

Can a Single Property Be Both Dispositional and Categorical? The “Partial Consideration Strategy”, Partially Considered

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Abstract One controversial position in the debate over dispositional and categorical properties maintains that our concepts of these properties are the result of partially considering unitary properties that are both dispositional and categorical. As one of its defenders (Heil 2005, p. 351) admits, this position is typically met with “incredulous stares”. In this paper, I examine whether such a reaction is warranted. This thesis about properties is an instance of what I call “the Partial Consideration Strategy”—i.e., the strategy of claiming that what were formerly thought of as distinct entities are actually a unified entity, partially considered. By evaluating its use in other debates, I uncover a multi-layered *prima facie* case against the use of the Partial Consideration Strategy in the dispositional/categorical properties debate. In closing, I describe how the Partial Consideration Strategy can be reworked in a way that would allow it to sidestep this *prima facie* case.

Keywords Dispositional properties · Categorical properties · Partial consideration · The substratum · Phenomenal properties

1 Dispositional Properties, Categorical Properties, and the Martin/Heil/Strawson Position

A dispositional property is “full of threats and promises” in that it points beyond its possessor to various manifestations or causal interactions with other objects, manifestations/causal interactions that may not be occurring and that, in fact, may never occur.¹ Despite pointing to various manifestations/interactions, dispositional properties are not relations; dispositional properties are *intrinsic* properties of objects, properties

¹The description of dispositional properties as being “full of threats and promises” comes from Goodman 1965.

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that are “really there” and “ready to go” objects even if the manifestations/causal interactions that they point to are not presently occurring.²

As I am using the term, there is a necessary connection between a “dispositional property” and the powers it conveys upon its bearer to act in various ways in various circumstances. The essence of a “categorical property”, in contrast, is not connected to how it makes its bearer behave in various circumstances or causally interact with other objects. If a categorical property conveys a set of powers in this world, there is no guarantee that it will convey those same powers in a different world that is governed by different laws of nature.³

One of the liveliest debates in all of contemporary metaphysics concerns dispositional and categorical properties. The central battle in this debate is between those who maintain that the properties of spatiotemporal objects are all dispositional (i.e., “Dispositional Monists”) and those who maintain they are all categorical (i.e., “Categorical Monists”).⁴ In this paper, however, I will focus upon an idea that, at least currently, resides in the fringe of this debate, an idea originally defended by Martin (1997) and subsequently picked up by Heil (2003, 2005) and Strawson (2008).

The idea is that it is a *mistake* to think of dispositionality and of categoricity as being mutually exclusive categories. Instead, every property is simultaneously dispositional and categorical; as Martin (1997, p. 216) puts it “[t]he dispositional and the qualitative are equally basic and irreducible; there is no direction for one being basic in a property and the other being ‘supervenient’”. According to the “Martin/Heil/Strawson position”—or “the M/H/S position”, for short—properties are not composites of two distinct ontological entities (i.e., “property-sides”), one of which is dispositional and the other categorical. Instead, there is just one, unified ontological entity on the scene: the unitary property itself. Borrowing an expression from Locke, M/H/S maintain that our concepts of dispositional properties and of categorical properties are the result of “partially considering” these unitary entities.

By combining dispositionality and categoricity within single properties, the M/H/S account of properties is potentially in a position to accommodate arguments from both sides of the debate between Dispositional Monists and Categorical Monists. Despite this potential benefit, the M/H/S theory has not been well received. It is often dismissed, with little explanation, as being too incredible to warrant serious consideration. In a survey piece on properties, Armstrong (2005, p. 315) says—

I confess that I find this totally incredible. If anything is a category mistake, it is a category mistake to identify a quality—a categorical property—and a power,

² These expressions come from Martin (1997). The claim that dispositional properties are intrinsic properties is widely accepted; see, for example, Martin (1994, 1997, 2008), Heil (2003, 2005), Molnar (2003), Whittle (2006), and Bird (2007).

³ As Schaffer (2005) explains, the defender of categorical properties could maintain that the laws of nature are necessary and, hence, constant across all possible worlds. Under such an account, categorical properties would end up conveying the same powers to their bearers in all possible worlds. But, unlike dispositional properties, it would not be part of their essence that they do so.

⁴ Dispositional Monists include Shoemaker (1980, 1998) and Bird (2007). Categorical Monists include Lewis (1986), Armstrong (1997), and Schaffer (2005). Some posit that there is a mix of both dispositional properties and non-dispositional (i.e., categorical) properties; see, for instance, Ellis (2001) and Molnar (2003).

essentially something that points to a certain effect. They are just different, that's all.

In the same vein, Molnar (2003, p. 155) says—

The very same thing is both dispositional and qualitative. How could that be, given that a power is a property that is essentially directed to a specific manifestation, whereas a quality is a property that is not essentially directed to any manifestation?⁵

Heil himself (2005, p. 351) confesses that—

...a view of this kind, in spite of possessing what strike me as impeccable philosophical credentials, is generally greeted with incredulous stares.

