

Dispositions and Intrinsicness¹

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Abstract

Focussing on David Lewis's account of dispositions, this paper separates and evaluates the following three claims: (1) dispositions are intrinsic, i.e. shared between duplicates, (2) the 'base' properties of dispositions are always properties intrinsic to the objects which have those dispositions, and (3) *if* base properties are restricted to properties intrinsic to the objects which have the dispositions *then* dispositions are always shared between duplicates. I argue that each of these three views is mistaken.

The claim that base properties are not always intrinsic has been defended by Nolan (2005). I draw upon his work and take additional steps to dismantle Lewis's arguments for the contrary view. The claim that duplicates are not always disposed alike has been defended by McKittrick (2003); I add only a little to her discussion. The point concerning the connection between intrinsic dispositions and intrinsic base properties, has (to my knowledge) not been defended before. I argue both that Lewis is wrong, by the lights of his own account of dispositions, to claim that if base properties are intrinsic then dispositions are, and that there are reasons to be suspicious of that claim regardless of whether one accepts Lewis's account.

1. Introduction

Lewis states that dispositions are 'an intrinsic matter', except insofar as they depend upon the laws of nature (1997, pp. 147, 148 and 155). This view – or at least something in its vicinity – is widespread. (Something like it is defended by, for example, Armstrong 1973, Bird 1998, Fara 2005 and Molnar 1999.)

Lewis's claim as he states it helps him to slur over the difference between the claim that *dispositions* are always intrinsic (shared between duplicates) and the claim that their *base properties* are always intrinsic. On introducing the phrase he cashes it out as the claim that dispositions are intrinsic (p. 148), but it is clear throughout the paper that he intends a very close connection to the claim that base properties are. One central purpose of this paper is to clarify how different these two claims are.

Lewis proposes (p. 149) that:

(D) Something *x* is disposed at time *t* to give response *r* to stimulus *s* if and only if, for some intrinsic property *B* that *x* has at *t*, for some time *t'* after *t*, if *x* were to undergo stimulus *s* at time *t* and retain property *B* until *t'*, *s* and *x*'s having of *B* would jointly be an *x*-complete cause of *x*'s giving response *r*.

The restriction to intrinsic base properties *B* in this account is included in an attempt to secure the result that dispositions are shared between duplicates.

¹ I am very grateful to Stephen Mumford, Daniel Nolan, Lewis Powell, an audience at the University of Buenos Aires and an anonymous AJP referee for their many helpful comments, suggestions and questions about this material.

I shall argue that Lewis is wrong (by his own lights, at least, but arguably also wrong *tout court*) to suggest that if base properties are intrinsic then dispositions are shared between duplicates, and wrong to suggest that base properties are intrinsic. I also think he is wrong to suggest that dispositions are shared between duplicates, though here I don't have very much to add here to what has already been said by others.

The claim that base properties are not always intrinsic has been defended by Nolan (2005). In arguing this point I shall draw upon his work, as well as taking my own steps towards dismantling Lewis's arguments for the contrary view. (Lewis does not simply assume the intrinsicness of either dispositions or base properties; there are identifiable – and separable – arguments for each.) The claim that duplicates are not always disposed alike has been defended by McKittrick (2003). The point concerning the connection between intrinsic dispositions and intrinsic base properties, has (to my knowledge) not been defended before.

2. *Intrinsic Dispositions vs. Intrinsic Base Properties I: As Lewis Sees Them*

Lewis argues that base properties are always intrinsic in an attempt to deliver the result that dispositions are intrinsic (duplicates are disposed alike). The purpose of this section is to show that, by his lights, that move does not deliver that result.

Lewis claims that 'if two things (actual or merely possible) are exact intrinsic duplicates (and if they are subject to the same laws of nature) then they are disposed alike' (p. 138). He relies on this claim to deliver a verdict concerning a particular case, which he uses to motivate his account of dispositions, (D), over a rival. This is the case of a fragile glass which is protected by a sorcerer who will, if his glass is ever in danger of being dropped over a hard surface, magically render it non-fragile and hence prevent it from smashing (p. 138). The case of the sorcerer's glass, Lewis argues, is a problem for the simple conditional analysis (p. 133) which states simply that:

(D-) Something x is disposed at time t to give response r to stimulus s iff, if x were to undergo stimulus s at time t, x would give response r.

The sorcerer's protection means that were his glass ever dropped above a hard surface, it would be rendered non-fragile, hence would not smash. It follows from (D-) that the glass is not disposed to break when dropped on a hard surface, which (according to Lewis, anyway) means that it follows from (D-) that the sorcerer's glass is not fragile.

