POWERS AND TENDENCIES REVISITED

BY

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Abstract. While powers and tendencies are among the most fundamental concepts of critical realism, there are several problems with these concepts that have been ignored, avoided or glossed. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to tease out these problems and provide clarification and consistency where possible. In the first section of the paper I sketch the existing critical realist conceptualization of tendencies by identifying eight distinct moments in a causal chain, denoted tendency1 to tendency8. In section two I ask: Is there a difference between powers and tendencies? The answer, controversially perhaps, is: ‘No’. In section three I ask: What is the difference between tendency1 and tendency2? The answer considers two possible arguments accounting for the difference, and initiates a re-think of some of the terminology used to discuss tendencies as distinct moments in a causal chain. I conclude by raising the possibility that tendencies or powers are not of an either/or, discrete, dichotomous or discontinuous nature, but are continuous. This raises the further possibility that powers or tendencies can come in stronger and weaker forms.

Key words: laws; powers; strong tendencies; weak tendencies

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Introduction

A great deal of social science remains committed to some variant of positivist philosophy of science and some variant of the hypothetico-deductive method. At the heart of this positivist/deductivist approach is the concept of regularity-based law or some other variant on the theme of the constant conjunctions of events. While I could give countless examples, the following two should suffice:

As the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume put it, causality is about:

‘an object followed by another ... where, if the first had not existed, the second had never existed’. This is precisely the kind of knowledge required to predict the effect of action, how behaviour changes the world. What do we really understand when we think we understand a mechanism? Presumably, at minimum, we have some idea about which inputs produce which outputs. We understand how the choice of inputs determines the outputs and that the reverse does not hold. The choice of outputs does not determine the value of inputs. This special and structured kind of knowledge requires that we understand that (1) changing X is likely to end up with a change in Y; (2) causes and effects are asymmetric: changing Y won’t budge X; (3) causes and effects go together over time; and (4) Y does not occur before X. Believing that heat causes expansion requires believing that (1) changing the temperature will change the volume (of a gas, say); (2) changing the volume won’t change the temperature; (3) certain temperatures are associated with certain volumes; and (4) new volumes aren’t observed before new temperatures.3

Ideally, you will develop a measurement system that lets you answer questions such as, how much will we have to change x in order to achieve our target in y? To illustrate, if you increase training by 20 per cent, how much will that change employee performance and, ultimately, unit performance?4

Not only do these examples presuppose an aetiology/ontology of constant conjunctions of events and, therefore, closed systems, they exemplify precisely the kind of thing that critical realists have rejected on the grounds that constant conjunctions of events are rarely, if ever, found in open systems such as the social world. If constant conjunctions of events are rarely, if ever, found in the social world; and if there is a certain degree of order or stability to the social world – which seems undeniable – then something other than constant

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3 Sloman 2005, 5. Unfortunately, Sloman is confused on the nature of mechanisms.
4 Becker, Huselid and Ulrich 2001, 110. Much of the empirical work on the link between human resource management (HRM) and organizational performance, for example, boils down to a search for a statistical association between variables representing bundles of HRM and variables representing organizational performance. To date, no robust statistical association has been found (see Fleetwood and Hesketh 2010). On Humean ideas in contemporary social science, see Psillos 2005.
event conjunctions must be at work here. Something must be governing the flux of events; something must be causing the certain degree of order or stability. The two main candidates for this ‘something’ are causal powers and/or tendencies. As Rom Harré and E. Madden put matters: ‘The ineliminable but non-mysterious powers … of particular things … are the ontological “ties that bind” causes and effects together.’

In the light of this, critical realists have advocated the replacement of (regularity-based) laws and constant event-conjunctions, with powers and/or tendencies. Doing this, however, places powers and/or tendencies right at the heart of social science which, in turn, generates a demand for an understanding of powers and/or tendencies that is sufficiently robust to withstand the weight placed upon them. Unfortunately, however, this demand has not been met. There are several problems with the understanding of powers and/or tendencies that critical realists – myself included – have ignored, avoided or glossed. Rather than these being deep-rooted ontological problems, many are caused by ambiguous and inconsistent use of terminology. A first step to obtaining the robust understanding of powers and/or tendencies demanded by their new role is, therefore, to carry out some groundwork in relation to such terminological ambiguity and inconsistency. I made a start in an earlier issue of Journal of Critical Realism, where I focused on powers – along with things and properties – but did not mention tendencies. My objective at present is to carry on with the effort, this time bringing tendencies into the picture alongside powers.

