

Abstract for **Properties: An Online Workshop**

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Properties in the ontology of natural language: Properties as reifications of kinds of tropes or kinds of abstract states

How does natural language permit reference to properties and what does this tell us about the (descriptive) metaphysics of properties? In English (and we may assume in natural languages in general), there are two sorts of terms for properties: A-terms, i.e. bare (determinerless) adjective nominalizations such as *wisdom*, and B-terms, i.e. explicit property-referring terms of the sort *the property of being wise*. As I have argued in previous work, A-terms and B-terms stand for different sorts of things. *Wisdom* behaves like a kind-referring term (in the sense of Carlson 1977), referring to a kind of trope. *The property of being wise* refers to a property as an abstract object. This is reflected in distinct readings of various sorts of predicates (with A-terms, but not B-terms, *encounter* and *exist* involve existential quantification over instances, *is admirable* generic quantification, and *look for* quantification over instances in satisfaction situations). Moreover, B-terms can be based on disjunctive, conjunctive, and quantified linguistic material (*the property of being tall and / or intelligent*, *the property of owning a car*), but not so A-terms. This suggests that B-terms denote entities abstracted from a sentential content, as would be represented by a λ -expressions. However this cannot be right. The complement of B-terms cannot be eventive (* *the property of walking / thinking / playing golf / talking to someone / becoming wise*), and it cannot describe concrete, spatially located states (* *the property of sleeping / standing / sitting*). Rather the complement must describe abstract or ‘Kimean’ states (Maienborn 2007, Moltmann 2013) – the implicit arguments of *be* or abstract state verbs like *own*, *resemble*, *weigh* (*the property of being wise / owning several homes / resembling a horse / weighing ten kilo / being the agent of an act of talking / being the cause of a commotion / being the experiencer of an act of kindness*). Alternatively, the complement of *property* can be an A-term, denoting a kind of trope (*the property of wisdom*). Gerundive terms like *being wise* themselves are kind-referring terms, denoting kinds of (abstract) states. This means that in the ontology of natural language, properties are conceived as entities that correlate with kinds of tropes or kinds of abstract states, rather than being the correlates of predicates or sentential contents.