Australasian Journal of Philosophy
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rajp20

The mysterious grand properties of Forrest

Paul Noordhof [a]
[a] University of Nottingham
Published online: 02 Jun 2006.

To cite this article: Paul Noordhof (1997) The mysterious grand properties of Forrest, Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 75:1, 99-101, DOI: 10.1080/00048409712347701

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048409712347701

Australasian Journal of Philosophy
Vol. 75, No. 1; March 1997

THE MYSTERIOUS GRAND PROPERTIES OF FORREST

Paul Noordhof

Peter Forrest proposes that there exist grand properties as a way of getting out of a certain dilemma, the *Mystery or Reduction Dilemma* [2]. The dilemma is that either supervening properties are not reducible to the properties upon which they supervene, in which case the relationship between them is mysterious, or they are reducible, in which case the notion of supervenience cannot be used to express the kind of non-reductive relation that we might wish to claim holds between the evaluative and the non-evaluative, the mental and the physical, colours and their composite reflectances, and so on. The examples are his. The proposal is that many supervening properties are not properties of objects, but properties of their natures, that is properties of properties. Forrest holds that if two objects have the same nature, this means that they have the very same property. These properties are to be thought of as universals, that is they are wholly instantiated at more than one place and time. Shorn of its technical apparatus, it is reasonably easy to see how the account works. If goodness, say, is a property of a nature, then whenever this nature is instantiated, so is the property of goodness. We get the standard supervenience claim that two objects could not have the same subvenient properties without having the same supervening properties by taking the nature as the subvenient property, and goodness as the supervenient one. The numerical identity of natures explains the supervenience of properties of these natures [2, p. 2].

I take it that this proposal would only be successful if it did not introduce a mystery of its own to take the place of that concerning supervenience. Otherwise, we merely have a relocation of the mystery coupled with a certain loss of intuitiveness, viz., that neither I nor my brain has mental properties, a good deed is not good, and objects are not coloured, except in the trivial sense that they can be *said* to have these properties because, in fact, their nature has these properties [see 2, p. 2]. We can *say* that I have mental properties but that does not really attribute a property to me only to my nature. Unfortunately, all we have in making this manoeuvre is a relocation of the mystery.

The question that we should ask now is not 'How is non-reductive supervenience possible?' but 'Why do natures have the properties that they do?'. Sometimes the answer can look easy, if not particularly satisfying. If we ask why a particular property, F, is nomically related to another property, G, then, following David Armstrong, we can say that nomic relations are just brute second order relations that hold between properties. We can give the same answer to the question 'Why does property F have the property of being nomically related to the property G?'. The mysteriousness is somewhat abated by the fact that the nomic relation can hold between any combination of intrinsic properties. We do not have to suppose that there is something special about their nature to which appeal needs to be made to explain why they stand in that relation [1]. Take now the property of being soluble. That, too, seems to be a candidate for being a property of a nature, that is of internal structures of various types, since it apparently supervenes upon

these. If we now ask why it is a property of this type of nature, we can explain it in terms of the laws which govern natures. In both of these cases we have what might be plausibly characterised as accidental properties of natures.

But this is not the case with Forrest's grand properties. They are supposed to be intrinsic and, thereby, essential properties of natures [2, pp. 2-3]. That is, their possession by natures is independent of any relations which hold [2, pp. 2-3]. From which it follows that if two objects have numerically the same nature, any properties that are possessed by one nature are possessed by the other by the Indiscernibility of Identicals [2, p. 8]. Let an object possess a property F (in the trivial sense) if and only if its nature possesses the grand property F*. (Here I am bracketing issues concerning which property terms are suitable substitution instances in a schema of this form [see 2, p. 7].) For instance, let an object be intrinsically good if and only if its nature possesses the grand property of intrinsic goodness. Then we have an explanation of the *weak (or narrow) supervenience* of F on properties constituting these natures. For any two items in the same possible world with the same nature, either the term 'F*' applies to their nature or it does not. If it does, then both items are F, if not then both are not F. And, on the assumption that terms referring to grand properties are rigid designators, Forrest argues that we have an explanation of F's *strong (or broad) supervenience*, too. Since F* will pick out numerically the same nature in every possible world the reasoning applies to items in different possible worlds as well. That was the point behind Forrest's insistence on natures being universals [2, p. 2].

The contrast between what can be said about intrinsic and about relational properties of natures merely dramatises the point I originally made. The question is why do natures have some grand properties rather than others? It is here that we have the relocation of the mystery. The idea that one property is intrinsically possessed by another property will seem just as unintelligible as, and just as worthy of explanation as, the supervenience relationship in the circumstances for which Forrest's approach is designed to provide a demystification. Anybody inclined to be worried about one will be worried about the other.

Equally, any explanation that we offer of one is likely to be available as an explanation of the other. It is not my intention to claim that one cannot explain the supervenience of some properties on others. In the case already mentioned, we could have easily explained solubility's supervenience on internal structures by taking it to be a property of objects rather than natures. We would then explain the fact that these objects had such properties by citing the laws which governed their internal structure. But what about properties arguably related by metaphysical necessity, something for which Forrest's account was expressly designed? For instance, take the property of being striped. No doubt we could take this as a property of the nature of a certain arrangement of colours. I think we can explain why it is a property of such a nature by giving a description of what it is to be striped and showing that this is implied by a particular arrangement of colours. But then I think this explanation would be available to explain the supervenience of the property of being striped *without taking it as a property of a nature*, but rather as a property of an object with particular colour properties. My claim is that Forrest's proposal adds nothing.

Forrest rather disarmingly writes that

> The Grand-property Hypothesis may strike some . . . as a cure worse than the disease. [2, p. 8]

I suppose I am more pessimistic. If you do think there is a disease, then you are likely to think that the Grand-property Hypothesis is unfortunately yet another virulent manifestation of it.[1]

University of Nottingham

Received January 1996
Revised March 1996

REFERENCE

1. David Armstrong, *What is a Law of Nature?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
2. Peter Forrest, 'Supervenience: The Grand-property Hypothesis', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1988) pp. 1-12.

[1] My thanks to Michael Clark, Bob Kirk and two anonymous referees for the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* for helping me improve this paper.