The paper consists of three sections. In section one I offer a sketch of the existing critical realist conceptualization of tendencies by identifying eight distinct moments in a causal chain, denoted tendency1 to tendency8. In section two I ask: Is there a difference between powers and tendencies? The answer, controversially, is: ‘No: powers and tendencies refer to the same phenomenon – at least in the case of tendency1 and tendency2.’ In section three I ask: What is the difference between tendency1 and tendency2? Attempting to answer this initiates a re-thinking of some of the terminology used to discuss tendencies as distinct moments in a causal chain. I conclude the paper by raising the possibility that tendencies or powers are not of an either/or, discrete, dichotomous or discontinuous nature but, rather, are continuous. This raises the further possibility that powers or tendencies can come in stronger and weaker forms.

Before we get underway, however, it is important to note that, while I suggest alterations to the terminology that critical realists use when dealing

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5 Harré and Madden 1975, 11.
6 Fleetwood 2009. I strongly urge the reader to acquaint themselves with this previous paper.
with powers and tendencies, not all of these alterations involve changes to the underlying ontology. In most cases my suggestions involve choosing less ambiguous terms and advocating their consistent usage. I fully accept that this kind of approach can be a little tedious and, on occasion, verge on ‘logic chopping’. However, without slowing down and taking time to reflect carefully upon our terminology, ambiguity and inconsistency will simply continue.

1. The Existing Critical Realist Conceptualization of Tendencies

In what follows, I understand a tendency in a non-empirical realist, non-Humean way. That is to say, I do not confuse a tendency with a trend, a cyclical variation, a stochastically specified law, a counterfactual thing that would bring about an event in closed systems, or an imprecise, or under-elaborated regularity-law. I do understand a tendency as the transfactual way of acting of a thing.7

In 1975 Roy Bhaskar first introduced the idea of differentiating between two different notions of tendencies, which he denoted with a numeric subscript, tendency_1 and tendency_2. In his later work, he extended this to include tendency_3 to tendency_8, referring to these concepts as ‘distinct moments in the causal chain’.8 Brian Pinkstone and Mervyn Hartwig’s entry in the Dictionary of Critical Realism also uses this schema.9 The general idea is that some tendencies are ‘closer’, as it were, to – transfactually – bringing about some event than other tendencies. What makes the difference is the conditions operating inside and outside the thing possessing the tendency. To be more accurate, what makes the difference is: (i) the internal or intrinsic enabling conditions of the thing possessing a tendency; (ii) the external or extrinsic enabling conditions; and (iii) the external stimulating, and releasing conditions. We can think, for example, of a tendency_6 as being closer to bringing about some event than tendency_1 because tendency_6 has the extrinsic, stimulating and releasing conditions satisfied whereas tendency_1 does not. This will become a little clearer in a few moments.

The following section is a sketch of Bhaskar’s eight different concepts of tendency along with his interpretation of what each of these concepts means. I will use my terminology for tendency_1 and tendency_2 on the grounds that, later on, my more consistent use of terminology will become important. I take this as illustrating the existing critical realist conceptualization of tendencies.

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7 For an elaboration of this understanding, see Fleetwood 2010.
8 Bhaskar 1994, 78.
9 Pinkstone and Hartwig 2007.
The existing critical realist conceptualization of tendencies

Tendency₁ is ‘exercised’. Bhaskar refers to this as the ‘primary’¹⁰ or ‘normal’¹¹ concept of tendency and in one place he refers to it as tendencyₖ.¹² Pinkstone and Hartwig refer to this as the ‘base’¹³ concept:

