A Simple Theory of Intrinsicality

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An intrinsic property is one that the bearer has in virtue of the way it is and not in virtue of the way other things are or how they are related to it.

This simple formula is normally adequate to convey the notion intended by classifying a property as “intrinsic.” In this paper I offer a theory of intrinsicality meant to match the simplicity of this initial characterization. More precisely, the theory will make its link to the above formula evident; if correct, it explains why that formula is normally adequate to convey the notion in question. It will also explain why other characterizations frequently used for the same purpose are suited for doing so, though the theory’s connection to the above formula will be the most obvious.

The paper is divided into two parts. In the first, I focus on what we may think of as standard “orienting characterizations” that we use to fix ideas—characterizations like the one with which I opened the paper. Such characterizations may seem theory enough; if they succeed in directing us to the notion in question, what more do we want? Here, I explain what more a theory ought to tell us and examine the several characterizations in some detail. That examination provides constraints and motivations that guide the positive proposal here defended.

The second part introduces and develops that proposal. According to what I dub “the Simple Theory,” our understanding of intrinsicality depends on our prior understanding of grounding, where grounding is a metaphysical relation whereby something less fundamental is linked to something more fundamental on which it depends.1 More precisely, the proposal makes use of the claim that an individual has one property in virtue of having another. In my view, this notion is understood sufficiently for use in theory building, though I refer the reader to other work for a defense of this claim (Witmer et al. 2005; Rosen 2010).

The Simple Theory is not unlike the theory of intrinsicality I offered in Witmer et al. 2005; it differs in a number of substantial ways, however, discussion of which I reserve to a note.2 It is also very similar to a brief proposal made by Gideon Rosen (2010), though the main ideas of this paper were developed independently.3

1. Orienting characterizations

1.1 Getting a fix on the notion

How is it that we get a handle on the concept of an intrinsic property in the first place? I began with a simple formulation: an intrinsic property is one that the bearer has in virtue of the way it is and not in virtue of the way other things are or how they are related to it. This may be described as an “orienting characterization,” as it is the sort of thing that is said by way of orienting us so as to fix on what is presumably a single notion of intrinsicality.

Of course, there are many such characterizations. Here are several that I take to be representative.

(A) Intuitively, a property is *intrinsic* just in case a thing’s having it (at a time) depends only on what that thing is like (at that time), and not on what any wholly distinct contingent object (or wholly distinct time) is like. (Vallentyne 1997: 209)
You know what an intrinsic property is: it's a property that a thing has (or lacks) regardless of what may be going on outside of itself. To be intrinsic is to possess the second-order feature of stability-under-variation-in-the-outside-world. (Yablo 1999: 33)

Metaphysically, an intrinsic property of an object is a property that the object has by virtue of itself, depending on no other thing. (Dunn 1990: 178)

A thing has its intrinsic properties in virtue of the way that thing itself, and nothing else, is. (Lewis 1983: 197)

An intrinsic property is a property that is internal in the sense that whether an object has it depends entirely upon what the object is like in itself. (Francescotti 1999: 590)

A sentence or statement or proposition that ascribes intrinsic properties to something is entirely about that thing; whereas an ascription of extrinsic properties to something is not entirely about that thing. (Lewis 1983: 197)

If something has an intrinsic property, then so does any perfect duplicate of that thing; whereas duplicates situated in different surroundings will differ in their extrinsic properties. (Lewis 1983: 197)

With all of these characterizations of intrinsicality on hand, just what do we need a theory for?

1.2 The point of a theory of intrinsicality

For one, it would be best to have a single, canonical characterization. It is not obvious that all of these are equivalent, to say the least. Nor is it clear that all of them are even true. All that is clear is that such characterizations apparently succeed in directing our attention to a presumably single notion of intrinsicality.

Second, we may want a theory that reflects our understanding of the distinction, so that it amounts to a conceptual analysis. If so, then, while such an analysis will presumably link up in important ways to the various characterizations, it will also privilege some characterization as reflecting how it is we grasp the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties, a characterization that is fit to play a normative role that we would intuitively certify as correct.

Third, we may want a theory that spells out the conditions under which a property is intrinsic where those conditions are specified using some restricted, somehow privileged vocabulary. Here is how Dan Marshall describes this goal, focusing on "broadly logical notions":

It would be good if we could define ‘intrinsic’ using notions that are better understood, and less closely related to the notion of an intrinsic property, than notions like ‘a thing having a property wholly in virtue of how it is’. This could be achieved if we could define ‘intrinsic’ using only broadly logical notions, where broadly logical notions are those notions that can be expressed using the following vocabulary: the logical vocabulary of first order predicate logic; the predicates ‘is a possible world’, ‘is a set’, ‘exists’, ‘=’, ‘∈’, ‘is a proper part of’, ‘instantiates’ and ‘is a property’; and the modal operators ‘possibly’, ‘necessarily’ and ‘at’. (Marshall 2009: 647–648)

The idea here is that the restricted vocabulary is, at least in contrast to that used in the orienting characterizations, better understood. Perhaps so, though I should hasten to caution that matters of philosophical fashion likely have a pernicious influence on what gets counted as clearly.
understood and what does not. Be that as it may, it is not obvious that the best response to such a situation is to avoid using the less well understood vocabulary as opposed to taking on the task of better understanding the vocabulary that seems central to our grasp of the target notion in the first place. Insisting on keeping to familiar ground is unhappily reminiscent of the proverbial fellow who looks for his lost keys near the street lamp, even though he felt them drop from his hands when he was in deep shadow, explaining his choice by pointing out that, after all, the light is better there.

While Marshall aptly describes one goal one might have in developing a theory of intrinsicality, I should note that he does not think that it can be accomplished; the quotation is taken from his paper (2009) arguing that it is not possible to define “intrinsic” in broadly logical terms. My comments may be taken as aiming to show that this result need not be seen as an unhappy one.

Of these three possible motivations for a theory of intrinsicality, I share just the first two. The primary goal is to provide an account of the concept; more precisely, the goal is an account that makes explicit the conditions we intuitively take as normative for identifying a property as intrinsic or not. The orienting characterizations may manage to direct our attention to the concept, and hence to the conditions we take as normative in this way, but they don’t succeed in making those conditions explicit in a way that matches our intuitive judgments.

As a preliminary to developing a positive theory, we should examine these characterizations more carefully. In doing so, we will see both uncover key intuitive constraints on the notion of intrinsicality and see just how the explicit statements in (A) - (F) are lacking.

### 1.3 An examination

Let us start with (A) and (B) together. Both focus on the idea that if something has an intrinsic property, its having that property is independent of what other things—those that are “outside” of it or are wholly distinct from it—are like.\(^5\) On one very straightforward reading of this independence idea—emphasized by Stephen Yablo in (B) with the “stability under variation” phrase—for a property F to be intrinsic is just for it to be possible for something to have F and be in any otherwise possible environment. As is well-known, this account implies that no property is intrinsic, since one of those otherwise possible environments is, of course, one in which individuals have the property of being unaccompanied by anything with F. And it is not possible for there to be something with F in that environment.

This unhappy result can be avoided if we add one further constraint, namely, that the otherwise possible environments be characterized solely by relations between individuals in that environment and their intrinsic properties. But that, of course, leans on an understanding of “intrinsic” to characterize the relevant independence.

