

## CONCERNING THE POSSIBILITY OF EXACTLY SIMILAR TROPES

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### Abstract

In this paper I attempt to show, against certain versions of trope theory, that properties with analyzable particularity cannot be *merely* exactly similar: such properties are either particularized properties (tropes) that are dissimilar to every any other trope, or else universalized properties (universals). I argue that each of the most viable standard and nonstandard particularizers that can be employed to secure the numerical difference between exactly similar properties can only succeed in grounding the particularity of properties, that is, in having properties be tropes, at the expense of ruling out the possibility of their exact similarity. Here are the four nonstandard particularizers that I examine: the genealogy of a property, the history of a property, the causal effects of a property, and the duration of a property. And here are the two standard particularizers that I examine: the bearer of a property, by which I mean either a bare particular or a spatiotemporal location, and the property itself, by which I mean that the property is self-particularized. In my concluding remarks, I explain that the only remaining hope for preserving the possibility of exactly similar tropes is regarding properties as primitively particular, and that this must mean not that properties are self-particularized but that they are particularized due to nothing. I close by arguing that this may not help trope theory after all.

### 0. Introductory remarks

A common practice of trope theory, the view that regards properties as particulars and so as lacking the universal's "promiscuous" capacity (Campbell 1990: 53) for being a constituent of multiple nonconcurrent entities at one and the same time, is to replace fully determinate universals with sets of exactly similar, that is, qualitatively indiscernible, properties—sets that, without being repeatable, provide many of the same services as universals do (such as being that to which abstract singular terms refer) (see Williams 1966: 81-82; Campbell 1990: 74). For me at least, the admission of properties, whatnesses, that are exactly similar and yet in no way whatsoever identical—in short, properties that are *merely* exactly similar—is somewhat perplexing. After all, each of these fully determinate and exactly similar yellowness properties occupy and express one and the same position on the yellowness spectrum; each of these fully determinate and exactly similar mass properties occupy and express one and the same position on the mass spectrum; and so on. That this is tough for me to get my head around seems to be why, despite the many interesting questions related to trope theory, I find there to be one question in particular whose calling drowns out all the rest—one, to which I will

now attend, that concerns the very possibility of trope theory as commonly understood. Is there any viable way to individuate, where by “individuate” I mean numerically differentiate, exactly similar particularized properties without undermining either their particularity or their exact similarity? Is there, in short, any successful particularizer for exactly similar tropes?

In this paper, I endorse an answer of “no” to this question. I will argue that although it might be true that properties are particulars, that is, are tropes rather than universals, it is impossible for there to be tropes that are exactly similar if their particularity is analyzable, explainable. After a brief section where I will argue that the relation of being exactly similar in question must be internal to the tropes that are purportedly exactly similar (section 1), I will argue that even the best among the various nonstandard (section 2) and standard (section 3) particularizers that trope theory might employ to secure the numerical difference between exactly similar tropes can only succeed in grounding the particularity of properties, that is, in having properties be tropes, at the expense of ruling out the possibility of their exact similarity. This I intend to accomplish by disclosing the various ways that a trope theorist might employ each candidate particularizer to perform its particularizing job and by then proceeding to show that, in some of these ways, the particularizer fails to have properties be tropes and that, in the rest of these ways, the particularizer succeeds in having properties be tropes at the expense of ruling out the possibility of exact similarity. Since I show that no particularizer (whether it be a property’s genealogy, history, causal effects, duration, bearer, or even a property’s very own self) can both particularize a property and preserve exact resemblance between properties, by the end I hope it will be clear why, as is now being acknowledged in the literature, the only way for trope theory to guarantee both particularity and exact resemblance is to hold that property particularity is a brute fact, that it is due to nothing—neither something other than the property nor even (despite what we may think) the property itself. I do raise a problem for this view in my concluding remarks, however.

### **1. The relation of being exactly similar is internal**

When I am worrying about how monadic properties  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  can be individuated despite standing in the relation of being exactly similar, am I taking this relation to be

external or internal to  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ ? As most contemporary trope theorists agree (take, for instance, Campbell 1990: 37, 90), this relation is internal, that is, entirely a function of the relata, such that the mere existence of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  entails their being exactly similar. Aside from problems such as the fact that the infamous Bradley regress appears to sweep up any view that regards this relation as external, it just seems plain wrong to say the opposite: that it is a contingent matter whether the two *being two kilotons* properties,  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ , are exactly similar, such that instead of being exactly similar to  $x_2$   $x_1$  could have been exactly similar to  $y_1$ , *being three kilotons*, or even perhaps to  $g_1$ , *being a creeping motion*.