- the intrinsic enabling conditions are ambiguous

Tendency₂ is ‘actualized’. Bhaskar refers to this as ‘ready’. For tendency₂

- the intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied

Tendency₃ is ‘prone’. A tendency is prone when it is actualized and, in addition, has the extrinsic enabling conditions satisfied. For tendency₃

- the intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
- + the extrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied

Tendency₄ is ‘motivated’. A tendency is motivated when it is prone, and, in addition, has the intrinsic stimulating or releasing conditions satisfied, but not the extrinsic stimulating or releasing conditions. The tendency may be prone to be motivated, but not lapsed. For tendency₄

- the intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
- + the extrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
- + the intrinsic stimulating or releasing conditions are satisfied

Tendency₅ is lapsed, lagged or late. A tendency is lapsed when it is motivated and, in addition, has the extrinsic stimulating or releasing conditions satisfied, but not the intrinsic stimulating or releasing conditions satisfied. The tendency may be prone and motivated, but not realized. For tendency₅

- the intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
- + the extrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
- + the extrinsic stimulating or releasing conditions are satisfied

Tendency₆ is realized in all ‘normal’ circumstances. A tendency is realized when all the above extrinsic and intrinsic enabling, stimulating or releasing conditions are satisfied. When tendency₆ occurs the event that the entity has the power to bring about is actually instantiated. For tendency₆

¹⁰ Bhaskar 1978, 229.
¹¹ Bhaskar 1993, 78.
¹² Bhaskar 1994, 83.
¹³ Pinkstone and Hartwig 2007, 458.
intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
+ extrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
+ intrinsic stimulating or releasing conditions are satisfied
+ extrinsic stimulating or releasing conditions are satisfied

Tendency₇ is realized in a closed system such as an experiment, where an event regularity is artificially engineered.

Tendency₈ is realized in an open system,¹⁴ where an event regularity spontaneously emerges. It might, of course, turn out that no such systems have been found to exist, so tendency₈ would be a possibility.

Table 1 allows us to see the existing critical realist conceptualization of tendencies at a glance, showing what it means to conceive of tendencies as moments in the causal chain.

Table 1. The existing critical realist conceptualization of tendencies

| Moments in the causal chain | Denotation | Enabling conditions | Stimulating or releasing conditions |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                             |            | Intrinsic | Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Extrinsic |
| Tendency₁                  | exercised  | x         |           |           |           |
| Tendency₂                  | actualized | √         | x         |           |           |
| Tendency₃                  | prone      | √         | √         |           |           |
| Tendency₄                  | motivated  | √         | √         | √         | x         |
| Tendency₅                  | lapsed, lagged or late | √         | √         | x         | √         |
| Tendency₆                  | realized in ‘normal’ circumstances | √         | √         | √         | √         |
| Tendency₇                  | realized in a closed system | √         | √         | √         | √         |
| Tendency₈                  | realized in an open system | √         | √         | √         | √         |

When matters are put with this level of clarity, and usually they are not, we can start to see some of the problems with the way we currently conceive of tendencies and, for that matter, powers. What might these problems be? The

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¹⁴ Bhaskar 1993, 83. Bhaskar also refers to tendency₉, which is the base category and is synonymous with tendency₁. He also refers to tendency₁₀, which seems to be tendency₇ with directionality specified. Tendency₇ is synonymous with tendency₅ and tendency₁₀ is synonymous with tendency₉. I have to admit I am extremely unclear about all this, and it is by no means easy to understand.

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progression from tendency 3, via tendency 4 and tendency 5, to tendency 6 and beyond are relatively unproblematic, except for one thing. Some entities do, and others do not, appear to require their tendencies to be intrinsically and extrinsically stimulated or released. I do not think this is a major problem, but it is something we need to bear in mind, especially when we are dealing with complex social entities. I will not delve into anything much beyond tendency 3 in this paper; elaborating upon tendencies further along the causal chain is something for the future.

Where I think serious problems do lie, however, are (i) within and between the concept of powers and the concepts of tendency 1 and tendency 2; and (ii) within and between the concepts of tendency 1 and tendency 2. These two problems can be illustrated, and then answered, via the following two questions: Is there a difference between powers and tendencies? Is there a difference between tendency 1 and tendency 2?