M/H/S claim that the resistance people have to their position is the result of a dogmatic commitment to an assumption that is ultimately ungrounded and ought to be rejected: namely, the assumption that properties can be dispositional or categorical, but not both.⁶ But are they correct about this? Is the assumption really baseless? Or are there legitimate reasons for thinking that these two categories are, in fact, mutually exclusive, as the tradition says? If so, what are these reasons?

In what follows, I will argue that there is not anything inherent to what I call “the Partial Consideration Strategy”—i.e., the general strategy of claiming that what were formerly thought of as distinct entities are actually a unified entity, partially considered—that guarantees (or warrants) incredulous stares. To establish this claim, I examine (in Section 2) an application of the Partial Consideration Strategy in a completely different case, a case that involves the claim that our concepts of “properties” and of “substrata” are the result of partially considering a more basic, unified entity. As we shall see, the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy in this case has elicited far less incredulity than the application of the same strategy in the dispositional/categorical property case.

If, in general, the Partial Consideration Strategy is not fated to result in incredulous stares, then why does its application in the specific case of dispositional/categorical properties do so? To answer this question, I turn to another case (in Section 3): a hypothetical case where the Partial Consideration Strategy is used to explain the relationship between phenomenal and physical properties. In this context, the Partial Consideration Strategy would elicit a fair amount of incredulity, and rightly so. Drawing upon some of the resources for describing conceivability arguments from this area of philosophy, I develop an account of why, if it were deployed in this context, the Partial Consideration Strategy would (and should) be met with incredulity. I argue that the same analysis applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the case of dispositional and categorical properties (in Section 4). I then conclude (in Section 5) by sketching a different way of deploying the Partial Consideration Strategy in the case

⁵ To be fair, Molnar also offers some actual arguments against the M/H/S position; see, in particular, Molnar 2003, pp. 150–153.

⁶ Heil (2003, pp. 92–95) suggests that part of the reason people assume that there must be properties that are exclusively dispositional in nature and/or properties that are exclusively categorical in nature is because of the temptation to read ontology off of language—i.e., since we have dispositional and categorical *predicates*, there must be dispositional and categorical *properties*.

of dispositional and categorical properties, a way that would not elicit the level of incredulity elicited by the M/H/S thesis.

Before I carry out this project, I need to issue a warning. The issues connected to the two cases I am about to examine—the case that involves treating objects as mereological sums of properties and substrata and the case that involves the nature of phenomenal properties—are multifaceted and run deep. In discussing these cases, I will not attempt to do full justice to all of these issues. Instead, I will give a selective view of these issues, a view tailored towards the end of evaluating and gaining insights about various applications of the Partial Consideration Strategy.

2 Substrata, Properties, and Partial Consideration

One place where the Partial Consideration Strategy has gained some traction—one place where it is not immediately dismissed as “incredible” or routinely met with stares—is in the debate over whether concrete particulars can be mereologically reduced to bundles of properties. First, some background: Those drawn to the claim that objects cannot be reduced to bundles of properties claim that, besides properties, the metaphysical nature of objects also include “substrata” or, as Armstrong (1997) puts it, “thin particulars”. Although many arguments have been tendered against the “bundle” account of objects (i.e., the account that maintains objects are *mere* bundles of properties) and on behalf of the substratum/thin particular, for expositional purposes I will focus exclusively on the argument that asserts that *properties need bearers*. As Robinson (2009) describes the notion of the substratum in the background of this argument in his *Stanford Encyclopedia* article on “Substance”, it is a conception of something “...like a kind of stuff—the substantiveness on to which properties are stuck”.⁷

To perform this metaphysical task, the essence of the substratum must be propertyless. To appreciate why, consider the substratum present in a particular red apple. This substratum has the property of being red. But being red cannot be an essential property of it, for the same “kind of stuff” must also be capable of instantiating other, incompatible color properties. Generalizing from this point, we quickly reach the conclusion that, in terms of its intrinsic nature, the substratum must be propertyless.⁸

⁷ Another “job” sometimes assigned to substrata is to distinguish objects that instantiate all the same universals and thereby account for the numerical diversity of qualitatively identical objects. Conceived of in this other way, what’s important about the substratum is its *particularity*. (For discussion, see Armstrong 1997 and Loux 1998.) Some want the substratum to perform *both* of these jobs: bear properties *and* distinguish objects that instantiate all the same universals. (See, for instance, the discussion of thin particulars in Armstrong 1997.)