Such circularity can be avoided without such circularity, however, if we understand the talk of dependence in (A) in a more robust fashion. Consider the property of being spherical—an apparently intrinsic property. Does being spherical depend on what the surrounding environment is like? The case for saying it does is that a certain situation is not possible, namely, one in which something is a sphere in an environment in which other things have the property of being unaccompanied by anything spherical.

There is a straightforward sense of “depend” in which the impossibility of that situation indeed shows that being spherical depends on what the surrounding environment is like. We might think of this as a purely functional (as in mathematical) notion of dependence. But there is a robust sense of “depends” such that the impossibility of the above situation does nothing to show that being spherical depends on the surrounding environment. Indeed, a very natural thing to say is
that the situation is impossible because the property of being unaccompanied by anything spherical depends on the property of being spherical and not vice versa.

The operative notion of dependence is plainly related to grounding: what grounds the instantiation of the property of being unaccompanied by anything spherical is a fact about the property of being spherical. Reading (A) as relying only the functional, purely modal notion of dependence is plainly to misconstrue it, especially as reading it that way raises the obvious problem of needing to limit the possible environments to those characterized intrinsically.

As noted above, I take it that we have a sufficient grip on the notion of grounding that it is acceptable to use in a theory of intrinsicality. If that assumption is false, then the prospects for a theory of intrinsicality seem rather dim, as the orienting characterizations seem to appeal to grounding as a matter of course, whether they appeal to talk of “dependence,” one property’s being had “by virtue of” another, or some other locution. In light of this it seems an inevitable part of any good theory of the concept.

Such appeal to grounding certainly shows up in (C), where we are told that an intrinsic property is one the object has “by virtue of itself.” As I read this, “by virtue of itself” is equivalent to saying that the property is had “by virtue of how it is.” There is another reading available, perhaps, namely, “by virtue of what it is,” and the distinction is quite significant. Talk of “what it is” is often talk of the essence of a thing, that which (as we say) makes it what it is. So if we say that something has a property in virtue of what it is, then that property is, presumably part of the essence of that thing. Intrinsic properties are not the same as essential properties, of course, though the link just noted here may explain the occasional conflation.

So let us return to the main thread: an intrinsic property is one the bearer has by virtue of how it is. This, by itself, is clearly not sufficient for being intrinsic. Suppose that Amy is a sister—a clear-cut case of an extrinsic property. Does she have this property by virtue of how she is? Yes. She has that property in virtue of being both female and a sibling. In saying she has those properties (being female and being a sibling) we are, of course, describing how she is. It won’t help to stress that we’re interested in how she herself is; it’s not as if we made an error in attributing those properties to her, as if we should have attributed them to some other individual.

The point should make it plain that the second part of (C) is no redundant add-on. Recall the formulation: an intrinsic property is a property that “that the object has by virtue of itself, depending on no other thing.” The “depending on no other thing” is crucial. Intuitively, that rules out the case of sisterhood from being intrinsic. Her being a sister depends on how she is, yes—since it depends on her being a sibling. But that, in turn, depends on how some other things are, namely, her parents and whether they had another child.

As with (A), the “depending on no other thing” clause may be read in either a purely modal fashion or in a way that implies a grounding claim. If we take it as the former, we will run into the same problem as before—every property F will depend on there not being an individual with the property of being unaccompanied by something with F. But if we take it the latter way, the resulting reading of (C) is virtually the same as (D): a thing has its intrinsic properties in virtue of the way it is, and it does not have its intrinsic properties in virtue of the way any other thing is. This is also the formulation with which I opened the paper, and it is, I think, the characterization that comes closest to being an adequate theory of intrinsicality.

Moving on to (E), we see a somewhat different locution appear: whether an object has an intrinsic property “depends entirely upon what the object is like in itself.” “In itself” is dangerously close to “intrinsically.” But there may be a hint of another reading here: what something is like in itself is, we might say, what it is like even if all the other things relating to it
were stripped away. "In itself" might be, in other words, akin to "on its own." On this reading, the idea might be that if F is intrinsic, then when something has F, it could have it even if it was entirely on its own in the world. This, of course, is the idea behind the proposal (usually attributed to Kim 1983) that an intrinsic property is one that is compatible with *loneliness*—that is, the property of being the only contingent thing that exists—and the subsequent suggestion (Langton and Lewis 1998) that an intrinsic property must be *independent of accompaniment* in the sense that all four of the following cases are possible: something lonely has the property; something lonely lacks it; something accompanied has it; and something accompanied lacks it.

This strategy is described by Brian Weatherson and Dan Marshall (2013) as a “combinatorial” approach. It may be seen as a successor to the idea that intrinsic properties are had independently of *how* other things are, substituting for it instead the idea that they are had independently of *whether* other things are. That very contrast, though, should make us pause. Issues about the existence conditions of individuals may run interference with issues about the intrinsicality of properties. Suppose, for instance, that no individual is capable of existing unaccompanied. If being intrinsic requires being independent of accompaniment, then in that case no property is intrinsic. But this hardly seems the right result, especially if the reason no individuals can exist unaccompanied has nothing to do with the nature of any of the properties thereby ruled out as not intrinsic.

With the last two characterizations, two further elements are introduced. With (F), the key notion is that of *aboutness*. A sentence (or proposition) that ascribes an intrinsic property to something "is entirely about that thing," in contrast to those ascribing extrinsic properties. Notably, this characterization doesn't even hint at a modal formulation in terms of independence. What it suggests, rather, is a focus on explanation, or more precisely, an explanation in terms of *truth-making*: for it is natural to say that what a sentence is *about* are those (non-representational) things involved in *making* the sentence true or false.

The apparent divergence of (F) from the other characterizations is, then, somewhat superficial. If aboutness is to be understood in terms of truth-making, we have again an appeal to grounding, since truth-making is a *species* of grounding: a truth-maker for a sentence or proposition is something that grounds the fact that the sentence or proposition is true. For this reason, I see (F) as not indicating any substantive independent constraint on intrinsicality. Its aptness as a way of orienting us to the notion is plausibly a side effect, so to speak, of the more important facts about what properties are grounded by what other properties.

Finally, in (G) another new notion is introduced: that of a perfect duplicate. For any x and y, if x and y are perfect duplicates, then any intrinsic property had by x is also had by y, and vice versa. This is only true, however, if duplication is understood as limited to the replication of intrinsic properties. A perfect duplicate of a dollar bill in this sense need not share all of its properties, since it may be, of course, a counterfeit, and hence lack an important extrinsic property. How, then, does (G) help orient us to the notion of intrinsicality? Presumably it does so by pointing to one important way in which we want to use the notion, namely, by using it to *determine* an interesting notion of a duplicate. This doesn't rule out much by way of candidate intrinsic properties, perhaps, but it does do this much: properties that are incapable of being multiply instantiated are not intrinsic.