2. Is There a Difference between Powers and Tendencies?

Bhaskar uses the terms ‘powers’ and ‘tendencies’ widely, but if truth be told, he does not really make the distinction between them clear. He claims that ‘powers must be seen as tendencies’.15 He often refers to ‘a tendency as a power’ and then goes on to make qualifications about the powers – i.e. they ‘may be exercised without being fulfilled or actualized’,16 they are ‘held in abeyance’17 or some such. In other places he suggests that ‘powers are more than tendencies’.18 The fact is, critical realists use these terms, and the terms used in conjunction with them, ambiguously and inconsistently. It is time to dig a little deeper. The following comments are extremely common within the critical realist literature.

‘Power’ is a non-technical term, designating what something can do.19

While the word ‘power’ draws attention to the existence of unexercised powers, the word ‘tendency’ draws attention to the existence of exercised but unrealized tendencies.20

A simple power statement is … consistent with completely quiescent or dormant things or things that have a level of activity sufficient only for the retention of that power.21

15 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 231.
16 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 50.
17 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 235.
18 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 230.
19 Collier 1994, 62.
20 Collier 1994, 63.
21 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 234.
Now to describe a power is to suppose that there is a real basis for the possession of that power independent of whether the power is exercised or not.22

[W]hereas powers are potentials which may or may not be exercised, tendencies are potentialities which may be exercised or as it were ‘in play’ without being realized or manifest in any particular outcome … [T]endencies are powers which may be exercised without being fulfilled or actualized … It is the idea of continuing activity as distinct from that of enduring power that the concept of tendency is designed to capture. In the concept of tendency, the concept of power is thus literally dynamized or set in motion.23

Characteristic ways of acting or effects of mechanisms … are conceptualized here as tendencies … Tendencies, in short, are potentialities which may be exercised or in play without being directly realized.24

There I also distinguish between my normal concept of a tendency1, a power whose exercise was normically qualified – or to put it more affirmatively, one whose exercise was transfactually efficacious – from a tendency2, a power whose intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied, i.e. a power ready to be exercised.25

Now if powers are possessed by things which act in open systems their existence must be normically qualified; and they must be seen as tendencies1.26

While in one sense powers and tendencies are said to be different things, in another sense, powers and tendencies are said to be similar things. The similarity lies in the suggestion that tendencies are powers, but only when we are dealing with powers that are exercised but not necessarily actualized, i.e. transfactually acting powers. Powers that are exercised without being actualized are said to be tendencies. Powers that are actualized – in Bhaskar’s terms ‘ready to be exercised’ – that is, powers whose intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied, are said to be tendencies2. But what if powers and tendencies are not just similar, but are synonymous, interchangeable or refer to the same thing? To explore this possibility, let us proceed beyond the terminology and probe the ontology of the distinct moments in the causal chain.27

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22 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 237.
23 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 50.
24 Lawson 1997, 22–3, original emphasis.
25 Bhaskar 1993, 78, original emphasis.
26 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 231
27 The following comes from Fleetwood 2009.
and so on. Terminologically speaking, having all these terms – and others – to refer to the same concept encourages ambiguity and inconsistency. I suggest, then, that we fasten on the term ‘exercise’ and use it consistently.

Ontologically speaking, powers or tendencies can be exercised without being actualized, realized, fulfilled, manifest, in motion or dynamized. Sometimes powers are exercised and, in addition, are also actualized, realized, fulfilled, manifest, acting, in motion or dynamized. Terminologically speaking, having all these terms – and others – to refer to the same concept encourages ambiguity and inconsistency. I suggest, then, that we fasten on the term ‘actualize’ and use it consistently.

This means we can plausibly differentiate between powers and tendencies that are exercised, and powers and tendencies that are actualized. I suggest that something like this distinction is presupposed in all critical realist ontology, irrespective of whether the term ‘power’ or ‘tendency’ is used. Something like this distinction is presupposed in the crucial notion of transfactuality – see the last two comments from Bhaskar above. Sometimes critical realists use the term ‘powers’ – not tendencies – in which case they refer to powers acting transfactually. Sometimes critical realists use the term ‘tendencies’ – not powers – in which case they refer to tendencies acting transfactually. Indeed, the whole idea of distinct moments in a causal chain presupposes that tendencies act transfactually. Sometimes critical realists use both terms, to the effect that tendencies are normically qualified powers, i.e. that tendencies are transfactually acting powers.