Lewis says that (D-) must therefore be wrong. Since the sorcerer's glass is the duplicate of a glass which is not protected by a sorcerer, he argues, the former is disposed the same way as the latter. Hence, like the unprotected glass, the sorcerer's glass is fragile – it has a disposition to break when struck – and it is not disposed to lose its fragility when struck (pp. 138-9). Lewis wants his account to do better than (D-) on this score, and it is this which leads Lewis's inclusion of a clause in (D) stating that the base property B of a disposition must be an intrinsic property of the disposition's bearer x.

The first point I want to argue here is that this clause does not do the work it is supposed to do, i.e. ensure that duplicates are disposed alike. For there is a substantial difference, by Lewis's lights, between a disposition's being intrinsic and its base property's being so.

To see why the strategy does not work, notice that (D) appeals to a certain kind of counterfactual (if x *were* to undergo stimulus s ...), and recall that the truth-value of a counterfactual can be affected by a number of things, including things extrinsic to whatever object(s) a counterfactual may be about. Let me give an example of how extrinsic factors can

affect the truth-value of a counterfactual. I will then go on to say describe the impact of this upon dispositions as defined by Lewis.

It is pretty clear that extrinsic facts about me, such as my being located in my office right now rather than at home alone, affect the truth-value of certain *counterfactuals*. (Let's set aside, for a moment, their putative connection with dispositionality.) Consider the counterfactual 'Were I to start singing at the top of my voice right now, people would notice'. My location – which is extrinsic to me – clearly impacts upon the truth-value of this sentence. Thinking about the truth-conditions for counterfactuals in Lewis's own terms (see Lewis 1973 and 1979), we can attribute this to the fact that in determining the similarity relation on worlds relevant for assessing this sort of counterfactual sentence, we should pay attention to actual matters of fact, including matters of fact extrinsic to me. In the case at hand, the similarity relation relevant for assessing that sentence, *given that I'm in my office*, is one that renders some world where I sing in my office and get noticed closer than any world where I sing at home unnoticed. Hence the counterfactual is true. Were I at home, the relevant similarity relation would be one that renders some world where I sing at home unnoticed closer than any world where I sing in my office and get noticed. Hence the counterfactual would be false.

Now let's consider a case where this sort of extrinsic influence on the truth-values of counterfactuals affects which *dispositions* should be attributed to an object, assuming that (D) is the correct account of dispositions. Two duplicate objects x_1 and x_2 , both of which have a certain (candidate) base property B, may differ with respect to which counterfactuals are true of them, purely on account of their having different extrinsic properties. I, located in my office, and my duplicate, located at home alone, despite possessing all the same intrinsic properties that could play the role of B, nonetheless differ with respect to which counterfactuals about getting noticed are true of us.

It thus seems clear that duplicates may well differ in their *dispositions* if Lewis's account (D) of dispositions is correct, regardless of whether the base properties B are restricted to intrinsic properties. For by the lights of (D), all that would take is a certain kind of difference in which counterfactuals are true of them. (This is so even if we assume, as Lewis would want us to, that the objects in question are subject to the same laws of nature.)

Consider two duplicate fine china vases, v_1 and v_2 . Vase v_1 is suspended over a tiled floor, and vase v_2 is suspended over a big fluffy cushion. By Lewis's account (D) of dispositions, v_1 is disposed at time t to break in response to the stimulus of being dropped if and only if for some intrinsic property B that v_1 has at t , for some time t' after t , if v_1 were to undergo dropping at time t and retain property B until t' , the dropping and v_1 's having of B would jointly be a v_1 -complete cause of v_1 's breaking. It is plausible that this counterfactual is true of v_1 , with a certain intrinsic structural property of v_1 playing the role of B. It is much less plausible that the corresponding counterfactual is true of v_2 , simply because, given its location above a fluffy cushion, if v_2 were to be dropped (whilst retaining the relevant intrinsic structural property B), it would not break, and hence nothing would be a v_2 -complete cause of its breaking.

It may be tempting to reply that I simply have not specified the stimulus fully enough. The stimulus I described was that of simply *being dropped*. For all the example shows, the two vases are disposed alike with respect to the more specific stimuli of *being dropped over a hard surface* and *being dropped over a fluffy cushion*. Maybe we simply need to focus attention on these more specific stimuli. Lewis himself makes no claims about how specific a stimulus must be, and gives no indication that *being dropped* is insufficiently specific. But maybe his account could be improved by adding such a requirement?