There are several examples of such properties that are also plainly to be counted as extrinsic. Consider being the happiest person in the world, being the only cat ever to receive a tail transplant, and the like. There is, however, one sort of property incapable of multiple instantiation that seems not appropriately classified as extrinsic. I have in mind such properties as being William Shakespeare, or being Rudolf Carnap—in general, properties that may be expressed with "being ______," where the blank is filled in with the proper name of some
individual. Call any such property an identity property. Identity properties are a species of impure properties, that is, those the expression of which require the use of proper names. While identity properties cannot be multiply instantiated, this is not generally true of impure properties. The property of being a student of Rudolf Carnap is, for example, instantiated by many lucky individuals.

So far as (G) guides our understanding of intrinsicality, then, identity properties are excluded from being intrinsic. But this may seem puzzling. While the other properties mentioned (such as being the only cat ever to receive a tail transplant) are, in keeping with (G), intuitively classified as extrinsic, it is hardly intuitive to say that being William Shakespeare is an extrinsic property. Surely, one may think, Shakespeare’s having of that property is a function of just how he is, alone, without anything else being relevant.

One reaction to this puzzle is to propose that there is more than one notion of intrinsicality at work in the characterizations (A) through (G). Brian Weatherson and Dan Marshall pursue this idea, in fact suggesting that there are three different notions at work (2013). That is one option, but it is best to avoid positing such ambiguities if possible.

We can avoid doing so if we can make it plausible that the notions of intrinsicality and extrinsicality range over only a limited domain of properties, so that some properties, those outside the domain, are properly classified as neither intrinsic nor extrinsic. If there is independent motivation to think that identity properties are among those not to be classified as either, then we can exclude identity properties and endorse (G) without having to say that they are extrinsic. The Simple Theory will in fact do this, as we’ll see in §2.3.

2. The Simple Theory

2.1 The main idea

As I’ve indicated, I think the characterization in (D) is the most useful for developing a clear theory of intrinsicality. There are two conditions set out in that characterization: a positive one (an intrinsic property is had in virtue of the way the bearer is) and a negative one (an intrinsic property is not had in virtue of the way any other things are). Formalizing slightly, we have:

\[(1) \text{For any property } F, \text{ F is intrinsic if and only if}
\]
\[\text{Necessarily, for any } x, \text{ if } x \text{ has } F, \text{ then (i) } x \text{ has } F \text{ in virtue of how } x \text{ is and (ii) for any } y \neq x, \text{ it is not the case that } x \text{ has } F \text{ in virtue of how } y \text{ is.}\]

In reviewing the characterizations earlier we saw that the positive condition is hardly sufficient for being intrinsic. If Amy is a sister, she has that property in virtue of how she is, but being a sister is clearly not an intrinsic property. We need the negative condition to rule that property out. She does have the property of being a sister in virtue of how something else is; for example, her having that property is grounded (in part) by, say, her mother’s having given birth to Basil, her brother.

The main idea of the Simple Theory is that by leaning on this negative condition, we can do nearly all the work we need to do to specify just when a property is intrinsic. The positive condition plays an important role, but that role is less straightforward.

To develop the theory, I will focus on four issues, adjusting the account at each stage. First, there is an immediate problem with (1) due to those extrinsic properties whose instantiation depends on the absence of certain individuals. The solution to this invokes what I call a “twofold
approach,” one that builds into the analysis of “F is intrinsic” requirements on both F and the
property corresponding to its negation, not-F.7

Second, there are puzzles about the positive condition in light of properties that cannot be said to
be instantiated in virtue of how their bearers are, yet which are not instantiated in virtue of how
other things are, either. I explain how to handle such cases and what to make of the prominence
of the usual positive characterization.

Third, I address the usually neglected question of what, exactly, should be counted as the “other
things” that must not play a grounding role for the possession of intrinsic properties. It is clear
that an intrinsic property may be had in virtue of some feature of an individual not strictly
identical with the bearer; the usual strategy is to allow that the properties of the bearer’s parts
may be relevant, but this is, in my view, insufficiently general. The proposed account allows us to
make sense of a wider variety of cases.

Finally, there is a well-recognized distinction between local and global notions of intrinsicality,
and a good test of a theory is to ask how it explains and relates the two notions. I defend the
Simple Theory by showing how on that theory the global notion may be taken as more
fundamental, the local notion being defined in terms of the global notion.

Before we begin, I want to make one stipulation and confess to one presumption. First, in using
the locution “in virtue of,” I mean the same thing that is sometimes expressed as “partly in virtue
of.” I take this to be the customary meaning of “in virtue of,” in contrast to “solely in virtue of” or
“entirely in virtue of.” On this way of talking, Amy is a sister in virtue of being female, though she
is also a sister in virtue of being a sibling. The grounding conditions need not be sufficient for the
conditions grounded.8

Second, I presume an abundant view of properties. For any meaningful (one-place) predicate,
the corresponding property name is assumed to correspond to a property unless we have special
reason to think it does not—e.g., in the case of predicates for which the assumption leads to
paradox. Such a presumption is common in discussions of intrinsicality, and one motivation for
this is plain. Those less liberal about properties are apt to appeal to intrinsicality as a way of
trimming the class of alleged properties to the class of genuine ones, but if we’re trying to
explain intrinsicality in the first place, we can hardly suppose such trimming already to have been
done.

For most of the discussion I will limit my attention to properties properly so-called, leaving aside
many-place relations. This is just for ease of exposition. When I sum up the theory (§2.6), I will
briefly go over how multiple-place relations may be accommodated and classified as intrinsic or
not.

2.2 Absences and a two-fold approach

The property of being a lonely red thing is plainly not an intrinsic property. But (1) classifies it as
such.

Consider an arbitrary instantiation of being a lonely red thing. This will be an individual—call it
Rhoda—who is both red and the only contingent thing in existence. Now, we can ask two
questions about Rhoda and her being a lonely red thing. First, the positive condition: does Rhoda
have this property in virtue of how she is? The answer seems clearly Yes. She is a lonely red
thing at least partly in virtue of being the exact shade of red she is. Second, the negative
condition: is there any individual other than Rhoda such that Rhoda is a lonely red thing in virtue
of some way that other individual is? Clearly not: she is the only individual, after all.9 So, we’ve

shown that for any arbitrary instantiation of this property, the two conditions are met, and being a lonely red thing turns out to be intrinsic according to (1).

There is a straightforward fix: for any property to be intrinsic it must be the case that its negation is also intrinsic. This is what I am calling a “twofold approach”: the analysis of “F is intrinsic” includes requirements on both F and its negation not-F. In other words, if a property is intrinsic, that tells us something both about cases in which something instantiates it and about cases when something fails to instantiate it, viz. has its negation.

Such an approach is in keeping with the usual orienting characterizations, which occasionally stress that intrinsic properties are ones had or lacked in virtue of how the thing itself is; see (B) and (E) for examples. And in general it is uncontroversial that the set of intrinsic properties is closed under negation. Adjusting (1) to a twofold approach, we get (2):

(2) For any property F, F is intrinsic if and only if

(a) necessarily, for any x, if x has F, then (i) x has F in virtue of how x is and (ii) for any y ≠ x, it is not the case that x has F in virtue of how y is; and
(b) necessarily, for any x, if x has not-F, then (i) x has not-F in virtue of how x is and (ii) for any for any y ≠ x, it is not the case that x has not-F in virtue of how y is.

