Vetter on Varieties of Potentiality: Chapter 4

Recap of previous chapters

- Overall aim: to give an account of modality that is *localised*, i.e. that had at its base the having of certain sorts of properties by objects

- Vetter prefers *potentialities* to *dispositions*. The former is the more general notion, which expands and generalised the latter.

- Potentialities are a primitive in the theory so can't be given an analysis, but they include dispositions, abilities etc.

- Chapters 2&3 argue against the standard dispositional account. *Contra* the standard account, (i) dispositions/potentialities should be characterised by just their manifestation and (ii) dispositions should be got rid of for potentialities, which come in degrees and can be ordered by comparison

4.1: The aim of Ch 4

- To give an account of extrinsic potentialities to lay the fgroundwork for the satisfaction of the formal adequacy and extensional correctness constraints on an account of modality.

- (in my words) to push us to accept counterintuitive potentialities to bridge the gap to the virtues of the non-localised forms of modality

4.2: Joint potentiality introduced

- Basic notion—just as single objects have potentialities, so do collections of objects.

- Examples: *a* and *b* have the ability to play a duet, *c* and *d* have the potentiality to stand in an 'opening' relation, some boron rod and a pile of uranium have a potentiality of certain degree to chain-react

4.3: Joint potentiality: five questions

1. What are the bearers of joint potentialities?

    - Pluralities of objects (rather than sets of objects or composite objects). This is to dodge issues

2. What are the manifestations of joint potentialities?
    - Two types:
        i. a (plural) property of or relation between all of its possessors
        ii. a property or relation of only some of its possessors

    - Type 2 can be expressed as 'potentiality to be such that *p*'

3. What is the ontological statues of joint potentialities?
    - Relations or plural properties (these differ but not in important ways)

4. What's the relationship between the joint potentialities and the individual potentialities of their possessors?
    - Often seems joint are grounded in individual, but no general answer given due to emergence issues

5. What are the conditions for objects to possess a joint potentiality?

- Not giving sufficient conditions. There are no necessary conditions, bar trivially existence

4.4 Extrinsic potentiality

- Vetter claims joint potentialities give rise to extrinsic potentialities

- Argument given by way of examples:
  - A particular key and a particular door
  - City and its defence mechanism
  - Weight
  - Bill Clinton's recognisability
  - Tennis player's specific ability to serve

- In all but the first example, it's hard to see on what the object with the extrinsic potentiality depends for that potentiality. Vetter's approach is that 'it depends'

4.5 Extrinsic potentiality systematised

- Aim is to provide a systematic connection between joint potentialities and extrinsic ones, and by so doing to reassure those who thought potentialities were intrinsic

- Two claims:
  i. Any extrinsic potentiality possession is fully grounded in (joint) possession of joint potentialities
  ii. Any possession of a joint potentiality entails possession of an extrinsic potentiality which grounds this

- (i) is not argued for, but taken as a consequence of the book's assumptions

- (ii) is examined in some detail. If the joint potentiality is of type 1, the possessors simply have the extrinsic potentiality to be a certain (joint) way. If the joint potentiality is of type 2, the possessors have the extrinsic potentiality to be such that something is a certain way.

- Vetter seems to be deflationary about what is claimed here. Given that the extrinsic potentialities are grounded in the joint ones, the former are not supposed to add anything to the fundamental metaphysics

4.6 Iterated potentiality

- Potentialities can be iterated: the potentiality to have a potentiality for p

- Some terminology is fixed, but largely for later chapters:
  - A potentiality is once-iterated if it's a potentiality for p, twice-iterated if it's a potentiality to have a potentiality for p …
  - An immediate manifestation of an iterated potentiality is the potentiality once less iterated
  - An (ultimate) manifestation of an iterated potentiality is for p

- Iterated potentialities are **for p**, i.e. for propositions to be the case

4.7 Conclusions

- Three types of potentiality introduced and defended: joint potentialities, extrinsic potentialities and iterated potentialities. These, I suspect, will do lots of work in the formalism of the next chapter