I do not think so. There will be scope for the creation of new problem cases, along very similar lines to my original case, unless we require that all stimuli be given with

maximal specificity: i.e., unless they are so fully specified as to pin them down to one particular location in one particular possible world. For example, consider duplicate vases v3 and v4. Each is suspended over a hard surface, but v4 is suspended over a hard surface that would become soft were v4 to be dropped. By (D), v3 is disposed at time t to break in response to the stimulus of being dropped over a hard surface if and only if for some intrinsic property B that v3 has at t, for some time t' after t, if v3 were to undergo dropping over a hard surface at time t and retain property B until t', the dropping over a hard surface and v3's having of B would jointly be a v3-complete cause of v3's breaking. It is plausible that this counterfactual is true of v3, with a certain intrinsic structural property of v3 playing the role of B. It is much less plausible that the corresponding counterfactual is true of v4, because if v4 were to be dropped (whilst retaining the relevant intrinsic structural property B), the surface below it would become soft, so v4 it would not break, and hence nothing would be a v4-complete cause of its breaking.

We could require that stimuli be *maximally* fully specified, but then Lewis's problem case for the simple conditional account (D-), the case of the sorcerer's glass, will not work. For by the lights of such a requirement, when the sorcerer's glass is dropped on a hard surface it does not encounter the same stimulus as that encountered by the unprotected glass when *it* is dropped on a hard surface. So, for all Lewis says, the sorcerer's glass and the unprotected glass may be disposed exactly alike by the lights of (D-). If we are to take Lewis's remarks as showing that (D-) is mistaken because it delivers the verdict that the unprotected glass is disposed to break when dropped on a hard surface but the sorcerer's glass is not, then requiring maximal specificity for stimuli is not an option.

This problem for (D) is closely related to the issue of *masking*.² It is in general plausible that dispositions which an object possesses can sometimes be masked – that is, prevented from manifesting – despite the presence of the appropriate stimulus. Perhaps the correct understanding of what's going on in the case of v1 and v2 is that v2 does possess the disposition to break when dropped, but this is masked by its being suspended over a fluffy cushion. If so, Lewis's (D) incorrectly delivers the verdict that v2 lacks the masked disposition. This is not a novel point (see e.g. Bird 1998 and §2.3 of Fara 2006).

The novel point I am trying to make is that as (D) stands, it does not deliver the result that if base properties are intrinsic then dispositions are shared between duplicates. For in the case of v1 and v2, the base property B is an intrinsic structural feature shared by the two vases, and yet *by the lights of (D)* the disposition of which this is the base in v1's case is not a disposition that is shared by v1's duplicate v2. It might be that the best diagnosis of this failure is that (D) is in general bad at dealing with masked dispositions. An assessment of that claim lies outside my current remit. Be that as it may, there are here two distinguishable questions:

- (I) Has Lewis accounted properly for masked dispositions?
- (II) Has Lewis secured the result that if base properties are intrinsic then so are dispositions?

The point of this section has been to answer (II) in the negative.

3. *Intrinsic Dispositions vs. Intrinsic Base Properties II: As They Really Are*

What I have argued so far is that *by the lights of (D)* a disposition can be extrinsic (not always shared between duplicates) despite its base property's being intrinsic. This is not yet to show that a disposition can *genuinely* be extrinsic despite its base property's being intrinsic. It

² I am indebted to an anonymous AJP referee here.

could be argued that it is because (D) is mistaken, particularly with regard to the kind of masking effects described in the preceding example, that (D) allows one to drive a wedge between intrinsic bases and intrinsic dispositions.

However, I think there is some reason to believe that the disconnect is genuine. If this is so, it would be problematic for the widespread view that dispositions are to be identified with their bases. (Plausibly, this the view that Armstrong is defending in Armstrong, Martin and Place 1996.) To explain my take on this issue properly, however, it will be necessary to take a closer look at what exactly the ‘base’ of a disposition is supposed to be.

It is often assumed that the base property of a disposition is a *causal* base – or basis – for the disposition. I am suspicious of this assumption, as I think that disposition-talk can be sensibly used in discussing non-causal matters. But for current purposes I will set my suspicions aside and follow the majority. Here is a tentative characterization from Fara 2006:³

A *causal basis* of a disposition to *M* in conditions *C* is a property *P* such that whenever an object which possesses *P* is in conditions *C* and *Ms*, the fact that the object possesses *P*, together with the fact that it is in conditions *C*, causally explains why the object *Med*.