⁸ The absence of essential properties in substrata is sometimes used to argue that the very notion of substrata embodies a contradiction. People drawn to this argument says things like “in order to execute the job they’ve been assigned, substrata must possess the property of being property-bearers” or “if substrata are property-less, then they possess the property of having no properties”. Such arguments can be blunted, however, by adopting a “sparse” conception of properties where every meaningful predicate does *not* necessarily map onto a property. Under a sparse conception, the truth of sentences like “the substratum bears properties” or “the substratum is (intrinsically) property-less” doesn’t require that the substratum instantiate the property of being a property-bearer or the property of being property-less. For more on this response to the apparent contradictions of the substratum, see Loux (1998, p. 121–123) and Sider (2006).

Many find the conception of substrata as intrinsically propertyless worrisome. The concern here need not be limited to the old Empiricist complaint, voiced by Hume, that one cannot directly experience the substratum. Consider, for instance, what Heil (2003, p. 171) says about substrata:

You need not be an empiricist to worry about substrata thus conceived. What could substrata (or 'thin particulars') *be*?

In attempting to describe the essence of the substratum in the red apple, for instance, we cannot cite its being red or apple-shaped, for these properties are *not essential* to it, *qua substratum*. So what can we say about it?

The previous passage from Heil suggests that, given its lack of (essential) properties, there is *nothing* we can say about what substrata are like. On this point, Ted Sider (2006, p. 392) disagrees:

On an intuitive level: to have a nature is to “be a certain way”. There must be answers to questions like “what is the thing like?”, and “to what is the thing similar, and to what is it dissimilar?” Truly bare particulars do have natures in this intuitive sense. Indeed, they all have the same nature, and that nature is exhausted by the fact that they instantiate no monadic universals. That is the way that they are. “What is a truly bare particular like?” Answer: “It is not charged. It does not have any mass. It does not have any spin. And so on.”

Conceding Sider's point, it still remains the case that we can say very little, *in positive terms*, about the intrinsic nature of the substratum. This is worrisome. By what right can we assert that such an entity exists when we are prohibited from saying anything, in positive terms, about its nature? Some are willing to bite this bullet: Bergmann (1967), for instance, is happy to assert that “bare particulars” have no nature and, as we have just witnessed, Sider (2006) is content with what little he can say, in negative terms, about them. Most of the rest of us, however, find such a “thin” conception of the substratum a little too off-putting to embrace.

At this point, it may seem like this entire line of argument ends up being a *reductio ad absurdum*: if a propertyless entity is the price we have to pay to accommodate the claim that properties need bearers, then perhaps we should claim that properties do *not* require bearers after all! There is, however, another option for those attracted to the claim that properties need bearers: namely, the Partial Consideration Strategy. Adopting the strategy in this context gives us the means to accept the claim that since properties cannot exist all on their own, there must be *more* to the nature of an object than just its properties while not reifying this additional “substratum” into a full-fledged ontological entity. The strategy accomplishes this by denying a long-standing assumption held in common between bundle theorists and defenders of substrata: namely, that objects can be reduced to more basic ontological entities. In place of this assumption, the Partial Consideration Strategy treats the objects themselves as being the basic entities; our conceptions of “properties” and of “substrata”, in turn, are the result of *partially considering* those unitary entities.

Here is a statement of the basic idea, taken from Heil (2003).

Property-bearers and properties are inseparable. This is not because properties are bonded to property-bearers with an especially powerful metaphysical glue.

Rather, property-bearers are objects considered as being particular ways, and properties are ways objects are. In considering an object as a property-bearer, we are considering it partially; in considering its properties, we are considering ways it is, another kind of partial consideration. (pp. 172–173)

Such an approach to the “substratum” has been embraced by a number of prominent metaphysicians besides Heil, including Martin (1980, 1997, 2008), Lowe (2000), Loux (1998), Armstrong (1997), and Strawson (2008, 2009). These philosophers disagree with regard to some of the finer details of this approach; they disagree, for instance, about whether the relevant basic entities are best described as “objects”, “concrete particulars”, “states of affairs”, etc.⁹ Despite these differences, they all embrace the basic outline of the Partial Consideration Strategy in this context, a strategy that allows them to accept arguments in support of the “substratum” without reifying it into a problematic stand-alone entity.

Although it is not completely uncontroversial, this application of the Partial Consideration Strategy has *not* been met with the degree of sheer incredulity that often meets the M/H/S position. Even though it rejects a long-standing assumption that objects can be mereologically reduced to more basic entities and, in doing so, completely redraws basic ontology categories, I have *never* seen someone dismiss this position on the basis of its being “totally incredible” or stare silently in disbelief when its defenders are talking about it. This, in turn, establishes that there is nothing about the Partial Consideration Strategy *in general* that guarantees that people will find its applications too incredible to take seriously.

So what is it about the application of this strategy in the case of dispositional and categorical properties that elicits so many incredulous stares? Why has not tradition been overturned as easily there as it has been in the case of substrata and properties? To make some headway towards answering this question, I will examine another case: a hypothetical case that involves applying the Partial Consideration Strategy to phenomenal properties.