On this formulation, the property of being a lonely red thing turns out to be extrinsic. The negation of being a lonely red thing is the property of being either not-lonely or not-red. There is a possible case in which something has that property in virtue of being not-lonely; and in that case there is some individual other than the bearer such that the bearer is not-lonely in virtue of that other thing’s being a certain way, namely, that other thing’s accompanying the bearer.

The idea that the status of a property as intrinsic is to be determined in part by considering its negation is reflected in those combinatorial approaches that require an intrinsic property to be independent of accompaniment, since, of course, they impose conditions regarding possible instances of the property’s negation. The Simple Theory does not require that intrinsic properties be independent of accompaniment, though its twofold character is, I think, a different response to the same felt need.

2.3 Making sense of the positive condition

What I’m calling “the positive condition” is the requirement that the individual in question have the property in virtue of how that individual is. I stressed earlier that the negative condition—that the individual not have the property in virtue of how other things are—is needed because the positive condition is not sufficient. But the positive condition is worse than that; at least, on one reading, it makes the theory too strong, ruling out properties that ought to be allowed as intrinsic.

Consider the condition (a)(i) of (2): x has F in virtue of how x is. A natural way to read this is as saying:

There is some G such that x has G and x has F in virtue of having G.

Call this the “straightforward reading” of the positive condition. On the straightforward reading, no property that is fundamental can count as intrinsic, where a fundamental property is one such that its instantiation is never grounded in anything more basic. It is arguably a general truth that no property is instantiated in virtue of itself, since grounding carries explanatory import, and it is no explanation to say that an individual has F because it has F.
If, then, F is fundamental, then on the straightforward reading, F cannot satisfy the positive condition and cannot count as intrinsic. This is surely the wrong result. Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that an intrinsic property is one had by virtue of how the bearer itself is. There is something at least appropriate for using that statement in characterizing intrinsicality. What might this amount to if the straightforward reading is abandoned?

I suggest that the aptness of the phrase derives from the contrasts to which it points. More precisely, I suggest that when we say

An intrinsic property is one had by virtue of how the bearer is,

we can be best understood as saying

An intrinsic property is one such that whether or not something has it is determined by facts about how the thing is, in contrast to other kinds of facts about the thing.

Call this the “contrastive reading.” Its significance depends on what those other kinds of facts might be; so what are they? There are two contrasts that seem salient. First, consider a statement about an individual that tells us which thing or who that individual is as opposed to how it is. If I say that a particular individual is William Shakespeare, I am saying who it is, but it hardly seems right to say that I am describing how he is. Importantly, I am not describing how anyone else is, either; I am not describing how anything is at all. Plausibly, then, in attributing an identity property to an individual, one does not describe how that individual is.

The other contrast to which the positive characterization may draw our attention is that between saying how something is and saying what it is, or perhaps what kind of thing it is. If I aim to say what an individual is by describing it as, say, a cat, I am likely trying to describe in part the essence of that individual—to say something about what it is to be that thing. This second contrast does not (as the first does) indicate any special class of properties as irrelevant to one of the two projects (saying how something is vs. saying what it is). After all, a single property might be mentioned both in saying how an individual is and in saying what it is, even while those two claims are distinct. This second contrast, then, does not require any restriction of the properties to be considered as candidates for being intrinsic.

Let us return to the first contrast and the division of properties it suggests. It will be convenient to have some labels. While it would be a gross category mistake to say that a property is literally descriptive in the ordinary senses of the term, I will stipulate a technical sense as follows:

A property F is descriptive if and only if necessarily, a true ascription of F to an individual is a description of how that individual is.

A property is nondescriptive if and only if it is not descriptive.

If we consider again some of the orienting characterizations, we have reason to think that the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction is supposed to be drawn among the descriptive properties, while nondescriptive properties are set aside as not being candidates for either label. Consider our first one again:

(A) Intuitively, a property is intrinsic just in case a thing’s having it (at a time) depends only on what that thing is like (at that time), and not on what any wholly distinct contingent object (or wholly distinct time) is like.
Witmer, "A Simple Theory of Intrinsicality," p. 10

Note the use of "what that thing is like." Talk of \textit{what an object is like} is not infrequently used to exclude from consideration certain properties as irrelevant. If I tell you that the object behind Door #3 is identical with itself, you may complain that I am not telling you anything about what it is like, anything about \textit{how it is}. Since talk of \textit{what an object is like} indicates that the properties at issue are descriptive, it is plausible that the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction is drawn among descriptive properties only, setting aside as irrelevant nondescriptive properties.

Happily, this result makes sense of the puzzle we noted in considering the last of the orienting characterizations invoking duplicates. There, we noted that identity properties such as being William Shakespeare cannot be shared among duplicates simply because they cannot be multiply instantiated, yet they are not intuitively extrinsic. The answer to the puzzle is that they are nondescriptive properties and for that reason neither intrinsic nor extrinsic.

Supposing, then, that the contrastive reading of the positive condition is correct and that the key contrast is between descriptive and nondescriptive properties, we can \textit{drop} the first "positive condition" in our analysis in favor of restricting the initial quantification to descriptive properties. Given this restriction, we should add an explicit analysis of extrinsicality to abide by the same restriction. Finally, we can introduce the straightforward reading of "in virtue of how it is" for the negative condition, since the negative condition (unlike the positive condition) \textit{can} be met by both fundamental and non-fundamental properties. The result is (3) and (4):

(3) For any descriptive property F, F is intrinsic if and only if
   (a) necessarily, for any x, if x has F, then for any y ≠ x and property G, it is not the case that x has F in virtue of y's having G; and
   (b) necessarily, for any x, if x has not-F, then for any for any y ≠ x and property G, it is not the case that x has not-F in virtue of y's having G.

(4) For any descriptive property F, F is extrinsic if and only if F is not intrinsic.

A good question here is whether there are any nondescriptive properties other than the identity properties that should be excluded from consideration. Above, I used the example of being self-identical; and indeed it seems that if I say that an object is self-identical, I am not describing how it is. The fact that it's true to say that Shakespeare, for example, is self-identical is due entirely to facts \textit{about the nature of identity generally} and not at all about \textit{how Shakespeare is}. Nor is it really about \textit{how identity itself} (the abstract relation) is. Or so it seems to me. What is important, however, is not so much the status of that property in particular but how it interacts with judgements about intrinsicality. Insofar as one thinks that the truth of "Shakespeare is self-identical" does \textit{not} reflect on how he is, one will be inclined, I suggest, to think that being self-identical is neither intrinsic nor extrinsic. If one thinks that being self-identical is obviously intrinsic, you likely think of it as descriptive as well.

What other properties might be likewise irrelevant to how their bearers are? Consider the property of being such that 2+2=4. I submit that whether we take this to be descriptive turns on what we think about mathematical talk generally. If we adopt a frank mathematical realism according to which there are objects such as 2 and 4, then the fact that I am such that 2+2=4 is indeed grounded in how something else is—namely, in how those mathematical objects are. If, on the other hand, we reject such realism and take the truth of the mathematical statement to be a very different sort of beast, where, say, there are no entities that make such statements true, then we are likely to take this as a \textit{nondescriptive} property.