If something like this is right (and I think Fara is respecting common usage here), then a lot hangs on what counts as ‘causally explaining’ why something happened. This is a point that Fara himself notes in passing. Let me expand upon what I take to be one of the most important respects in which that is so.

I have argued (Jenkins 2008) that explanation-talk is context-sensitive in a wide variety of different ways. Here I shall focus on just one important kind of context-sensitivity that I think it exhibits. On some occasions of use, the word ‘explains’ will mean roughly the same as ‘satisfactorily answers a certain why-question for audience A’, while on others it will mean roughly the same as ‘satisfactorily answers a certain why-question for audience B’. When audience A and audience B have different background information, different interests and so on, these two meanings of the word ‘explains’ will be significantly different.

If the word ‘explains’ works this way then so, I take it, does the phrase ‘causally explains’. What it takes to ‘causally explain’ something will depend on what it takes to ‘explain’ something, with additional constraint that the explanation be causal. (I won’t get into the question of what exactly it takes for an explanation to be causal, but will work with the rough idea that a causal explanation is one that cites a cause or causes of the explanans.)

Fara’s discussion does not give explicit guidance on whether one of the many possible readings of ‘causally explains’ is to be preferred, or whether the context-sensitivity of this phrase should be embraced as generating a corresponding context-sensitivity in ‘causal basis’. I incline towards the latter option. One reason for this is that I can think of no reason to favour one particular context of use (and hence one particular pair of candidate meanings for ‘causally explains’ and ‘causal basis’) over others. Another is that I think it extremely plausible that when philosophers use phrases like ‘causal basis’ and ‘base property’ they intend to talk about properties which they would, at the time of use, be happy to describe as ‘explaining’ the manifestations of dispositions in conjunction with the stimulus conditions. (I shall describe below how I think Lewis’s notion of an ‘x-complete cause’ is related to the demand that manifestation be *explained* by the base property together with the stimulus conditions; see pp. 6-7).

³ A more well-known characterization is that of Prior, Pargetter and Jackson (1982, p. 251), but this characterization rules out the possibility of a disposition with a causal basis being masked, as has been pointed out by Molnar (2003, p. 130). Presumably it does not, therefore, accurately capture what most philosophers who write about dispositions have in mind when they talk of causal bases.

Suppose all this is roughly correct. Then there could be contexts wherein to describe something *b* as a ‘base property’ for disposition *d* is in effect to say that citing *b* together with the characteristic stimulus condition *c* can satisfactorily causally answer for audience *A* the question of why response *r* is displayed (when it is). Now note that the more background knowledge *A* has, the easier (in some respects at least) such questions will be to answer. To see the kind of thing I mean, consider the following two causal explanations of why my house key opened my front door yesterday evening:⁴

- (i) Because I attempted to use it to open my front door, and it has a shape corresponding to the shape of the lock on that door.
- (ii) Because I attempted to use it to open my front door, and it is shaped as follows: [precise intrinsic description of the contours of my key].

For someone who knows what shape my front door lock is, (ii) can serve as a perfectly adequate explanation. But to someone who has no idea about this, something more like (i) might be needed. (ii) will fail to be a good explanation for such a person if the connection between being shaped as (ii) describes and being suitable for opening my door is unclear to him.⁵

Clearly, my key is disposed to open my door when I attempt so to use it. The question is, what should we be willing to describe as the ‘causal basis’ of that disposition? What I propose is that in this case the conditions for satisfying the description ‘causal basis’, as used in contexts where ‘causally explains’ means roughly ‘satisfactorily answers a why-question for an audience of people who know what shape my lock is’, will be met by the intrinsic shape property appealed to in (ii). On the other hand, when that phrase is used in contexts where ‘causally explains’ means roughly ‘satisfactorily answers a why-question for an audience of people who know very little about my door lock’, that intrinsic shape property may fail to meet the conditions for satisfying that description. Properties like the extrinsic property appealed to in (i) – the property of being shaped in a way that corresponds to the lock on my door – will fare better.

The upshot of all of this is that in *at least some contexts*, it is correct to describe an intrinsic property as the ‘base property’ of my key’s disposition to open my door when I attempt so to use it. But, as McKittrick argues (2003, p. 159), this disposition is extrinsic; my key’s having it depends on what shape the lock on my door is. Duplicates of my key located at times or in worlds where my door has a differently shaped lock will lack the disposition to open my door.