3 Phenomenality, Physicality, and Partial Consideration

There is a long running debate about the relation between phenomenal properties—i.e., properties that constitute “what it's like” to have a perceptual experience¹⁰—and physical properties. Some claim these properties are identical, others say that they distinct, others maintain that they stand in a supervenience relation to one another, others “eliminate” either one or the other, and so on. In what follows, I will identify and explore a new possible position in this debate, one that relies upon the Partial Consideration Strategy. This investigation, in turn, will yield important resources for analyzing and evaluating the incredulous stares elicited by the M/H/S position.

⁹ They also differ over the arguments they give in favor of the substratum; some give arguments in addition to (or in place of) the argument that properties need bearers. As a result, some are working with a conception of substrata where they have additional/other metaphysical jobs besides that of supporting properties.

¹⁰ This expression comes from Nagel (1974).

If we apply the Partial Consideration Strategy to the case of phenomenal properties, we end up with a (hypothetical) position where neither “phenomenal properties” nor “physical properties” are genuine, stand-alone entities. Instead, our conception of each type of property is the result of partially considering a single, unified entity whose nature is irreducibly both phenomenal and physical. It is important to note that this position would differ from (prototypical) Physicalists accounts that claim that physical properties are *ontologically basic* and that what we call “phenomenal properties” are really properties with *completely physical natures*. The Partial Consideration Strategy does not, in any way, reduce the phenomenal to the physical. Instead, it maintains that the physical and the phenomenal are equally basic.¹¹

How would this (hypothetical) application of the Partial Consideration Strategy be received? The answer, I suspect, is *not well*; I suspect it would be summarily dismissed as “totally incredible” and elicit many silent stares. But what, exactly, would be so problematic about claiming that what were formerly thought of as being phenomenal properties and physical properties are really abstractions from another unitary entity? Would resistance to such a position simply be the result of a long-standing, but ultimately *unjustified* assumption that a given property could either have a phenomenal nature or a physical nature, but not both?

No. There is a relatively obvious *prima facie* case that can be constructed against the use of the Partial Consideration Strategy in the context, a case that draws upon the intuitive underpinnings of the many conceivability-based arguments that have been leveled against Physicalism. As Chalmers (2002) notes, these arguments rely upon claims about what is “conceivable” in an especially strong sense of that word, a sense that he labels as “positive conceivability”.¹² To introduce the notion of positive conceivability, let us start with its contrast: negative conceivability. A state of affairs P is “negatively conceivable” if P cannot be ruled out a priori (i.e., if there are no contradictions in P). This is a relatively weak sense of conceivability; if, for example, you point blindly to an object behind your back and think “that thing could be red”, the state of affairs you are considering is *negatively* conceivable in virtue of there being no contradiction embodied in the content of your thought. If a state of affairs P is “positively conceivable”, in contrast, you can form a *detailed positive conception*, typically via an act of imagination, of a situation that verifies P.

Our substantial grasp of phenomenal properties and of physical properties—a grasp that underpins the *positive* conceivability of absent qualia, inverted spectra, etc.—has important implications for the initial credibility of the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy to the case of phenomenal properties. To start with, our introspective grasp of phenomenal properties provides a *prima facie* reason for thinking that they are *stand-alone* entities, qua properties. In introspecting phenomenal red, for instance, you seem to be aware of complete, stand-alone property; there is nothing about the manner in which this entity is presented before the mind that

¹¹ This point also distinguishes the position under discussion from what Chalmers (1996, 2010) labels “Type-F Materialism/Monism”. According to the latter position, phenomenal (or “protophenomenal”) properties serve as the categorical basis for physical properties and, as a result, are more ontologically fundamental than physical properties.

¹² Others have drawn a similar distinction; see, for example, Levine's (2001) distinction between “thin” and “thick” conceivability. Chalmers' discussion of this and other issues relating to conceivability owes much to Yablo's (1993) seminal paper on the topic.

suggests that there must be more to its nature, qua property. This, in turn, speaks against the Partial Consideration Strategy (applied to phenomenal properties), for according to this position there is supposed to be *more* to the nature of this entity than just this phenomenality—there is also supposed to be its physicality.

A similar *prima facie* obstacle is encountered when we switch from phenomenality to physicality. For just as introspection provides us with a substantial grasp of phenomenal properties, the physical sciences provide us with a substantial grasp of the nature of physical properties. In describing the physical nature of C-fiber firing, for example, it seems that the physical sciences are describing a complete, stand-alone property; there is nothing about the scientific description of this and other “physical” properties that suggests that there must be more to their nature, qua properties.¹³ Once again, this speaks against the version of the Partial Consideration Strategy currently under discussion; according to that position, there is supposed to be *more* to the nature of these entities—there is also supposed to be their phenomenality.