We see this in examples that differentiate – say – between a car with the engine running and the gear in neutral, and this same car with its engine running and first gear selected. Most critical realists would agree that the car is in two different states or two different moments in a causal chain. What matters, crucially, is the ontic distinction between the two states that the car is in, not the terminology we use to describe these two moments. Of a car with the engine running and the gear in neutral, we might say that it has the exercised power or the exercised tendency to transport its occupants from A to B. Of that same car with the engine running and first gear selected, we might say it has the actualized power or the actualized tendency to transport its occupants from A to B. The difference between the two moments is that in the second case the power or the tendency is a step further along the causal chain.28

28 In Fleetwood 2009 I used the example of an electricity-generating station to make the same point.
Not only is it usual to differentiate between an *exercised* tendency and an *actualized* tendency, it is usual to refer to this using numeric subscripts, hence tendency\(_1\) and tendency\(_2\). It is not, however, usual to differentiate between an *exercised* power and an *actualized* power using numeric subscripts, but this seems to me more a matter of terminology than ontology. Ontologically speaking, it makes sense to differentiate between an *exercised* power and an *actualized* power. And if this is correct, then I see no reason why we cannot do for powers, what we do for tendencies, that is, use numeric subscripts to refer to *exercised* powers and *actualized* powers. To avoid confusion, I will use Roman numeric subscripts for powers and refer to *exercised* power as power\(_i\) and an *actualized* power as power\(_ii\).\(^{29}\)

This point is very important, so allow me to re-state it to make it crystal clear. I am officially recognizing the existence of:\(^{30}\)

- An *exercised* tendency or tendency\(_1\)
- An *actualized* tendency or tendency\(_2\)
- An *exercised* power or power\(_i\)
- An *actualized* power or power\(_ii\)

At this juncture, something extremely controversial surfaces. We can now see clearly that power\(_i\) and tendency\(_1\) refer to the same phenomenon; they are synonymous, or interchangeable. And the same goes for power\(_ii\) and tendency\(_2\). This has not been spotted before, in part because the terminology has been ambiguous and inconsistent, and in part because it is not usual to *explicitly* recognize the distinction between powers, and to formalize it using subscripts.\(^{31}\)

This claim is not entirely original. In their influential book entitled *Causal Powers*, Harré and Madden do not use the term ‘tendency’ at all, preferring to use the term ‘power’ instead. They go on to make arguments in terms of powers that Bhaskar makes in terms of tendencies. Interestingly, Harré and Madden’s choice of terminology is rooted in simple pref-

\(^{29}\) This should not be confused with Bhaskar’s notions of power\(_1\) and power\(_2\). Power\(_2\) refers to a notion of political power, whereas his power\(_1\) refers to a notion of causal power in the sense I am using it here, although Bhaskar does not officially label these causal powers power\(_i\) and power\(_ii\).

\(^{30}\) Note well that while I may be the first critical realist to officially recognize this distinction between powers at distinct moments in a causal chain, and identify them with Roman numeric subscripts, I do so in the full knowledge that this is often presupposed in critical realist ontology. All I have done is make the terminology reflect what critical realists actually claim.

\(^{31}\) Incidentally, even if one disagrees with me, and wants to keep a distinction between powers and tendencies, to claim that a *tendency is a power actualized* (or some such) is to presuppose the distinction between exercised power, and actualized power\(_ii\). This distinction only makes sense if a power can be in an *unactualized* (i.e. unexercised) state.
ference and linguistic implication rather than ontology. They write: ‘Our preference for the concept of “power” rather than “tendency” derives in part from the sense of passivity that seems to infect the notion of tendency in ordinary English.’32 The fact that Harré and Madden see this as a matter of preference strongly encourages the idea that they are dealing with concepts that refer to the same thing. This is also encouraged by Pinkstone and Hartwig’s claim that: ‘Causal or generative mechanisms may refer either to a power or a tendency, or both.’33

Now, if this controversial claim is correct, then there are several ways of combining powers and tendencies or, indeed, choosing one term over the other.

