

Dispositional terms and natural kind terms

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Abstract

In their attempt to provide a better understanding of the semantic properties of dispositional terms, Bird and Lipton make the critical observation that there is a remarkable similarity between natural kind terms and dispositional terms. The chief goal of this paper is to give substantive content to their observation, which will lead us to an externalist semantic view of dispositional terms, the view that the features of an archetypical circumstance in which the ascriber deals with or needs to deal with the stimulus condition for a dispositional term make impact on the term's semantic properties. To justify this view, I will bring into focus the issue of how dispositional concepts are used for a variety of classificatory and inferential purposes in everyday or scientific practices, which will provide a theoretical basis for turning down what I call the no interference reasoning, a line of reasoning that I take to be at least implicitly responsible for the popularity of the internalist view of dispositions. I will close by examining what lessons we can draw on the issue of linking dispositions to conditionals from the externalist view advanced in this paper.