Now, if  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  were ordinary objects such as houses, then it might not be the case that the mere existence of the two entails their being exactly similar. For on the at least somewhat reasonable assumption that the two houses would retain their identities through such minor changes as patio additions, by only house1 gaining a patio and not so too house2 (which was exactly similar to house1 before the patio addition), it will be the case that their being exactly similar does not follow from the mere fact that they both exist. The thing is, because the two exactly similar *whatnesses*,  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ , indubitably cannot in any intrinsic way change without ceasing to exist, saying that they are not guaranteed to be exactly similar is tantamount not to saying that the existence of the two houses does not guarantee their being exactly similar, but rather to saying that the houses being exactly as they are when they were objectively exactly similar does not guarantee that they are objectively exactly similar. This seems absurd.

## **2. Nonstandard particularizers for exactly similar properties**

Let me move on now to interrogating some candidate particularizers for properties that are exactly similar. I will start with nonstandard particularizers. I call them “nonstandard” because they occur, from what I gather, rarely or not at all in the literature. There are four that I want to examine, each of which can be employed in a variety of ways: (1) a property’s genealogy, (2) its history, (3) its causal effects, and (4) its duration. I will argue that even in the cases where these particularizers are employed in ways that succeed in having properties be tropes, that is, that succeed in ruling out

any element of universality in properties, this success comes at the expense of ruling out the possibility of exact similarity between tropes.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1. *Genealogy as particularizer*

Can the genealogies of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ , that is, the causal chains that lead to their coming into being, secure their being *merely* exactly similar?<sup>2</sup> On the quite reasonable assumption that the genealogies are external to  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ , which is to say that  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are each something more than their genealogies, the possibility of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  being numerically distinct simply in virtue of differing genealogies appears to be ruled out right away. The basis for me saying this is not that it is possible for two merely exactly similar properties to have an identical genealogy or at least exactly similar genealogies. For the sake of the argument, I am willing to grant that this is in fact impossible. So why do I still say that genealogy is ruled out as being a particularizer? Well, even assuming that the two natures have radically divergent genealogies, when we attend only to the two natures themselves—in effect bracketing the particularizing genealogies—before the mind's eye can only be but one nature. This follows, of course, because bracketed was what here is assumed to be the *only* things securing the numerical difference between  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ : the differing genealogies.

Am I to move on so soon to another candidate particularizer, then? There is, I guess, one way in which the genealogies can be external to the natures and yet when we peel those genealogies away there remain two natures. We can say that each nature in itself has an intrinsic directedness, an orientation grounded in each whatness itself, towards its specific genealogy. There are two problems with saying this, though. First, the genealogy is no longer the particularizer. The particularizer seems to be, rather, the trope itself. But in this case, and this is the second point,  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  cannot be exactly

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<sup>1</sup> Note that what is most important in this section is not so much the catalogue of candidate particularizers, but rather the catalogue of options for how a particularizer can be employed to particularize. First of all, this latter catalogue covers, I believe, all the possible options. So by including it, readers will be able to see the parameters and, hopefully for the discipline, see if I missed something. Second, having this catalogue is helpful for those beginning to think about these issues and are considering taking one of the options that experts would regard as unviable for the reasons that I will provide. Finally, by going through these options now, when I get to the more interesting particularizers, the standard ones, I can focus on what really matters—namely, if they work—without having to go through the legwork of fleshing out the various ways that they might work, which would, I think, bog down the conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Genealogy as a possible particularizer, at least for events, has been stated, for example, by Van Inwagen (1983: 169) and Donald Davidson (1980: 306).

similar anymore. To be intrinsically oriented toward dissimilar genealogies is to be intrinsically dissimilar.

Since the goal here is to keep genealogies as the particularizers, and since when the genealogies particularize the natures from without, that is, externally, they can simply be bracketed, it seems that the only move we have left is to make the genealogies somehow intrinsic to the properties so that when we attend to the natures in themselves they are present. The first option for doing this that comes to mind is to have the genealogies make up some portion of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ . I say “portion” on the strength that if  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  were nothing but their divergent genealogies, then we would by hypothesis give up on  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  being exactly similar. Right? However, would not the preclusion of being exactly similar follow even when we make the genealogies but a *portion* of the natures? Considered in their entirety, yes. But since  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  were exactly similar before making the genealogies intrinsic to them, it follows that at least whatever about  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  that exceeds the genealogy-portions will be exactly similar to each other. There is still a sense, in this case, to saying that  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are exactly similar. They are exactly similar qua the portions of themselves exceeding their genealogies.

Alas, this glimmer of good news is short-lived. Even when I bracket the fact that this suggestion seems to violate the requirement that tropes be ontologically simple (see Morganti 2009: 190; Maurin 2002: 15; Campbell 1990: 20), that is, that they not have more than one constituent, it turns out that we are in the same predicament as when the particularizing genealogies were external to  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ . When we turn our attention only to  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  qua the portions of themselves exceeding their genealogies—in effect yet again managing to bracket the particularizers—reposing before the mind’s eye can only be what for the bluenosed scornor of universals is an anathema in this situation: one entity as opposed to many. This follows, of course, because bracketed was the *only* thing that made  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ —well,  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  qua the portions of themselves exceeding their genealogies—distinct: the genealogies.