So far, I have been focusing upon our grasp of phenomenal and physical properties. The final layer of the *prima facie* case against this application of the Partial Consideration Strategy, of course, involves the conceivability arguments themselves. By and large, the opening premises of these conceivability arguments—e.g., that an inverted spectrum argument is conceivable, that a zombie is conceivable, etc.—are accepted by anti-Physicalists and Physicalists alike. To be fair, there are pockets of resistance to these conceivability claims. To borrow some helpful terminology from Chalmers (1996), “Type-A” Physicalists deny all of these conceivability claims. (Shoemaker (1975), in contrast, argues that while an inverted spectrum is conceivable, a zombie is not.) My sense, however, is that most Physicalists are “Type-B” Physicalists who accept these conceivability claims while attempting to blunt the inference to the genuine metaphysical possibility of such scenarios.

What do these conceivability arguments have to do with our attempt to apply the Partial Consideration Strategy to phenomenal properties? Although they are typically deployed as *prima facie* cases for thinking that phenomenal properties are metaphysically distinct from physical properties, these arguments can be recast in more general terms: they can be recast as providing *prima facie* cases for thinking that *phenomenality* is metaphysically distinct from *physicality*. This provides an additional layer to *prima facie* case against the Partial Consideration Strategy, for according to that position the relevant types of phenomenality should be (metaphysically) *inseparable* from the relevant types of physicality. According to the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy currently under discussion, the physicality of pain (i.e., C-fiber firing) and phenomenality of pain (i.e., felt painfulness) are not distinct entities bonded together by strong metaphysical glue. Instead, they are supposed to be the result of partially considering a single, unified entity. The fact that we can (positively) conceive of their separation, in turn, provides another *prima facie* reason to doubt the Partial Consideration Strategy.

¹³ A small, but growing movement challenges this claim. The basic idea behind the challenge is that the physical sciences only provide *relational* descriptions of the properties they describe—i.e., they describe these properties in terms of what they help their bearers to do, while remaining silent about the *intrinsic* nature of these properties. For articulations of this challenge, see Russell (1927) and Chalmers (1996).

Taken together, these points present a multi-layered *prima facie* case against the Partial Consideration Strategy (when that strategy is applied to phenomenal properties). As we have seen, this case flows from the substantial grasp we have phenomenal and physical properties. I have argued that this grasp provides a *prima facie* reason for thinking that phenomenal properties, as revealed by introspection, are *stand-alone entities* and a *prima facie* reason for thinking that physical properties, as describe by the physical sciences, are *stand-alone entities*. This grasp also underpins the *positive* conceivability of the separation of phenomenality from physicality, which is another strike against the Partial Consideration Strategy.

Further insight into this *prima facie* case against the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy to phenomenal properties can be gained by comparing it to a similar *prima facie* case against Physicalism as a thesis about phenomenal properties. The conceivability arguments that are part of the *prima facie* case against the Partial Consideration Strategy also provide a *prima facie* case against the Physicalist position that reduces phenomenal properties to physical properties. Despite this similarity, Contemporary Physicalism is *not* generally met with stares and sheer incredulity. (And if it were, those stares would not be justified.) So what explains this difference in the reactions elicited by Physicalism and those that would be elicited by the Partial Consideration Strategy (if the latter thesis was applied to phenomenal properties)?

To start with, the *prima facie* case against the Partial Consideration Strategy (applied to phenomenal properties) *would have more layers* to it than the corresponding *prima facie* case against Physicalism. In particular, the Physicalist can allow that our grasp of physical properties, the grasp facilitated by the physical sciences, is, in fact, a grasp of an entity with a nature that is rich to be a stand-alone entity, qua property. The defender of the Partial Consideration Strategy, in contrast, must *deny* that our grasp of physical properties is accurate in that regard; he must say that “physical properties” really do not have a substantial enough nature to be genuine stand-alone entities, qua properties.

Another important difference involves the presence (or absence) of well-known pre-existing resources that can be used to undermine the respective *prima facie* case against each position. In virtue of being a well-established position, there are plenty of extant counter-arguments for the Physicalist to appeal to in attempting to defeat (or at least undermine) the *prima facie* case, based on the aforementioned conceivability arguments, against her position. For instance, the Physicalist can attempt to undercut conceivability arguments using well-known versions of the “Phenomenal Concept Strategy” or challenge her Dualists rivals more generally by appealing to the causal efficacy of phenomenal properties.¹⁴ I am not taking a stand, in this paper, about whether these (or other) Physicalists counter-arguments are ultimately successful. The point, instead, is simply that these counter-arguments are *well-known* and *taken seriously by both parties of the debate*. Because they are *so* well-known and *so* widely discussed, the *prima facie* case against Physicalism has become *contentious*, and is widely recognized as such. As a result, opponents of Physicalism (at least in