First, we could try to retain the terminology of powers and tendencies. If we did, we would end up with the following scheme, which I illustrate below using the – extremely abstract – example of a capitalist company.34

\[
\text{thing with properties} \rightarrow (\text{power}_i = \text{tendency}_1) \rightarrow (\text{power}_n = \text{tendency}_2) \rightarrow \text{event}\]

The moment a capitalist company is created, so too are its properties, powers and tendencies. It is a thing with an exercised power and exercised tendency to – say – extract profit from its workforce. If this power and tendency are actualized then the company also has an actualized power or tendency to extract profit from its workforce.

This would be a silly way to proceed because power, and tendency, and power, and tendency, both refer to the same thing. To avoid this, we should abandon one pair of terms.

Second, we could abandon tendencies, and just use the concepts of power and power.

\[
\text{thing with properties} \rightarrow \text{power} \rightarrow \text{power} \rightarrow \text{event}
\]

The moment a capitalist company is created, so too are its properties and powers. It is a thing with an exercised power to extract profit from its workforce. If this power is actualized then the company also has an actualized power to extract profit from its workforce.

32 Harré and Madden 1975, 100.
33 Pinkstone and Hartwig 2007, 458.
34 This is where the ontology of things, properties and powers developed in Fleetwood 2009 comes into its own – although I have added tendencies in this paper as synonymous with powers.
35 This shorthand should be read as follows: some thing’s properties endow it with powers and/or tendencies to cause certain events. Whether or not an event or events actually occurs is not an issue, provided that we accept that powers and tendencies act transfactually.
Third, we could abandon powers, and just use the concepts of tendency\textsubscript{1} and tendency\textsubscript{2}.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c}
\text{thing with properties} \rightarrow \text{tendency\textsubscript{1}} \rightarrow \text{tendency\textsubscript{2}} \rightarrow \text{event}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

The moment a capitalist company is created, so too are its properties and tendencies. It is a thing with an exercised tendency\textsubscript{1} to extract profit from its workforce. If this tendency\textsubscript{1} is actualized then the company also has an actualized tendency\textsubscript{2} to extract profit from its workforce.

Fourth, in situations where it is acceptable to generalize, making it unnecessary to differentiate between the two states of tendency and power, we could simplify this to either:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c}
\text{thing with properties} \rightarrow \text{power} \rightarrow \text{event}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Or

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c}
\text{thing with properties} \rightarrow \text{tendency} \rightarrow \text{event}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

No matter how we arrange the terms, we cannot avoid the conclusion that power\textsubscript{i} refers to the same phenomenon as tendency\textsubscript{1}; and power\textsubscript{ii} refers to the same phenomenon as tendency\textsubscript{2}. In answer to the question that motivated this section: No, there is no distinction between powers and tendencies – at least when we are discussing power\textsubscript{i} and power\textsubscript{ii}, and tendency\textsubscript{1} and tendency\textsubscript{2}.

Now, if this is correct, it seems entirely reasonable to abandon one of the terms. But which one: ‘power’ or ‘tendency’? While this might appear reasonable, carrying it out would be a Sisyphean task, not only because these terms have become embedded in the literature, but also because they have become embedded in two different literatures. While there are always exceptions,\textsuperscript{36} the fact is that the term ‘powers’ – or ‘dispositions’ – is used extensively in philosophy and philosophically oriented dimensions of disciplines like sociology and social theory, whereas the term ‘tendency’ hardly features. Conversely, the term ‘powers’ hardly features in economics and economically orientated disciplines like organization and management studies, whereas the term ‘tendencies’ is used – albeit not extensively, and not consistently.\textsuperscript{37}

My suggestion is that we take a ‘horses for courses’ approach. That is, we should recognize that power\textsubscript{i} and tendency\textsubscript{1}, and power\textsubscript{ii} and tendency\textsubscript{2}, have become interchangeable terms respectively, and should use whichever terminology is appropriate for the literature we happen to be engaged with. Henceforth, I will refer to powers \textit{or} tendencies.