Now, to try to overcome this problem that comes about when we make the genealogies portions or parts of the natures, I might say that the natures each possess their genealogies as *features*. Even here, however, there is something in excess to the genealogies. What is that? Well, that which has the features: the natures— $x_1$  and  $x_2$ . When we attend only to the natures, then, we attend only to one.

It is now clear that the only way to prevent the mind's eye from happening upon any universal element in  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  is by doing what I noted would foil all hopes of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  being—at least in some way—exactly similar: making  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  nothing but their divergent genealogies. Is there any way to make these natures nothing but their genealogies without undermining their being exactly similar? The only option is to make there be but a distinction of reason between the nature and the genealogy, in which case the nature and genealogy differ only as different ways of thinking or speaking about one and the same entity. This way trope theory can say that *qua nature*  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are exactly similar whereas *qua genealogy* they are distinct.

There are several options as to what we could mean when we say that there is a mere conceptual distinction between the nature and the genealogy. We must decide what exists outside of the classifying mind when we say that there is such a distinction of reason between the nature and its particularizing genealogy. We must also decide whether there is a basis for the distinction of reason in the reality independent of the classifying mind.

There are four options for what exists independent of the classifying mind when we say that there is a mere distinction of reason (that is, a distinction related to our conception) between the particularizer, which in this case is the genealogy, and the nature. (1) Outside of the intellect there is both the nature and the genealogy, but it is just that each cannot exist without each other the way that entities that are “really distinct” can. (2) Outside of the intellect there is neither the nature nor the genealogy, only that entity of which the nature and the genealogy is predicated, that entity that is perceived or considered as being the nature and yet the genealogy. (3) Outside of the intellect there is the genealogy but not the nature, and the genealogy is that of which the nature is predicated, is that which is perceived or considered as being the nature. (4) Outside of the intellect there is the nature but not the genealogy, and the nature is that of which the genealogy is predicated, is that which is perceived or considered as being the genealogy.

Now, when deciding whether there is a basis for the distinction of reason we have only two options. (A) The distinction between the two has a basis in the reality independent of the classifying mind, that is, the distinction between the two “arises not entirely from the sheer operation of the intellect, but from the occasion offered by the

thing itself on which the mind is reflecting” (Suarez 1947: 18). (B) The distinction between the two is generated merely by reason, that is, the distinction between the two “has no foundation in reality and arises exclusively from the reflection and activity of the intellect” (18), and as such is like the distinction between P and P that arises in the identity statement “P is P.”

Holding A, that there is a basis for the conceptual distinction in the reality independent of the classifying mind, proves unhelpful for trope theory when it comes to each of the four aforementioned options concerning what exists independent of the classifying mind when we say that there is a distinction of reason. I will go through each of these options and explain why. (1A) Trope theory does not want to say that both the nature and the genealogy have reality outside of the classifying mind and that, even though they cannot mutually exist without each other, there is some sort of basis for their distinction in the reality outside the classifying mind. For even though they cannot mutually exist without each other, that would not stop there from being the particularizing genealogy, on the one hand, and the *universal* nature, on the other, since there is a basis for their distinction outside of the classifying mind. (2A) Trope theory cannot say that neither the nature nor the genealogy exists independent of the classifying mind—only that entity which is perceived or considered as the nature and the genealogy—and yet say that there is a basis for the distinction between the two in the entity independent of the classifying mind. For if there is a basis for the distinction in the mind-independent entity, then the genealogy and the nature would be mind-independent as well (would be *aspects* of the entity, we might say). Besides, contrary to traditional forms of nominalism (predicate nominalism, resemblance nominalism, and so on), trope theory believes that there are such things as natures in mind-independent reality. (3A) Trope theory cannot say that the genealogy exists independent of the classifying mind but the nature does not and yet say that there is a basis for the distinction between the two in the genealogy. For if there is a basis for the distinction in the mind-independent genealogy, then the nature would be mind-independent as well (would be some aspect of the genealogy). Besides, since trope theory believes that there are such things as natures, it does not want to say that the genealogy exists but the nature does not. (4A) Trope theory cannot say that the nature exists independent of the classifying mind but the genealogy does not and yet say that there is a basis for the

distinction between the two in the nature. For if there is a basis for the distinction in the mind-independent nature, then the genealogy would be mind-independent as well (would be some aspect of the nature). Besides, even if one could somehow make this work, it would still be the case that the nature is universal since it is distinct to some extent from what particularizes it.

