role of dispositionality, for it informs even our basic and ordinary ways of speaking and interacting with the world. Instead of keeping the old prejudice, dispositions are better enquired from a multidisciplinary perspective, with more localised discussions. This does not only mean that old issues must be addressed again, such as the metaphysical status of dispositional entities, and the semantics of disposition ascriptions, but that new issues must be addressed with respect to the connection of dispositions with other philosophical domains, such as philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, philosophy of action, ethics and even aesthetics.

The present issue belongs to this particular way of looking at dispositions. Far from aspiring to offer an exhaustive exposition of the recent debates on dispositions, it aims to bring together some significant examples of what serious philosophical reflection on dispositions would look like. At the same time, it presents some recent new results in different areas of research on the topic. The content can be divided into two parts: the first part contains the first four articles, while the second part contains the last two contributions.

In the first part we find four articles which help presenting the variety of the philosophical enquiry on dispositions. First of all, dispositions are approached by looking at some core debates belonging to different philosophical areas: semantics, philosophy of mind, aesthetics and metaphysics. Secondly, dispositions are either the object of a metaphysical enquiry about their proper ontological status, such as in Kistler's article, or they are elements that can be used to offer some analysis of other phenomena – dispositional analysis – such as in Marmodoro's and Guardo's articles. Finally, dispositional concepts cannot be properly used without specifying what are the criteria of the dispositional; this is another line of research which is part of Voltolini's article.

Andrea Guardo, in his "Two Epistemological Arguments Against Two Semantic Dispositionalisms" focuses on the role dispositions play in the semantic domain. He offers a precise analysis of Kripke's so called "Normativity argument" against semantic dispositionalism and he argues that such an argument is stronger if construed as an

argument in the philosophy of mind than when it is used as an argument in the metaphysics of language.

The connection between dispositions and intentionality is at the centre of Voltolini's article "Why the Mark of the Dispositional is not the Mark of the Mental". The author argues that Crane's criteria for intentionality of reference – directedness and aspectual shape – cannot be interpreted dispositionally and this becomes clear when they are meant in mental and phenomenological terms. For this reason, Nes' criticism of Crane's criteria – construed in terms of dispositions – does not work.

Anna Marmodoro, in her "Aesthetic Cognitivism", offers an example of dispositional account of aesthetic properties. She endorses Constitutionalism in order to offer a metaphysical account of aesthetic properties in terms of multi-track and multi-stage powers of objects. She then argues that aesthetic judgements are up for truth and falsity like perceptual ones.

The metaphysics of dispositions is at the centre also of Max Kistler's "Laws, Exceptions and Dispositions". Here, dispositions play a role in making sense of the fact that laws of nature can have exceptions albeit they are universal regularities. Kistler argues that when a natural property is instantiated, laws of nature give rise to dispositional properties and exceptional cases are cases where these dispositional properties manifest themselves either in an unusual way or not at all.

The second part of the present issue contains the English translation of Alexius Meinong's text "Allgemeines zur Lehre von den Dispositionen" which is made available in translation for the first time. The English text is accompanied by the original German one together with an important introduction written by Sascha Freyberg. Meinong's work is very important because it contains both a particular theory of dispositions and a reflection on the role that dispositions play in the philosophy of education. Sascha Freyberg, in his "States of Possibility. Meinong's Theory of Dispositions and the Epistemology of Education" explores the role of Meinong's concept of disposition in education – the German *Bildung*. Meinong's underlying assumptions are expounded and put in the right context.

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