I am prepared to grant that there may be other contexts – contexts where the conditions for satisfying the description ‘causal explanation’ are stricter – in which it will *not* be correct to describe the intrinsic shape property of my key as a ‘causal basis’ of its disposition to open my door. This makes the question ‘Can an extrinsic disposition have an intrinsic base?’ a slightly trickier one than it might at first appear to be. Nevertheless, I think we should be prepared to answer positively when the question is asked in certain contexts.

4. *Base Properties Are Not Always Intrinsic*

⁴ I am here building on an example that (to my knowledge) was first discussed by Shoemaker, who described the power to open a door as a ‘mere-Cambridge power’ in his 1984. The example is also discussed by McKittrick (2003, p. 159), who explicitly describes the disposition to open a door as an extrinsic disposition.

⁵ Admittedly, giving explanation (ii) could, for many, serve to convey the required connection through implicature. But let’s suppose he is not smart enough to pick up on this.

Nolan (2005, pp. 104-5) has argued that the restriction to intrinsic properties as the bases of dispositions is mistaken. He gives the example of Ocelot Dirtyshirt, who is disposed to be laughed at because of her name, although her name is a matter of what she is called by other people rather than an intrinsic feature of her. He also considers the disposition to go bankrupt, which he argues is plausibly based on a person's social properties (having to do with how finances work and so on) rather than (merely) the individual's intrinsic properties. Further cases are not hard to find; it seems, for example, that my loving Muriel is the base of my disposition to get upset when someone is rotten to her.

However, listing cases where a disposition seems to have an extrinsic basis is not quite enough to create trouble for Lewis's (D). It could be argued that in each of these cases there is, *in addition to* the extrinsic property that is intuitively the (or perhaps: a) 'base' for the disposition, an intrinsic property that could play the role of B in (D). In which case, the fact that there are also certain extrinsic 'base' properties around is not necessarily a problem for Lewis.

Whether this is so will depend heavily on what exactly it takes for s and x's having of B to 'jointly be an x-complete cause of x's giving response r'. The notion of x-completeness is particularly obscure. All Lewis says is that an x-complete cause is one which is 'complete in so far as havings of properties intrinsic to x are concerned, though perhaps omitting some events extrinsic to x' (p. 149). What kind of completeness is Lewis talking about? He does not say. However, the exegetical hypothesis I favour – primarily because I can't think of any other serious contender – is that he has in mind is some kind of *explanatory* completeness.

If this hypothesis is correct, however, it is far from clear why we should assume, in the cases just described, that explanatorily adequate causes of responses can be given which appeal only to intrinsic properties of the objects concerned. Why should we assume, for example, that a description of (say) the intrinsic state of my brain would be explanatorily adequate substitute for a description of my feelings of love for Muriel? On the contrary, this seems extremely unlikely, at least for the majority of explanatory contexts in which we typically find ourselves.

Lewis discusses the case of Willie to help motivate the claim that dispositions are 'an intrinsic matter'. The case of Willie appears to motivate the restriction of base properties to intrinsic properties, as opposed to the claim that duplicates are disposed alike, so this case should be assessed as part of the present discussion of the former claim. Willie is a weakling and a pacifist, but has a (very) big brother who is neither. It is therefore highly inadvisable to pick a fight with Willie. Lewis argues that '[i]f we allowed extrinsic properties to serve as causal bases of dispositions, we would have to say that Willie's *own* disposition makes him a dangerous man to mess about with. But we very much do not want to say that' (p. 147). Naturally, we want to attribute the relevant disposition to Willie's big brother.

The intuition that it's not Willie's own dispositions that make him dangerous seems to me to be a robust one that should be respected by an account of what it is to have a disposition. However, I suspect that what is going on in the case of Willie is simply that the harmful response that will await anyone who messes with Willie is not a response that *Willie* would give to the stimulus of his being attacked. Rather, it is a response that his brother would give.