Holding B, that there is no basis for the conceptual distinction in the reality independent of the classifying mind, also proves unhelpful for trope theory when it comes to each of the four aforementioned options concerning what exists independent of the classifying mind when we say that there is a distinction of reason. I will go through each of these options and explain why. (1B) Trope theory cannot say that both the nature and the genealogy have reality outside of the classifying mind and yet say that there is no basis for their distinction. There must be a basis if they are *both* outside of the classifying mind. (2B) Trope theory does not want to say that neither the nature nor the genealogy exists independent of the classifying mind even if they also hold that there is no basis independent of the classifying mind for the distinction made between them. For trope theory believes that there are such things as natures. (3B) Trope theory does not want to say that only the genealogy exists independent of the classifying mind, even if trope theory also says that there is no basis independent of the classifying mind for the distinction. Again, trope theory believes that there are such things as natures. (4B) Trope theory does not want to say that only the nature exists independent of the classifying mind (and so not as well the genealogy), even if trope theory also says that there is no basis for the distinction between the nature and the genealogy in the reality outside of the classifying mind, namely, in the nature. This would undermine the purported exactly similar between natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ . Here is why. First, the genealogies of natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are assumed to be dissimilar. Second, the conception of the particularizing genealogy is nothing but a conception of the nature it particularizes (lest the particularizer have no efficacy to particularize according to the parameters of this 4B option where, on the one hand, there is no genealogy independent of the classifying mind and, on the other hand, there is no basis for a distinction between the genealogy and the nature in the reality independent of the classifying mind). To put this second premise in a different way, the conception of the particularizing genealogy is nothing but the conception of the nature, the way that the conception of the apple's redness is,

for the austere nominalist, nothing but the conception of the apple itself (rather than of some ontological constituent of the apple: redness). From these two points it follows that natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  alone account for their dissimilarity, in which case  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are not exactly similar.

It is appropriate at this point to move on to the next candidate particularizer. But first, here is a graph of all the options as to what we could mean when we say that there is merely a conceptual distinction between the nature and its particularizing genealogy. Included is a major reason why each option fails.

	<b>A.</b> There is a basis for the distinction	<b>B.</b> There is no basis for the distinction
<b>1.</b> Both the nature and the genealogy are outside of the mind.	Does not work because the nature itself would be universal.	Does not work because there must be a basis if they are <i>both</i> independent of the intellect.
<b>2.</b> Neither the nature nor the genealogy is outside of the mind.	Does not work because trope theory believes in natures independent of the intellect.	Does not work because trope theory believes in natures independent of the intellect.
<b>3.</b> The genealogy is outside of the mind, but the nature is not.	Does not work because trope theory believes in natures independent of the intellect.	Does not work because trope theory believes in natures independent of the intellect.
<b>4.</b> The nature is outside of the mind but the genealogy is not.	Does not work because the nature itself would be universal.	Does not work because the exact similarity of natures is thus disallowed.

Note that in subsequent sections of this paper, where I test other particularizers, I will only refer to option 4B when I suggest that trope theory might say there is distinction of reason between the nature and its purported particularizer. First, 2 and 3 straightaway deny what trope theory believes: that there actually are mind-independent natures. Second, A straightaway denies what trope theory believes: that natures are not universals. Third, 1B is contradictory: the nature and its particularizer cannot *both* exist in the reality independent of the mind and yet there be no distinction between the two. 4B is the only option that is not inconsistent or in violation of the trope theory view that natures are particulars or in violation of the trope theory view that there are mind-

independent natures; it is the only option, in other words, that supports the trope theory view that natures are particulars, and does so without any directly apparent contradiction and without violating the trope theory view that there are mind-independent natures.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2. *History as particularizer*

Can the histories of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  secure their being merely exactly similar?<sup>4</sup> Even aside from the fact that it may be that two exactly similar tropes could have an identical history or at least exactly similar histories, in which case their histories would not in fact be able to individuate them, the possibility of the histories of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  grounding their numerical distinctness is ruled out for the same reasons why the genealogies of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  were ruled out as being able to ground their numerical distinctness. Let me briefly recount the previous movement, this time as it occurs on the assumption that the histories of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ — $x_1$  and  $x_2$  at time  $t_1$ —are the only particularizers.

First, if the particularizers are extrinsic to the natures (option  $\alpha$ ), then when we attend only to  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ , thus bracketing even the most divergent histories of the natures in question, we are thereby attending to one nature. Second, if we make the natures have an essential directedness towards the divergent histories (option  $\beta$ ), then we rule out the histories themselves as the particularizers and we disallow the exact similarity between  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ . Third, even if we make the histories intrinsic to the natures (option  $\gamma$ ), whether by making them portions of the natures or features of the natures, there still remains an excessive element of universality. Fourth, for trope theory