The example of being such that 2+2=4 fits into a general category of property of special interest. Say that a property F is \textit{indiscriminately necessary} if and only if necessarily, for any individual x, x has F. It is tempting to think that our notion of intrinsicality is designed for properties that are only contingently instantiated and hence that indiscriminately necessary properties may be set
aside just as nondescriptive ones are on the current proposal. After all, it is a common thought that, when $F$ is indiscriminately necessary, the claim that a particular individual has $F$ is (apart from its implication that the individual exists) empty of content. In earlier work I wanted to set aside indiscriminately necessary properties as not relevant, but I now think that I was misdiagnosing the felt impulse (see Witmer et al. 2005: 347–349). What should be set aside as such are nondescriptive properties, not indiscriminately necessary properties. How many of the latter are ultimately to be set aside as nondescriptive will depend on just how one understands the nature of those properties, and I take no stand on such in this paper.

2.4 The "other things"

The main idea of the Simple Theory is to lean on the negative condition: an intrinsic property is one that is not had in virtue of properties of things other than the bearer. Thus far, I have been treating this distinction—between the bearer and the other things—as nothing more or less than a lack of identity. But this was a temporary measure, as it is clear that the "other things" need to be understood in a less exhaustive fashion. There are examples in which an individual has an intrinsic property in virtue of how some distinct individual is but where that distinct individual is closely related to the bearer of the property in a way that makes this distinctness benign.

Consider a simple example. Suppose that being red is an intrinsic property and a particular shirt is red; now take a patch of that shirt that is also red. Plausibly, the shirt itself is red in virtue of that patch's being red. The patch is not identical with the shirt, of course, so if the "other things" that are not to play a grounding role in the intrinsic property's instantiation include a thing's parts, being red will turn out not to be intrinsic after all. And that is the wrong result.

This is a well-recognized point, and it is standard in theories of intrinsicality to limit the "other things" to those that are not only distinct from the bearer but also wholly distinct in the sense of having no parts in common with the bearer (e.g., Francescotti 1999; Trogdon 2009; Weatherson and Marshall 2013). While this is a move in the right direction, it does not go far enough. There is also a sense in which it goes too far. I take the latter point first.

Suppose we restrict the negative condition so that what is required for intrinsicality is just that property (and its negation) never be grounded in any properties of an individual wholly distinct from the bearer of the property. The resulting conditions are too weak. Consider an ordinary physical object $O$ with a proper part $O_p$. Given the definition of "wholly distinct," $O$ and $O_p$ are not wholly distinct. Now suppose $O_p$ has some property $F$ in virtue of $O$'s having some property $G$. For example, $O_p$ could have the property of being part of a hammer-shaped object, where $O$ is a hammer. Is the property of being part of a hammer-shaped object intrinsic? I take it intuition is clear here in denying it that status. After all, in this case the possession of $F$ depends on how things are, as we might put, "outside" of its bearer.

It is easy to fix this problem. The "other individuals" should not include parts of the bearer, but they should include objects of which the bearer is a part. The quantification in the negative conditions, then, might be adjusted to

\[ \text{for any } y \text{ such that } y \neq x \text{ and } y \text{ is not a part of } x \]

So far, so good. But the appeal to parts is insufficiently general. There may be ways in which one individual is "made up of" some other individuals without those being parts of the former—perhaps because the individuals in question aren't located in space and time, or aren't so located in any way that makes the "parts" talk straightforward. Here's an example.\(^\text{12}\)
Suppose the philosophy majors at a particular institution form a student organization deemed the "Philosophy Club," and at a certain point in its history, nearly every member of the Philosophy Club is a student inclined to describe herself as "pre-law," as nearly every member hopes to go to law school. At that time, then, the Philosophy Club has the property of being dominated by would-be law students. Let Basil be a would-be law student who is a member of the Philosophy Club. It seems clearly that the Club’s possession of the property of being dominated by would-be law students is grounded in part in Basil’s being a would-be law student.

Now, is the property of being dominated by would-be law students an intrinsic property? Perhaps not, but it seems clear that the grounding of this property in Basil’s being a would-be law student doesn’t suffice to bar it from that status. Yet Basil is presumably not to be reckoned a part of the Philosophy Club. He’s a member, not a part. Nonetheless, he stands in a relation to the Club that is relevantly similar to the relation a part may stand to a whole. The Philosophy Club is, as we may put it, ontologically dependent on its members, including Basil. The Club exists in virtue of the existence of those members. (Not solely in virtue of their existence, of course; but their existence does indeed partly ground the existence of the Club.)

For another example, consider Socrates and the singleton set \{Socrates\}. The latter has the property of having a philosopher as a member; it has this in virtue of Socrates’ being a philosopher. Since a set is ontologically dependent on its members, this is no threat to the intrinsicality of having a philosopher as a member.\(^\text{13}\)

Let us generalize and define ontological dependence as follows:

\[
\text{For any } x \text{ and } y, \text{ } x \text{ is ontologically dependent on } y \text{ if and only if } x \text{ exists (at least partly) in virtue of the fact that } y \text{ exists.}
\]

Plausibly, whenever \(x\) has \(y\) as a part, \(x\) is also ontologically dependent on \(y\), but the reverse is not true: the notion of ontological dependence is broader than that of a part. It is similar, however, in that if a property is grounded by a property of some individual that is distinct from the bearer yet is such that the bearer is ontologically dependent on it, that fact plausibly does not threaten the property’s intrinsicality.

Given this revision of the notion of the “other things” that must not be involved in grounding an intrinsic property, our analysis (3) becomes (5):

\[
(5) \text{ For any descriptive property } F, \text{ } F \text{ is intrinsic if and only if }
\]
\[
\text{(a) necessarily, for any } x, \text{ if } x \text{ has } F, \text{ then for any property } G \text{ and any individual } y \text{ such that } y \neq x \text{ and } x \text{ is not ontologically dependent on } y, \text{ it is not the case that } x \text{ has } F \text{ in virtue of } y \text{'s having } G; \text{ and}
\]
\[
\text{(b) necessarily, for any } x, \text{ if } x \text{ has not-}F, \text{ then for any property } G \text{ and any individual } y \text{ such that } y \neq x \text{ and } x \text{ is not ontologically dependent on } y, \text{ it is not the case that } x \text{ has not-}F \text{ in virtue of } y \text{'s having } G.
\]

Grounding is here invoked twice over: in the statement of the crucial negative condition that the property in question is not grounded in how things other than the bearer are and in the explanation of which “other things” are at issue. I take this result to be congenial given how often orienting characterizations make use of grounding talk. In the next section, we’ll see one more way in which grounding is given work to do.

2.5 Local and global notions
Consider the property of being cubical or within five feet of a sphere. The property itself is not intrinsic, but in a particular case, it may be instantiated in an intrinsic fashion. Suppose Clara is a cube that is not within five feet of a sphere. The way Clara has the property—on this particular occasion, at least—is solely a matter of how she is, not a matter of how other things are. So she has it intrinsically, even if the property itself is not intrinsic. The local notion of intrinsicality is that expressed by saying that Clara has that property in an intrinsic fashion; the global notion is that which classifies properties themselves as intrinsic. How are the local and global notions related?