Let's take it that being the relevant disposition here is being disposed to harm one's attacker when one is attacked. Willie is not disposed in this way because *he* would never harm *anyone*. His brother is the one who does the harming when Willie is attacked. Thus even if Lewis's account did not include the restriction to intrinsic base properties it would be able to deal with the case of Willie: one need merely note that there is no harming response that Willie would give to the stimulus of attack which could be plugged in to (D) to deliver

the result that the danger associated with messing with Willie is due to a disposition of Willie's.⁶

Certain other cases could be used to try to motivate the Lewisian restriction to intrinsic base properties: for instance, cases where an object *lacks* a certain disposition but would *acquire* it were the relevant stimulus to occur (see e.g. the 'reverse-cycle electro-fink', Martin 1994 pp. 3-4). Consider a fluffy cushion, which is not disposed to break when dropped onto a hard surface. Now suppose it is watched by a sorcerer, who stands ready to *give* it that disposition should it ever be dropped onto a hard surface. In this case, were the cushion to be dropped onto a hard surface, it would break. So by the lights of (D-), the cushion is disposed to break when dropped. That sounds wrong. And demanding that base properties be intrinsic could solve that problem: the property of being watched by a sorcerer of the kind described is extrinsic and hence would be deemed unsuitable to serve as a base property were we to adopt some account like (D).

However, in the light of the apparent counterexamples to the claim that base properties are always intrinsic which I discussed at the beginning of this section, I am inclined to doubt that whatever is shown by this kind of case, it isn't that. And indeed, it seems possible to invent cases, very similar in structure to the one just described, where the disposition-changer is not external to the cushion (as the sorcerer is) but something internal. Suppose, for instance, that the cushion has as a part a hard-floor detector coupled to an internal-structure-rearranger. The detector will go off if the cushion is ever dropped over a hard floor, and will trigger the re-arranger, which will, just before the cushion hits the ground, re-arrange the cushion's internal structure so as to render the cushion disposed to break when dropped onto a hard floor.

When this cushion is nowhere near a hard floor it is soft and fluffy and lacks the disposition to break when dropped onto a hard floor. *Were* it to be dropped on a hard floor it would break. So (D-) delivers as before the erroneous result that the cushion *is* disposed to break when dropped onto a hard floor even when it is nowhere near a hard floor. But this time the base property is intrinsic to the cushion: it is a fact about the cushion's internal make-up, rather than the extrinsic property of being watched by a certain kind of sorcerer. Since restricting base properties to intrinsic properties fails to solve problems that are clearly of the same kind as the problem of the sorcerer's cushion, I contend that it is not the right solution to that problem.

5. *Duplicates Are Not Always Disposed Alike*

In addition to the problems raised by restriction base properties to intrinsic properties, there is a (distinct) set of problems associated with insisting that dispositions should always be shared between duplicates. That claim is persuasively resisted by McKittrick (2003), who gives several examples of dispositions which can differ between duplicates, including weight, vulnerability, the disposition to dissolve the contents of my pocket and the power to open a door. McKittrick also resists an argument for the claim that duplicates are disposed alike, found in Armstrong 1973.

⁶ Some may prefer to say that Willie *is* disposed to harm his attackers when he is attacked, perhaps because he is disposed to cry out and hence bring the attack to the attention of the big brother. I'm not (in most contexts) inclined to describe as a way for Willie to 'harm' his attackers. But it is certainly a way for him to *cause* harm to come to them, and I am happy for those who think that this means it is a way for him to 'harm' them to describe Willie as disposed to 'harm' his attackers when attacked. He is certainly disposed to *cause* harm to come to them when attacked.

I have little to add to McKittrick's discussion here, beyond noting as I did in §2 above that it is apparently straightforward to show that, by the lights of (D), duplicates can differ in their dispositions whether or not it is specified that only intrinsic properties may play the role of B.

What should we say about the case of the fragile glass protected by the sorcerer? It was supposed to motivate the claim that duplicates are disposed alike. I myself would say that the sorcerer's glass is fragile – and hence disposed to break when struck – and that it is disposed to lose its fragility when struck. It shares the first, but not the second, of these dispositions with its unprotected duplicate. That it has a disposition to break when struck and another disposition to do something incompatible with breaking when struck doesn't seem to me to be problematic. (It would, I think, be problematic to say that has a single disposition to do both things when struck. But that is not the same as saying it has two different dispositions, the relevant stimulus for each of which is being struck.) The mere fact that the activation of one of the dispositions – the disposition to lose fragility – would result in the loss of the other (the fragility) does not mean the glass cannot have both dispositions prior to being struck.

Indeed, this is precisely what Lewis himself would say about certain closely analogous cases, where an object is 'disposed in two opposite ways' in virtue of having one non-finkish and one finkish disposition, both of which have intrinsic bases (p. 150). Since he needs to make this kind of move to deal with related cases, there is no obvious reason to resist the analogous diagnosis of the case of the sorcerer's glass. But so diagnosed, the case provides no motivation for the claim that duplicates are always disposed alike.

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