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<sup>3</sup> This understanding about what a trope theorist is going to mean by there being a distinction of reason between a nature and its particularizer is fairer to trope theory than, for example, the understanding that Moreland has of it in his work against trope theory (see Moreland 2001: 59; 1989: 393-394). Moreland thinks that by making there be just a distinction of reason between the property and the particularizer, trope theory is necessarily faced with an inescapable dilemma: either the nature is nothing but a universal nature or it is not a nature at all, but rather is nothing but its particularizer (2001b: 64). My 4B option shows that trope theory need not be faced with this dilemma. As trope theory sees things according to 4B, the particularizer of this nature is to this nature what, according to austere nominalism, the redness of this apple is to this apple. In this case, it is true to conceive of the nature as the particularizer but the truthmaker for this correct conception is nothing but the nature itself. Because the particularizer is not an ontological entity, one horn of the dilemma is gone: the nature cannot in truth be nothing but its particularizer. And yet because the particularizer is truly predicated of the nature that *itself* serves as the truthmaker for that predication, it is the nature *itself* that secures its particularity, thus making it impossible for the other horn to arise.

<sup>4</sup> I do not know how serious it is taken, but you do see such a view that history can serve to differentiate things. Simons, for example, points out that, as Hughes would have it, two things, such as ships, can be numerically differentiated by having different histories (1997: 762).

to make each nature merely conceptually distinct from its history (option  $\delta$ ) can only be for trope theory to say, for reasons I gave in the previous section, (4B) that outside of the intellect there is the nature but not the history, and there is no basis for a distinction between the nature and the history in the reality outside of the intellect, namely, in the nature. This  $\delta$  option for how the particularizing history is employed to perform its particularizing job undermines the purported exact similarity between natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  for the same reasons that this  $\delta$  option did in the previous section where genealogy was the particularizer. Since the histories of natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are assumed to be dissimilar, and since the conception of the particularizing history is nothing but a conception of the nature it particularizes (lest the particularizer have no efficacy to particularize according to the parameters of this 4B option), then natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  must be dissimilar, must not be exactly similar.

### *2.3. Chain of causal effects as particularizer*

Can the chains of causal effects of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  secure their being merely exactly similar?<sup>5</sup>  
No, and for the same reasons as above.

### *2.4. Duration as particularizer*

Can the durations of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  secure their being merely exactly similar?<sup>6</sup> No, and for the same reasons as above.

## **3. Standard particularizers for exactly similar properties**

Now let me move on to the standard particularizers for exactly similar properties. I call them “standard” because these are the ones that appear most often in the literature. There are two main candidate particularizers that I want to examine: (1) the property’s bearer or (2) the property itself.

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<sup>5</sup> Davidson suggests that the numerical distinctness of some things—he has in mind events—might be explained by a difference in their causal effects (1980: 306). When it comes to events, he personally thinks that the causal effects plus the genealogies is the particularizer that works. Note, by the way, that by the chains of causal effects I do not mean the causal powers of the natures, which will be exactly similar between the two exactly similar natures. I mean, rather, everything that each nature is complicit in bringing about, which can of course differ drastically.

<sup>6</sup> Davidson offers the suggestion that the numerical distinctness of some things might be explained by a difference in their duration (see 1980: 305). He does not agree, however, that this is a good particularizer.

### 3.1. *Bearer as particularizer*

Two things are commonly meant by “bearer of a property.” Going from least to most popular, by “property bearer” we are going to mean either a bearer that is not a spatiotemporal location or a bearer that is a spatiotemporal location. So let us look at both of these.

#### 3.1.1. *Non-spatiotemporal location bearer*

By “non-spatiotemporal location bearer” it seems that we are going to mean either a trope-bundle bearer, whether consisting of many tropes or just one, or else simply a bare particular bearer, where by “bare particular” I mean that in which properties inhere (but in itself is propertyless) and whose particularity is unanalyzable or else is due to itself alone (which presumably is something different from being unanalyzable).<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the trope-bundle bearer would not be a good particularizer. For just as trope theorists, at least the ones with which I am dealing, find it uncontroversial that there can be exactly similar properties, trope theorists also find it uncontroversial that there can be exactly similar bundles, whether these bundles consist of one property or several. Because the question would arise about what particularizes the bundles in the case where two are exactly similar, and because trope theory holds that the particularity of the properties of the bundles explains the particularity of these exactly similar bundles (explains why they are numerically distinct), this option is of no use until it is established what particularizes tropes, which is precisely what we are now trying to do. In light of this, let us just consider the option where the bearer is a bare particular.

Can the bare particular bearers of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  secure their being merely exactly similar?<sup>8</sup> First, it is reasonable to say that  $x_1$  is distinct from its bare particular (option  $\alpha$ ). After all, a bare particular is not itself a property. By  $x_1$  being particularized by the bare particular, then, we must mean that  $x_1$  is particularized insofar as it is tied to something that is distinct from itself. Now, since  $x_1$  is of course not nothing, we are attending to something when we attend only to  $x_1$ . The thing is, when we attend only to

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<sup>7</sup> C. B. Martin (1980) is the famous advocate of the Lockean view that bare particulars are the bearers of particularized properties.