A natural reaction to such cases is to propose that we define the local notion first and then define the global notion using the biconditional (6):

\[(6) \text{ For any property } F, F \text{ is intrinsic if and only if necessarily for any } x, \text{ if } x \text{ has } F, x \text{ has } F \text{ in an intrinsic fashion.}^{14}\]

Call this the "local-first" strategy. Insofar as (6) seems an obvious truth, one may be tempted to insist on a local-first strategy as a means of vindicating it. The Simple Theory, however, does not take a local-first strategy. While it does imply that whether a property is intrinsic depends on what conditions are met by possible instances of it, those conditions do not suggest a sensible way of defining the local notion.

Consider those conditions spelled out as (5)(a) and (5)(b). Suppose we want to use them to define "x has F in an intrinsic fashion." The conditions regarding instances of not-F won’t be relevant, of course, so an attempt to define the local notion using (5) gets us (7):

\[(7) \text{ For any descriptive property } F \text{ and any individual } x, x \text{ has } F \text{ in an intrinsic fashion if and only for any property } G \text{ and any individual } y \text{ such that } y \neq x \text{ and } x \text{ is not ontologically dependent on } y, \text{ it is not the case that } x \text{ has } F \text{ in virtue of } y \text{’s having } G.\]

This definition of the local notion is plainly inadequate. Recall Rhoda, the lonely red thing we discussed in §2.2 According to (7), she has the property of being a lonely red thing in an intrinsic fashion. After all, there are no other individuals the properties of which could ground her having that property. This sort of problem is exactly why I introduced a twofold approach in the first place.

The local/global distinction raises two questions for the Simple Theory. First, just how is the local notion to be understood? Since the Simple Theory defines the global notion first, we should complete the theory by showing how the local notion can be defined in terms of the global notion. The local notion is clearly available; the example of Clara the cube's having the disjunctive property in an intrinsic fashion is quite compelling, as are others. So some analysis is needed. Second, can the appealing biconditional (6) be vindicated given that analysis? If so, whatever pressure that biconditional may put on us to take a local-first approach is removed.

There is in fact a straightforward way to understand what we are getting at when we say that an extrinsic property is nonetheless had in an intrinsic fashion. In the case of Clara, she has that disjunctive property solely in virtue of having one of its disjuncts—being cubical—where that disjunct is itself an intrinsic property. Here, the crucial notion is that of one property had solely in virtue of another. Having a property (partly) in virtue of having an intrinsic property is plainly not sufficient for the first one to be had in an intrinsic fashion. After all, many properties will be instantiated both in virtue of some intrinsic aspects and in virtue of some extrinsic aspects; for example, the property of being cubical and within five feet of a sphere will always be instantiated at least partly in virtue of having an intrinsic property, but there is no temptation to say that it is always had in an intrinsic fashion.
Generally, then, to have an extrinsic property in an intrinsic fashion is just to have that extrinsic property solely in virtue of some intrinsic property one has. To have an intrinsic property in an intrinsic fashion might be defined as a kind of default case: if the property is intrinsic, it’s trivially had in an intrinsic fashion. My suggestion, then, is to define the local notion thus:

(8) For any individual x and property P, x has P in an intrinsic fashion if and only if either P is intrinsic or there is some P* such that P* is intrinsic and x has P solely in virtue of having P*.

To have a property in an extrinsic fashion is then defined simply as (9):

(9) For any individual x and property P, x has P in an extrinsic fashion if and only if P is extrinsic and it is not the case that x has P in an intrinsic fashion.

What of our second question about the biconditional (6) linking the local and global notions? Do our definitions vindicate the claim that a property is intrinsic if and only if every possible instance of it is a case in which it is had in an intrinsic fashion? The left-to-right direction of (6) is easy. Given definition (8), if a property F is intrinsic, it is trivial that anything that has it has it in an intrinsic fashion. The right-to-left direction is less straightforward. Could it happen that a property that is necessarily had in an intrinsic fashion is nonetheless itself extrinsic?

Arguably not. Here is the argument. Suppose that F is such that, necessarily, whenever some x has F, x has F in an intrinsic fashion. This implies that if F is not itself intrinsic, then for any instance of F, the individual x has some intrinsic property I such that x has F solely in virtue of I. Let \{I_1, I_2, ..., I_z\} be the set of every intrinsic property such that F is possibly instantiated solely in virtue of having that property. That set then exhausts all the ways in which F might be instantiated.

To show that F itself is intrinsic, we need to show that the two negative conditions—one for possible instances of F and the other for possible instances of not-F—are satisfied. Consider the first. Are there any possible instances in which an individual has F in virtue of how some other thing is? If so, it would have to be an instance in which the individual also had F solely in virtue of some intrinsic property in \{I_1, I_2, ..., I_z\}. But given that this instance is grounded solely in the instantiation of that member of \{I_1, I_2, ..., I_z\}, and given that those intrinsic properties had by the individual are of course not themselves grounded in how any other individuals are, we can conclude in none of these cases is F grounded in how other things are. The first condition is satisfied.

Consider the second condition concerning possible instances of not-F. Plausibly, if I_1, I_2, ..., I_z are all the ways in which something could have F, then if something lacks F, it lacks F in virtue of lacking one of those properties—or, equivalently, in virtue of possessing the conjunction of their negations. So, for any x, if x has not-F, it has not-F in virtue of having neither I_1, nor I_2, nor I_3, ... nor I_z—the conjunction of the negations in \{I_1, I_2, ..., I_z\}.

Each member of \{I_1, I_2, ..., I_z\} is intrinsic. Since the Simple Theory as set out in (5) implies that the negation of any intrinsic property is itself intrinsic, each member of \{not-I_1, not-I_2, ..., not-I_z\} is intrinsic. The conjunction of any number of intrinsic properties will itself be intrinsic, since an individual will have a conjunctive property solely in virtue of having each conjunct. So, the property of having neither I_1, nor I_2, nor I_3, ... nor I_z is intrinsic. We established above that any instance of not-F is had solely in virtue of having neither I_1, nor I_2, nor I_3, ... nor I_z. It follows that it’s necessarily the case, for any x such that x has not-F, x has not-F solely in virtue of some intrinsic property. This is sufficient to show that it is never the case that x has not-F in virtue of
how other individuals are; the same proof given for the positive case applies. Hence, (5)(b) is satisfied.

Our analysis of the local notion in terms of the global notion, then, vindicates the plausible biconditional (6) without requiring us to take a local-first approach.

2.6 The theory in summary

Let us sum up the Simple Theory and illustrate it with some applications. Our formulations (5) and (6) give the theory:

For any descriptive property F, F is intrinsic if and only if
(a) necessarily, for any x, if x has F, then for any property G and any individual y such that y ≠ x and x is not ontologically dependent on y, it is not the case that x has F in virtue of y’s having G; and
(b) necessarily, for any x, if x has not-F, then for any property G and any individual y such that y ≠ x and x is not ontologically dependent on y, it is not the case that x has not-F in virtue of y’s having G.

For any descriptive property F, F is extrinsic if and only if F is not intrinsic.

