

Trope

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trope, a non-shareable, or non-multiply-instantiable property sometimes called an *abstract particular*, a *property-instance*, or a *unit-property*. In contrast to universals, tropes are synchronically unshareable: If trope *f* characterizes object *O* at time *t*, then nothing wholly distinct from *O* is characterized by *f* at *t*; for example, if distinct spheres *a* and *b* exist at *t*, the sphericity of *a* and that of *b* are numerically distinct even if exactly similar. In contrast, if properties are universals, the sphericity of *a* and that of *b* are (numerically) identical. On some views, however, tropes are diachronically shareable, or transferable, capable of characterizing distinct objects at different times. Douglas Ehring, for instance, takes causation to involve the transfer of a trope from one object to another. Further disagreement concerns whether transferable tropes are dependent entities. Some take transferable tropes to depend on some bearer or other, though independent of any *given* bearer. Others allow for free-floating tropes that exist on their own.

A related distinction can be drawn between module tropes and modifier tropes. On a *module*—as opposed to a *modifier*—trope theory, a sphericity trope is itself spherical. A module trope can be conceived as a singly-charactered *object*, whereas a modifier trope is a singly-characterizing *property*. Sometimes the module/modifier distinction is tacitly equated with the independent/dependent distinction. For example, Armstrong (citing Ayer) describes independent tropes as singly- or thinly-charactered "junior substances." Although it is natural to consider these conceptual distinctions coextensive, it is not obvious that they must be—both transferable and even free-floating modifier tropes and non-transferable, dependent module tropes are conceivable.

Tropes have been employed to do various kinds of metaphysical work, though their eligibility is disputed. Unshareability is thought to make tropes well suited to provide an analysis of events, as well as to be the immediate objects of perception and the terms of causal relations. In semantics, some philosophers take resemblance classes of tropes to provide subjects for discourse that irreducibly refers to properties. For example, one might take the abstract singular term 'sphericity' to name the resemblance class whose members are all and only sphericity tropes.

Various trope theories of substance have been proposed. On a *trope bundle theory*, an ordinary object is a collection of suitably related tropes. The nature of this intra-bundle relationship—as well as whether it is a further trope—is disputed; candidates include co-location, mereological fusion, and interdependence. On a *substance-attribute trope theory*, ordinary objects involve tropes being borne by an item from a distinct category, such as a substance or substratum. Finally, recent value theorists dispute whether some—or perhaps all—of the bearers of final value are tropes.