<sup>8</sup> Rojek thinks that bare particular bearers particularize tropes (2008: 364). Leftow also thinks this, claiming for example that “Cain’s humanity is distinct from Abel’s just because it is Cain’s, not Abel’s” (1999: 203). Kim seems to suggest that Denkel individuates tropes by their bearers (2000: 159) and he says that Campbell never considers this option (149). Although they do not agree that it is successful, Levinson (2006: 578) and Trettin (2002: 509) suggest this as being one of the particularizers of a trope.

x1 in this case, we are attending to that something as it is independent of being particularized. We are, in short, attending to a universal.

Second, if we make x1 have an essential directedness towards its bare particular (option  $\beta$ ), then we rule out both the bare particular as the particularizer and the possibility of x1 being exactly similar to x2. For you see, x2 is by hypothesis intrinsically oriented to some *other* bare particular than x1 is, which thus makes the nature that it is dissimilar to the nature that x1 is.

Third, making the bare particular intrinsic to x1 (option  $\gamma$ ) is doomed to fail as well. For if we make the bare particular a portion of x1, whatever exceeds that portion will be universal. And because a bare particular is not a feature, we surely cannot make it a feature of x1. Even if we could, when we attend solely to that which has the particularizing feature we will be attending to a universal.

Fourth, for trope theory to make each nature merely conceptually distinct from its bare particular (option  $\delta$ ) can only be for trope theory to say (4B) that outside of the intellect there is the nature but not the bare particular, and there is no basis for a distinction between the nature and the bare particular in the reality outside of the intellect, namely, in the nature. But since the bare particular bearers of natures x1 and x2 are different, and since the conception of the particularizing bare particular bearer is nothing but a conception of the nature it particularizes, natures x1 and x2 must be different. And since they must be different due to nothing but themselves alone, that is, since they must be different *qua nature, qua qualitative content*, then this can only entail that they are not exactly similar (as I will explain in further detail in section 3.2, where I explicitly consider the view that a property is self-particularized).<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1.2. Spatiotemporal location bearer

Let us move on now to spatiotemporal locations as the particularizers of tropes, where this means that two exactly similar properties are numerically distinct because they are at different spatiotemporal locations, that is, are at a non-zero distance from each other in time and space. So, can the spatiotemporal locations of x1 and x2 secure their being

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<sup>9</sup> Besides, it seems impossible for a property to be the truthmaker for its truly being said to be a bare particular. Since a bare particular is a non-property, and since the property is indeed a property, this predication cannot be true.

merely exactly similar?<sup>10</sup> Whether we take a substantival or a relational view of spacetime,<sup>11</sup> the answer is no for pretty much the same reasons that we already saw.<sup>12</sup>

First, if the locations are extrinsic to the natures (option  $\alpha$ ),<sup>13</sup> then when we attend only to  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  we are thereby attending to one nature. Second, if we make the natures have an essential directedness towards their different locations (option  $\beta$ ), then we rule out both the locations themselves as the particularizers and we disallow the exact similarity between  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ . For you see,  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are thus intrinsically oriented to different locations, which makes them dissimilar in a certain way. Third, even if we make the locations intrinsic to the natures (option  $\gamma$ ), whether by making them portions of the natures or features of the natures, there still remains an excessive element of universality. Fourth, for trope theory to make each nature merely conceptually distinct from its location (option  $\delta$ ) can only be for trope theory to say (4B) that outside of the intellect there is the nature but not the location, and that there is no basis for a distinction between the nature and the location in the reality outside of the intellect, namely, in the nature. But since the locations of natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are different, and since the conception of the particularizing location is nothing but a conception of the nature it particularizes, then natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  must be different. Just as we saw with option  $\beta$ , since they must be different due to nothing but themselves alone (that is, since they must be different *qua nature, qua qualitative content*), it would be incorrect to say that  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are exactly similar (as I will explain in more detail right now).

### 3.2. *Property itself as the particularizer*

Let us move on now to the view that natures are self-particularized. So, can the very being of  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  secure their being merely exactly similar? When we say that the particularity of a nature is a function of the nature alone, that is clearly not going to

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<sup>10</sup> Stout supposedly held this view (see Moreland 2001: 51). Famous for this view of course is the early Campbell (1997: 136). Harré seems to espouse this particularizer too, speaking of this redness-here-now (2009: 98). Davidson suggests, but does not agree, that the numerical distinctness of events might be explained by a difference in their spatiotemporal locations (1980: 306). Although he does not think that it would be helpful to trope theory, Levinson also suggests this as a particularizer (2006: 578-579).

<sup>11</sup> For the distinction between the relational and the substantival theory of spacetime in regards to individuating tropes by location, see Schaffer (2001: 251).