As it stands, the Simple Theory only classifies properties—that is, one-place attributes—as intrinsic or extrinsic, but arguably the same distinction can apply to many-place relations as well. Brian Weatherson and Dan Marshall helpfully provide a relevant platitude:

An n-place intrinsic relation is an n-place relation that n things stand in in virtue of how they are and how they are related to each other, as opposed to how they are related to things outside of them, and how things outside of them are. (Weatherson and Marshall 2013)

How is the Simple Theory to be generalized to all attributes, both one-place and many-place? Suppose an attribute A is being evaluated for intrinsicality. Consider a possible tuple T_A that exemplifies A and ask: is T_A’s exemplification of A grounded in the attributes of any ordered sets of individuals outside T_A? Again, we must take care with how the “other things” are to be understood. A tuple T_O will be distinct from T_A if and only if either their cardinalities differ or there is some i such that the i-th member of T_A ≠ the i-th member of T_O. In addition, however, to be appropriately other, it must also be the case that T_O does not help constitute T_A; it must not be the case that T_A exists (at least partly) in virtue of the existence of T_O. The theory is then straightforwardly reworded for greater generality:

For any descriptive attribute A, A is intrinsic if and only:
(a) Necessarily, for any tuple T_A, if T_A exemplifies A, then for any attribute B and any tuple (of whatever cardinality) T_O such that T_A ≠ T_O and T_A is not ontologically dependent on T_O, it is not the case that T_A exemplifies A in virtue of T_O’s exemplifying B.
(b) Necessarily, for any tuple T_A, if T_A exemplifies not-A, then for any attribute B and any tuple (of whatever cardinality) T_O such that T_A ≠ T_O and T_A is not ontologically dependent on T_O, it is not the case that T_A exemplifies not-A in virtue of T_O’s exemplifying B.

For any descriptive attribute A, A is extrinsic if and only if A is not intrinsic.
Now that the theory is on the table, much more can, and should, be said by way of evaluating it. However, given space limits, I here confine my remarks to a few comments in support of the theory and an examination of a handful of cases.

Instead of just setting out the Simple Theory at the outset, I chose in this paper to develop it in stages only after a look at several orienting characterizations. The point was to exhibit how the theory thus developed is well-founded in our intuitive grip on the notion. In examining those characterizations, I took pains to note how they related to each other, and in particular related them to (D), here repeated:

\[(D)\] A thing has its intrinsic properties in virtue of the way that thing itself, and nothing else, is.

This claim is enshrined in the Simple Theory as the central claim. Characterizations such as (F) and (G) that seem to introduce other elements can be seen, as I argued, as deriving from the basic idea in (D).

A crucial test for a theory of intrinsicality is, of course, whether it classifies particular examples in the way it should. In developing the theory above I have often resorted to this test, but I will here review a handful of examples, including both some already mentioned and others not touched on yet in this paper.

*Identity properties*, such as being William Shakespeare, are classified as neither intrinsic nor extrinsic. It is true that one might want to say Shakespeare has this property in virtue of *who* he is— but that, I take it, is not the same as having it in virtue of *how* he is, and only the latter is relevant to intrinsicality. However, the structural similarity here between saying that a property is grounded in who someone is (or which thing it is) and saying that a property is grounded in how something is explains the temptation to count identity properties as intrinsic. The same kind of similarity explains the conflation of being intrinsic with being essential, as the intrinsic is grounded in *how* something is and the essential in *what* something is, or *what kind* of thing it is.

What about what we might call *distinctness properties*, such as the property of being *distinct* from William Shakespeare? This, too, I think, is nondescriptive. It tells us something about which thing the individual is by telling us what thing it isn't, but nothing about how it is.

Identity and distinctness properties are impure properties, and both are set aside as not being candidates for the intrinsic or extrinsic designation. But not all impure properties are set aside as nondescriptive. The property of being a student of Rudolf Carnap is plausibly descriptive and extrinsic. Quine has it in virtue of how something else is; his possession of that property is grounded in Carnap’s having the property of having taught Quine.

Many impure properties will be extrinsic. Are any intrinsic? Here, examples are less easy to come by, but here is one. The property of *being a set with Shakespeare as one’s sole member* is, I think, intrinsic. The set has that property in virtue of Shakespeare’s being its member, but the set is itself ontologically dependent on Shakespeare, so this grounding in a distinct thing’s features is not the kind of grounding that threatens its status as intrinsic. Note, too, that the negation of this property is intrinsic. The negation is the property of being either not a set or a set with something other than Shakespeare as a member. Not being a set is presumably intrinsic. If something is not a set, that is hardly a function of how other things are. If something is a set that has something other than Shakespeare as a member, that feature is grounded in the features of its members—and hence grounded in the features of things on which it is ontologically dependent.

Witmer, "A Simple Theory of Intrinsicality," p. 16
Indiscriminately necessary properties such as being self-identical and being such that $2+2=4$ do not receive a uniform classification. Being self-identical is arguably not descriptive and hence neither intrinsic nor extrinsic. Being such that $2+2=4$ may be intrinsic if there are no facts about entities that make it true that $2+2=4$, but it won’t be if it’s true in virtue of how mathematical objects are. Our difficulties in classifying these can be explained as due to our difficulties in understanding the relevant ontology in the first place.

What about what Ted Sider calls border-sensitive properties? A property is border-sensitive in this sense if and only if “whether it is instantiated by an object depends on what is going on, intrinsically, outside that object at its borders” (Sider 2001: 358). To take one of his examples, consider a solid cube of gold; within that cube there is a quantity of gold that takes up the space of a sphere, yet that gold is not itself a sphere. To be a sphere requires that it have a border with an appropriate shape. Intuitively, such border-sensitivity rules out intrinsicality. The Simple Theory captures this in a straightforward way. In the case of being a sphere, there are possible cases of not being a sphere that are grounded in how other things are. Sider’s own example makes this plain. Let George be the quantity of gold that is embedded in a larger gold cube. George has the property of being not a sphere in virtue of how something else is, namely, the surrounding gold; that gold has the feature of being gold and surrounding George, and this helps make George not a sphere.

What of the property of being an intrinsic duplicate of Shakespeare? This is extrinsic. There is a possible case in which an individual distinct from Shakespeare (and not ontologically dependent on him) has that property by virtue of the way Shakespeare is. What, however, of the distinct property of being an intrinsic duplicate of Shakespeare as he actually is? The same point holds, I believe, though in this case it is worth pointing out that this extrinsic property will be necessarily coextensive with some intrinsic property, namely, the one determined by conjoining all the intrinsic properties of Shakespeare as he actually is (at a given time, of course—I am abstracting away from time for simplicity here).

A few others: what of the property of attending to something (Hawthorne 2001: 399)? This counts as extrinsic because there is a possible case in which an individual (say, Amy) attends to a distinct individual (say, Basil, who is another person and not something on which Amy ontologically depends). In that case, Amy has the property of attending to something in virtue of a property had by Basil, namely, being the target of Amy’s attention. Recall that “in virtue of” here is not the same as “solely in virtue of”: Amy’s having the property of attending to something is never had solely in virtue of how other things are; but so long as one possible case is partly grounded in some other thing’s being a certain way, the property is extrinsic.

What of the property of being one of at most 17 cubes? This is plainly extrinsic. The twofold approach to intrinsicality gives a happy result; the negation is the property of being either not a cube or a cube accompanied by more than 16 distinct cubes. There is a possible case in which this disjunctive property is grounded in how some other thing is, say, when the bearer is accompanied by 50 other cubes. In that case, the property is grounded by one of those other individuals’ being a cube.