¹⁴ The “Phenomenal Concept Strategy” maintains that the conceivability of the relevant scenarios is the result of a special feature of our phenomenal concepts, and not the result of the actual metaphysical distinctness of phenomenal and physical properties. For general discussion of this strategy, see Stoljar 2005.

the current context) cannot get away by simply staring incredulously when confronted with that position.¹⁵

In contrast, the Partial Consideration Strategy (when applied to phenomenal properties) has *not* been a widely discussed or defended position; insofar as I know, I am the first person to discuss it. If someone were to actually adopt this position, he would *not* be in a position to lean upon a reservoir of well-known pre-existing counter-arguments to the obvious *prima facie* case against it.¹⁶ As a result, the *prima facie* case against the Partial Consideration Strategy would be relatively *unchallenged*, at least in the early days of someone defending that position. In such a context, there is a sense in which incredulous stares would be justified, for there would be an obvious intuitive case against the position and no well-known reasons to doubt that case. (Perhaps incredulous stares from professional philosophers are never really *justified*; perhaps, as philosophers, we are obligated to take all ideas seriously, even those that go against our most basic, long-standing, and justified assumptions. If you feel this way, I could instead put the point by saying that, in the context described above, incredulous stares would be *understandable*, even if they were not *justified*. I will ignore this complication, however, in what follows.)

Let us summarize. The reason the Partial Consideration Strategy, if applied to the case of phenomenal properties, would be met with incredulous stares is that there would be an obvious multi-layered *prima facie* case against the position, a case that, at least in the early days of that position, would not be undermined or threatened by any well-known counter-arguments. Although there is a similar *prima facie* case facing the Physicalist, there are significant differences between these cases: the *prima facie* case against Physicalism does not have as many layers, there are a battery of well-known Physicalist counter-arguments, etc. These differences, in turn, account for why Physicalism, at least in the current context, is not met with incredulous stares.

As a final way of diagnosing the incredulous stares that the Partial Consideration Strategy would receive in this context, let us compare this application of the Partial Consideration Strategy to the application of that strategy in the case of substrata/properties, discussed earlier. In the phenomenal/physical properties case, our concepts provide *prima facie* reasons for thinking that each is a stand-alone property. Our concept of the substratum, in contrast, does not provide a *prima facie* reason for thinking that it is a stand-alone entity. If anything the reverse is true: the fact that the substratum is conceived of as being *intrinsically propertyless* casts doubt upon its status as a stand-alone entity. What is more, in the phenomenal/physical case, there are conceivability arguments that provide a *prima facie* case for thinking that phenomenality and physicality are metaphysically separable. There are no analogs of these conceivability arguments in the substratum/properties case. Since, in the

¹⁵ I suspect that things were different in the infancy of the contemporary Physicalist movement; when he was first giving talks in which he identified phenomenal properties with physical properties, I suspect that Jack Smart met his fair share of incredulous stares. (Although even then there were pre-existing Behaviorist arguments against Dualism that, if accepted, could help undercut the force of the *prima facie* case for Dualism.)

¹⁶ Perhaps the defender of the Partial Consideration Strategy could co-opt some of the pre-existing defensive maneuvers of the Physicalist. To do so, however, he would first have to make the case that, despite the differences between Physicalism and the Partial Consideration Strategy, the relevant defensive maneuvers deployed on behalf of the former could also be deployed on behalf of the latter.

substrata/properties case, the Partial Consideration Strategy does *not* posit that there are different types of substrata—as we have seen, it posits that there is only one “kind of stuff” here—that strategy does *not* entail that different types of substrata are inseparable from different types of properties.¹⁷

As a result of these differences, in the phenomenal/physical properties case there is a strong, multi-layered *prima facie* case against the Partial Consideration Strategy—a case that, at least in the early days of that position, would be relatively unchallenged. In such a context, incredulous stares are justified (or least understandable). In the substrata/properties case, in contrast, there is no correspondingly strong, multi-layered *prima facie* case for thinking that substrata and properties are separate, stand-alone entities. This, in turn, explains why, even in its early days, the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy to the substrata/properties case was not met by incredulous stares.

4 Dispositionality, Categoricity, and Partial Consideration

With all these lessons in hand, let us return to the central topic of this paper: the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy to the dispositional/categorical properties case. There are striking similarities between the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy to this case and the application of the same general strategy to the phenomenal/physical properties case, similarities that explain why the M/H/S position is met with (and, in some sense, deserves) incredulous stares.