<sup>12</sup> Note that, for the sake of ease, throughout the rest of this section I will focus merely on *spatial* location.

<sup>13</sup> Kim seems to think that this is the only option. He complains that it is wrong to have tropes be individuated by location because location is extrinsic to the trope (2000: 177).

mean that something external to the nature has particularity (option  $\alpha$ ) or that merely some portion or feature of the nature has particularity (option  $\gamma$ ). Moreover, we would not take this to mean that the property has an essential directedness towards something else that has particularity (option  $\beta$ ) (although this in effect does seem to entail that the property is self-particularized). What we are left with, in effect, is that there is a distinction of reason between a property (a nature, a qualitative content) and its particularity, where this is understood in terms of option 4B: outside of the intellect there is the nature but not in addition some particularity, and there is also no basis for a distinction between the nature and the particularity in the mind-independent nature.<sup>14</sup>

But there is still a problem even here. Since the particularities of natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are different, and since the conception of the particularity is nothing but a conception of the nature it particularizes, then natures  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  must be different. That is fine for the trope theory—indeed, it is precisely what trope theory wanted: ontological individuation. But since, in other words,  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  must be different due to nothing but themselves alone (that is, since they must be different *qua nature, qua qualitative content*), that can mean nothing else but that they are dissimilar *qua nature*, in which case it would be incorrect to say that  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are exactly similar.

Am I right about this, as I have been taking for granted? Well, I cannot see why their qualitative difference, which is due to nothing but the *mere* qualities that they themselves are, would not guarantee their qualitative dissimilarity. Any gap between difference and dissimilarity closes at this point, no? If this orangeness is different than that orangeness due to nothing else but the orangenesses themselves, then that can only mean, it seems, that they themselves are not exactly similar, whatever might have been assumed and however resembling they may seem. This is not an a posteriori affair. The two whatnesses are two on this view due to nothing other than the whatnesses themselves—not due to inhering in different substrata or being in different locations. In other words, each of these properties are particular due to nothing other than themselves alone. But what can it be about mere orangeness, orangeness alone (not its location or whatever), that makes it different from some other orangeness? It can only be that it is a different “shade” of orangeness than the other orangeness. Put it this way. If the *mere simple quality itself* is sole ground for its particularity (in short, if the quality is self-

<sup>14</sup> It may very well be that this is what Campbell, in his revised trope theory, takes to be the right view (see Moreland 2001: 60).

particularized), then the ground for the particularity can be nothing else but qualitative. But if the ground for the particularity of a mere simple quality is qualitative, then the ground for the numerical difference of purportedly exactly similar qualities is of course qualitative. But if the ground for the numerical difference of purportedly exactly similar qualities is qualitative, then that means that there is a qualitative difference, and thus qualitative dissimilarity, between them. So while having a property be self-particularized guarantees its particularity, the expense is that the possibility of exact resemblance between such properties is ruled out.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

I have not argued that the concept of a particularized property, a trope, is at bottom inconsistent. I have not ruled out the possibility that properties are particulars rather than universals. Aside from delineating each of the ways that property-particularizers might be employed to perform their jobs, my aim in this paper was to explain why I think that in the few ways to employ a particularizer that actually succeed in having the property be particularized, that is, be a trope, the possibility of exact similarity between tropes is disallowed. My aim, in other words, was to explain why I think that a particularizer's success in getting rid of any universal element of the property results in the impossibility of exact similarity between the properties.

Might the realist be faced with a problem analogous to that faced by the trope theorist who regards properties as analyzably particular? If we are going to ask the trope theorist to explain how exactly similar properties are not in truth simply one property, should we not also ask the realist to explain how multiple property instances are not in truth simply multiple properties? We might wonder, in effect, whether there can be a successful universalizer for a property. This question may be just as well motivated as my question as to whether there can be a successful particularizer for exactly similar tropes. For whereas I find it odd that mere whatnesses can be indiscernible and yet not identical (even though, for example, indiscernible mass properties occupy and express one and the same position on the mass spectrum), the trope theorist might find it odd that one thing can be wholly expressed through two nonconcurrent entities at once. The realist's answer to this question is going to be that the property is its own universalizer; it is self-universalized. At the end of the previous section I discussed the problem that

trope theory would face if it regarded properties as self-particularized. The problem was that self-particularization secures the ontological distinctness of a property at the expense of ruling out the possibility of a property being exactly similar to any other property. Does the realist face an analogous problem by regarding properties as self-universalized? Self-universalization secures the property's ability to be had by multiple entities at one and the same time (such that the entities with this property will be strictly identical in terms of it), but there is no analogous expense from what I can see.<sup>15</sup> The disanalogy seems telling. We would expect self-particularization to do the job for trope theory if it is going to be a viable alternative to realism. But if demanding that properties be considered self-particularized was not bad enough (well, bad at least from the perspective of the realist), trope theory must demand even more if it is going to preserve the possibility of exactly similar tropes.