This is just a smattering of cases for consideration. So far as I have found, there are no cases that pose a clear counterexample to the Simple Theory.¹⁵ This alone doesn’t give me much confidence that the theory is correct—after all, we all know how hard it is to anticipate all potential counterexamples. The fact that the theory is developed by close attention to the orienting characterizations, on the other hand, gives me reason to think that something close to it, at least, is correct.¹⁶
REFERENCES


1 For a recent anthology of papers focused on this notion, see Correia and Schnieder 2012.

2 There are two especially significant differences to which I draw attention.

First, the "Strong Independence Definition" given in 2005 made the local notion of intrinsicality more basic than that of the global notion; that is, it first defined what it is for an individual to have a property in an intrinsic fashion on a particular occasion and then defined what it is for a property itself to be intrinsic. The Simple Theory takes the reverse route; see §2.5.

Second, the Simple Theory, unlike the 2005 theory, makes no use of the notion of independence of accompaniment. I take this as a virtue of the theory for two reasons. First, there may be ways in which the requirement is too strong; I note some potential problems in §2.3. Second, the theory of intrinsicality may play an important role in explaining certain modal facts, and if so, it should not presuppose them. I have in mind the possibility of explaining what may be called "Hume's Dictum," the thesis, as Jessica Wilson puts it, that "there are no metaphysically necessary connections between distinct, intrinsically typed, entities" (emphasis added) (Wilson 2010: 595). I expect that some refinement of this is correct and important, and a correct theory of intrinsicality should help explain this fact. If independence of accompaniment were built into the definition of intrinsicality, such an explanation would be likely doomed to circularity. The Simple Theory, I believe, offers some promise of a noncircular explanation.

3 Rosen's proposal is only briefly given as an illustration of the potential utility of grounding as a theoretical tool. (Needless to say, I am in agreement with him on this.) Here is Rosen's proposal:

F is an intrinsic property iff, as a matter of necessity, for all x:
If x is F in virtue of $\psi(y)$—where $\psi(y)$ is a fact containing y as a constituent—then y is a part of x; and
If x is not-F in virtue of $\psi(y)$, then y is part of x.

There are a number of significant differences between Rosen's proposal and the Simple Theory here developed, but the two theories are obviously very close in spirit.

4 Quotations (D), (F) and (G) are all taken from the very same paragraph in David Lewis, "Extrinsic Properties" (1983). It has been suggested (Weatherson and Marshall 2013) that the three statements from that single paragraph indicate three distinct notions. This seems unlikely given their occurrence in the very same paragraph. In any case, this ambiguity thesis is unnecessary; as I hope to show here, the Simple Theory can in fact make sense of all of the several different characterizations as directing our attention to a single notion.

5 There is an excellent question about which things, exactly, are to be counted as appropriately "outside" the individual that bears the property in question, but I suppress it for now and address it when developing the positive proposal; see §2.4.

6 These might also be called haecceities or haecceitistic properties, but I am sticking with the easier label. Note that there is no commitment here to the idea that a property is an identity property whenever it is necessarily attached to just a single individual. More precisely, I allow that P may be a property such that there is a particular individual x where, necessarily, something has P if and only if that thing is identical with x, yet P is not itself an identity property.

7 More precisely, the negation should be understood as follows. I take property names to be canonically formed from predicate expressions. So, the "property of being F" corresponds to the predicate expression "is F." The negation of "x is F" is what corresponds to "it is not the case that x is F." I will make use of less careful expressions, such as using plain "F" for the property of being F; in that case, "not-F" should be understood in an analogous fashion.

8 It is worth noting here that the crucial negative condition needs to be read in this way. A property can fail to be intrinsic even if it is not instantiated entirely in virtue of things other than the bearer. We might reserve the term "purely extrinsic" to mean those properties that are instantiated solely in virtue of how things outside the bearer are. ("Cambridge changes" might be defined in terms of the gain or loss of a purely extrinsic property in this sense.) Plain "extrinsic" seems mostly to be used to include both those and what we might call "partly extrinsic" properties.

9 Well, she is the only contingent individual aside from her own parts; noncontingent individuals and the bearer's own parts don't seem to count here. More on this in §2.3 and §2.4.

10 For example, in his proposed account of intrinsicality, Brian Weatherson (2001) makes this claim, along with other closure principles, key to the positive account.

11 What if a property is such that its expression makes ineliminable use of expressions of both descriptive and non descriptive properties? In that case, we might call it non descriptive without fear of missing out on some descriptive properties, since the descriptive elements of such can stand on their own.

12 My thinking about the need to accommodate examples such as these was motivated by correspondence with Dan Marshall.

13 Marshall (forthcoming) addresses this sort of case and makes a claim that just surprises me. He claims that the property of having a member (as applied to sets) is extrinsic, not intrinsic. This seems to me just false, and if we keep in view the fact that a set is ontologically dependent on its members, the contrary judgement should seem plausible.

14 Such a local-first approach using that biconditional was key to the definition in Witmer et al. 2005.

15 I say that I have found no cases that pose a clear counterexample, but there is a kind of property that at least raises questions about just how to apply the theory. I have in mind any intuitively extrinsic property that is either uninstantiable or has a negation that is uninstantiable. Consider the modal conditions (a) and (b): if the property at issue is one such that either it or its negation is not possibly instantiated, one or both of those conditions will be, at least on one standard reading, vacuously satisfied. That reading results in an inappropriate classification of such properties.

Here are two examples that show this. First: the property of being both a brother and not a brother. Since nothing could have it, the conditional (a) is true, and since nothing could have its negation, the conditional (b) is true as well. Yet we are hardly going to be happy with declaring the property of being both a brother and not a brother an intrinsic property. Insofar as we are inclined to classify it, it seems extrinsic. Second: the property of being not a creature of God—that is, being something that is not created by God. This plainly cries out for classification as extrinsic—yet the conditions are again met. Since God does not exist, and hence could not exist (assuming his essence includes necessary existence), everything necessarily has this property. Further, since God could not exist, there are no instances of the property grounded in
features of God. No other "outside" entity seems relevant, so condition (a) is met. Consider the negation: being a creature of God. Since God could not exist, nothing could have the negation, and condition (b) is vacuously satisfied.

We can avoid these unhappy results if we read (a) and (b) in such a way that allows for counterpossibles to be substantively true or false. Suppose that something were, *per impossibile*, to have the property of being a brother and not a brother. In that case, it would have that property (partly) in virtue of being a brother, and hence (partly) in virtue of how something else is. Similarly, if something were, again *per impossibile*, a creature of God, it would have that property in virtue of God's being a certain way, namely, having created him.

If we are unwilling to allow counterpossibles with nontrivial truth-values, of course, the examples must be handled in some other way. They are rather peculiar examples, of course, and it is not unreasonable to expect that a suitable treatment may be had, perhaps one guided, in fact, by the way in which the nontrivial counterpossible readings appear to churn out the right results.

16 Thanks to Dan Marshall for some correspondence related to these issues. His forthcoming paper, "Intrinsicality and Grounding," is an attack on the theory suggested by Rosen 2010 that is rather similar to this. The Simple Theory is, I think, immune to the objections there posed, though I lack space here to engage in that battle.