Just as in the phenomenal/physical properties case, our grasp of dispositional properties and of categorical properties seems to reveal each type of entity as having a rich and substantial nature in its own right. Recall that dispositional properties are exhausted by the causal powers they bestow upon their bearers. As many have pointed out, the physical sciences are well positioned to yield detailed descriptions of such powers. If you think that the physical sciences provide complete descriptions of the properties they describe—as many people do—then you have *prima facie* reason for thinking that dispositional properties, as described by science, are stand-alone entities.¹⁸

Assessing our grasp of categorical properties is a little trickier, for there is not a consensus among the defenders of categorical properties about the nature of these properties. Some, for instance, claim that the natures of categorical properties are thin, perhaps mere “quiddities”.¹⁹ Other flirt with the idea that their natures are phenomenal or “protophenomenal”.²⁰ For the time being, however, I will follow the lead of

¹⁷ Recall that we are working with a conception of the substratum where its *sole* job is to be the bearer of properties. Things would be different on this front if we instead thought of the job of the substratum in terms of *particularizing* objects; in that case, perhaps we *could* conceive of the particular substratum associated with an object—say the substratum associated with my dog Fitz—being associated with a completely different set of properties.

¹⁸ We saw earlier, in footnote 13, that some think that the physical sciences are fated to give incomplete descriptions of the properties they describe. The same concern resurfaces here as well: if the physical sciences give incomplete descriptions of the properties they describe, and if they describe properties exclusively in terms of the powers they convey upon their bearers, then there must be more to properties than the powers they convey.

¹⁹ For critical discussions of this conception of categorical properties, see Black 2000 and Bird 2007.

²⁰ See, for instance, Blackburn (1990) and Chalmers (1996).

Martin (1997, 2008) and Heil (2003, 2005) and act as though *perception* gives us a rich conception of the nature of categoricity: the categorical nature of color or of shape, for instance, would be whatever is revealed to you about those (instantiated) properties through perception.²¹ Under such an account of categoricity, our grasp of categorical properties reveals them to have a relatively substantial nature in their own right.

In short, our grasps of dispositional properties and of categorical properties provide a *prima facie* case for thinking of each as being a stand-alone property in its own right. This parallels the phenomenal/physical properties case. Another parallel involves the presence of conceivability arguments. In this context, the opening premise of these arguments involve claims about the conceivability of a property conveying *different* powers than the powers it happens to convey in this world: e.g., salt that does not dissolve when placed in water, a spherical object that does not roll down an incline, etc. There are, of course, pockets of resistance to some of these conceivability claims. A hard-nosed Dispositional Monist might claim that all such scenarios are inconceivable. (Notice that this would be the analog of the “Type-A” Physicalist’s position.) Others find some of the conceivability claims persuasive, but not others; Fine (2002), for instance, claims that he cannot conceive of an electron that is not negative charged. My sense, however, is that most people, including Dispositional Monists, accept (something like) these conceivability claims. (Dispositional Monists who accept the conceivability of these claims are in a position analogous to that of the “Type-B” Physicalist in that they must find a way of blunting the inference to the genuine metaphysical possibility of such scenarios. One popular strategy, in this regard, involves claiming that above acts of conceivability provide *prima facie* evidence for genuine possibilities, but that these genuine possibilities have been misdescribed. For example, I have not actually conceived of *salt* that does not dissolve in water; instead, I have conceived of something superficially similar to salt that does not dissolve in water.²²)

In summary, in terms of our grasp of the relevant properties and in terms of the presence of conceivability arguments, the *prima facie* case against the M/H/S position mirrors the *prima facie* case against the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy to the case of phenomenal properties. An additional parallel is that since the M/H/S position is still in its early days, there is not reservoir of pre-existing well-known counter-arguments to the multi-layered *prima facie* case against that position. To be clear, Heil (2003), in particular, has leveled an impressive array of arguments in favor of the M/H/S position and against competing theses. As some of these arguments become better known and receive more attention, the larger philosophical community may eventually come to think of the obvious *prima facie* case against the M/H/S position as no longer being unchallenged. But, for the time being, Heil’s counter-arguments have not been widely discussed in the literature and, as a result,

²¹ Martin and Heil emphasize, repeatedly, that categorical properties are “manifest” qualities. For additional discussion of this way of characterizing the nature of categorical properties, see Molnar (2003), pp. 167–168.

²² For example, see Shoemaker (1998), Ellis (2001), Heil (2003), and Bird (2007). The seminal discussion of this general strategy for undermining conceivability arguments comes from Kripke (1980), who uses it to undermine conceivability objections to *a posteriori* identities like “water=H₂O” or “Phosphorus=Hesperus”.

the *prima facie* case against the M/H/S position is likely to be viewed as being *unchallenged*, at least in the immediate future. And this, in turn, is why so many people are content to stare incredulously when confronted with this position.

5 A New Take on Categoricity and its Implications for the Partial Consideration Strategy

Rather than speculating about whether the overall case in favor of the M/H/S position is (or will eventually be) strong enough to undermine (or at least cast doubt upon) the initial multi-layered *prima facie* case against it, I will instead conclude this paper by sketching a new conception of “categoricity”, a conception that is radically different from the conception adopted by Martin, Heil, and Strawson. The significance of this new conception of categoricity, in this context, is this: when the Partial Consideration Strategy is applied to the dispositional/categorical properties case with this new conception of “categoricity” in hand, the resultant position *sidesteps* the *prima facie* case detailed in the previous section.