What more is that? The only option left, as should now be clear, is for trope theorists to regard properties as *unanalyzably* particular, particular due to nothing—not even themselves.<sup>16</sup> Such a move is considered the last bastion of hope for trope theory (mainly in light of the problems that I have consolidated in this paper). One may be prone to think, however, that pulling the brute-fact card here is in fact no help for the trope theorist (and not only for the reason that, as I just pointed out, we would expect properties to be *self*-particularized—not *brute*-particularized—if trope theory is to be a viable alternative to realism). Here is why. Since a nature being primitively particular entails that it is wrong to hold even that the nature itself provides for its own

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<sup>15</sup> One may say that there are expenses that come with holding the realist view in general, though. For example, the redness here in this apple is spinning (insofar as this apple is spinning) whereas the redness there in that apple is stationary (insofar as that apple is stationary), such that redness is both moving and not moving. There are several replies that can be made to this. Just as we say that Descartes insofar as he is 25-years-old-and-a-day is bearded whereas Descartes insofar as he is 26-years-old-and-a-day is shaved, we might say that property *x* insofar as it is over here is spinning whereas *x* insofar as it is over there is stationary. There is nothing odd about me saying “See that clean-shaven man over there, he was bearded a year ago.” Likewise there is nothing odd about me saying “See property *x* spinning over there, it is stationary over here.” When I say “*x* is spinning at place *p*1” I mean that *x* has the property *spinning at p*1, and when I say that “*x* is stationary at place *p*2” I mean that *x* has the property *being stationary at p*2. The properties of *x* are, in short, place-and-time indexed. We clearly have one and the same *x* in the two places at the same time, and yet there is no contradiction. There would only be contradiction if *x* was both spinning and not spinning *at the same place and time*. This could never happen, though. There cannot be two instances of *x* at the same place and time: a purported two instances in the same place and time would be one instance according to realism.—Or perhaps one might take the Moreland-Wolterstorff line and say that universals are not really located, in which case it would not be true that it is both spinning and stationary.

<sup>16</sup> D. C. Williams famously holds the view that the particularity of tropes is unanalyzable (1966). Maurin too takes particularity to be an unanalyzable fact about tropes (see 2002: 16-21). Trettin (2002: 509) and Livanios (2007: 365) suggest this as an option.

particularity (an easy point to forget), it follows that a nature being primitively particular entails that it is right to hold that the nature itself does *not* provide for its own particularity. But if a nature itself does not provide for its own particularity, then that nature—considered in itself—just is a universal! So not only is trope theory saddled with the odd position that nothing, not even the property itself, provides for the particularity of a property (which is a problem not faced analogously by realists since universals are self-universalized), this position seems to undermine trope theory.

Does this argument involve slippery reasoning? It may be motivated by an explanatory rationalist's scorn for brute facts, and I admit that such a temperament is out of touch with how disputes in metaphysics work these days (where everyone grants that brute-fact cards will be pulled by each competing theory). Yet I cannot shake being compelled by the argument. If the property is neither self-particularized nor other-particularized, then surely it is appropriate to say that the property in itself is *not* particularized.

Even if I am wrong about this, it does seem odd for the brute-fact card to be pulled right on the very contended issue as to whether properties are particular or universal. Perhaps it is only odd from the realist perspective. This I am self-critical enough to admit. Nevertheless, one advantage realism has over trope theory in this regard is that it does not do the same: properties for it are *self*-universalized, not *brute*-universalized. Explanation has to stop somewhere, yes. And that is why I think we are so self-consciously open nowadays to pulling the brute-fact card. Of course, the point where an explanation stops need not be a brute fact. Instead of stopping at the *unexplained*, explanation can stop at the *self*-explained. Not all endpoints to explanation are created equal, I think. The more “virtuous” buckstopping point is the self-explained rather than the non-explained (or, more accurately, the nothing). Both stopping points may leave people dissatisfied, to be sure. But since it is so repugnant to say that there is something that is explained neither by itself nor by any other,<sup>17</sup> we ought to be more dissatisfied with the strictly brute stopping point. So I take it as a major mark against trope theory that it cannot take the more virtuous path of having properties be self-particularized without thereby undermining (for reasons I explained in the previous section) the very possibility of exact similarity between particularized properties. When

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<sup>17</sup> According to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, there seem to be cases where commonsense is downright wrong in this regard. So perhaps I am speaking a bit recklessly.

we ultimately measure the two theories, realism and trope theory, against each other (at the forever-to-come time where we will consider which has more explanatory power, satisfies more desiderata, is more economical, pulls less primitive-fact cards, and so on), we should perhaps note not merely how many endpoints to explanation are posited by a theory, but what those endpoints are. Are they self-explained or non-explained? Self-explained termini count much less against a theory than unexplained, that is, brute, termini.<sup>18</sup>

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