Let us take the first step down this road by revisiting the notion of “categoricity”. Earlier, we saw that there is not a consensus among the defenders of categorical properties about the nature of those properties. (More carefully, there is not a consensus about the *positive* nature of these properties; the relevant parties all agree that these properties are *non*-dispositional.) There are also significant differences in terms of the objections they level against Dispositional Monism in an effort to motivate the need for positing categorical properties. Some defenders of categorical properties, for instance, insist that dispositional properties require categorical grounds.²³ Others claim that a world of “pure powers”—i.e., a world of objects that possess only dispositional properties—is contradictory or, at the very least, deeply counter-intuitive.²⁴ And yet others maintain that categorical properties are required to explain the difference between a world of objects and empty space.²⁵ And the list of objections goes on.

These two projects—the project of specifying the nature of categorical properties and the project of leveling objections against Dispositional Monism—are potentially connected to one another. For one way of developing a positive conception of categorical properties is by identifying the deficiency with the Dispositional Monist position that categorical properties are supposed to overcome. In what follows, I deploy this strategy: I will develop a positive conception of the nature of categoricity by focusing upon a particular objection Dispositional Monism.

Most of the objections leveled against Dispositional Monism suggest a “job” for categoricity that calls for *multiple types* of categorical properties. Consider, for instance, the claim that dispositional properties are needed to ground categorical

²³ There are a variety of arguments that fall under this general theme. Armstrong (1968) argues that dispositional properties need categorical grounds to explain how they continue to exist while unmanifested. Prior et al. (1982) argue that dispositional properties need grounds in order to accommodate the thesis of Determinism. Smith and Stoljar (1998) argue that dispositional properties need grounds in order to give a plausible account of the semantics of dispositional ascription. Etc.

²⁴ See, for instance, Blackburn (1990), Martin (1997), and Armstrong (1997).

²⁵ See, for instance, Foster (1982).

properties: since there are multiple types of dispositional properties, there will need to be multiple types of categorical properties to ground them to. There could be other objections to Dispositional Monism, however, that do *not* call for multiple types of categorical properties. If, for instance, we focus exclusively on the idea that the “job” of categorical properties is to account for the difference between a world of empty space and a world containing substantial space occupants, we could be led to a conception of categoricity where it *does not admit of multiple determinate types*. The idea would be that every object instantiates the same, fully determinate type of categorical property, a property that makes *all* of its bearers “substantial space occupants”. The various differences between those substantial space occupants, in turn, would be determined exclusively by their respective dispositional properties.

Although much more would need to be said in order to fully describe (and motivate) this new conception of categoricity,²⁶ let us push ahead and see what happens when we apply the Partial Consideration Strategy to the case of dispositional/categorical properties while conceiving of “categoricity” in this new way. Like the application of the Partial Consideration Strategy endorsed by Martin, Heil, and Strawson, this application also treats single properties as being unitary entities that are both dispositional and categorical. Unlike the M/H/S position, however, this new position does not maintain that the concept of categoricity is a concept of something that has a rich and substantial nature in its own right. Instead, it maintains that the concept of categoricity is a concept of something with a *relatively thin* metaphysical nature: pretty much all we can say about it is that it is a *primitive something* in common to all substantial space occupants that makes them different from empty space.

According to the analysis developed in this paper, this new conception of categoricity should make a difference with regard to the intuitive credibility of the Partial Consideration Strategy in the context of the dispositional/categorical properties case. Given this new conception of categoricity, there would not be the same *prima facie* case for thinking that both dispositional properties and categorical properties are stand-alone entities, for our grasp of categoricity would no longer reveal it to have a rich nature in its own right. (In this manner, our grasp of the categoricity becomes more like our grasp of the substratum.) There would also not be the same *prima facie* case, involving various conceivability arguments, for thinking that dispositionality and categoricity are metaphysically separable; unlike the M/H/S position, this new account would not entail that different types of categoricity are metaphysically inseparable from different types of dispositionalities, for, according to this new conception, *there are not different types of categoricity*.

Like the version of the Partial Consideration Strategy deployed by Martin, Heil, and Strawson, the version of that strategy just described has the potential of accommodating arguments from *both sides* of the debate between Dispositional Monists and Categorical Monists. In addition, there is not the same multi-layered *prima facie* case facing this position as there is facing the M/H/S thesis. So although more would have to be said to evaluate this new position (and its conception of categoricity) properly, in virtue of these potential advantages it warrants further investigation.

²⁶ I fill in some of the missing details in Schroer 2010.

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