\textsuperscript{36} Cartwright 2007 is a good example.

\textsuperscript{37} This might be due to the fact that the term was introduced into economics (actually, political economy) by Karl Marx and later John Stuart Mill and gained a currency from then on.
3. What is the Difference between $\text{Tendency}_1$ and $\text{Tendency}_2$?

The astute reader might have noticed that, in Table 1, there is no tick in the ‘intrinsic enabling conditions’ box for $\text{Tendency}_1$. And yet, if there was a tick in this box, as there is for $\text{Tendency}_2$, then the difference between $\text{Tendency}_1$ and $\text{Tendency}_2$ would become blurred. In the existing critical realist conceptualization, the difference between exercised $\text{Tendency}_1$ and actualized $\text{Tendency}_2$ is that in the latter, but not the former, the intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied. The snag is, it does not make sense to conceive of an exercised $\text{Tendency}_1$ as a tendency that has no intrinsic enabling conditions satisfied. Clearly we need to be far less ambiguous about the initial moments in the causal chain, and the intrinsic enabling conditions that are in operation.

In a previous paper I argued for an ontology of things, properties and powers (or, because powers and tendencies are interchangeable: things, properties and tendencies). Things, properties and tendencies emerge simultaneously to form a unity. The moment a thing emerges from other things – with their own properties and tendencies – so too do its properties and tendencies. Things have properties, these properties instantiate transfactually acting tendencies, and this ensemble of things, properties and tendencies generate any events that might occur. The properties I have in mind here are internal to the thing in question; they are intrinsic properties, properties that endow the thing with whatever tendencies it has. But notice that this is just another way of referring to a thing’s intrinsic enabling conditions. A thing’s intrinsic enabling conditions and a thing’s intrinsic properties are synonymous. Henceforth, I will use the terms ‘intrinsic enabling conditions’ and ‘intrinsic properties’ interchangeably, selecting whichever seems most appropriate for the needs of the exposition.

Consider Bhaskar’s argument for the difference between $\text{Tendency}_1$ and $\text{Tendency}_2$.

To say Tania pushed the door open completely explains why the door is open and implies that she can do it, i.e. has the power to do it. But to say that she tends to push the door open is to say something more; which cannot be analysed as when she exercises her power to push the door open, it tends to open (which is just to normically qualify the exercise of her power) … To attribute a tendency (in the second sense) is not just to normically qualify the exercise of the power; but to say that some of the intrinsic enabling conditions of a relatively enduring kind … are satisfied;

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38 Fleetwood 2009.

39 In Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 230, Bhaskar actually has another argument to account for the distinction between tendency, and $\text{Tendency}_2$, an argument relating to the distinction between natures and kinds, species and genera, individuals and classes. This has, however, been questioned by others such as Collier 1994, 123–6. I cannot pursue the matter here.

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that the thing is predisposed or oriented towards doing it, that it is in some-
thing of a state or condition to do it.40

To sum up then, a tendency2 statement says there is a level of activity intrinsic
to the thing, such that it is predisposed to perform an action of a certain type.
Its chief function is to indicate a level of activity within the thing such that it is
oriented towards some rather than other of the natural possibilities open to it.
In this way it leads us to a more precise application of the natures of particular
things – or groups – within kinds.41

[T]he cause of a failure of a car to move when the gear is in neutral is not
something distinct from, or extraneous to the mechanism responsible for
its normal motion … Now the intrinsic offsetting causes may or may not
directly interfere with the operation of the mechanism responsible for
the satisfaction of the intrinsic enabling conditions. If they do, then we must
say that the tendency2 is no longer possessed … But not all offsetting causes
are like that.42

To ‘say that a thing, X, has a tendency2 to do ø is thus to say … that most (or the
most important) of the intrinsic enabling conditions for it are satisfied’.43

To ‘say that a thing, X, has a tendency2 to do ø is thus to say … that (ii) X is
in an enduring condition to do ø, i.e. it is predisposed or oriented towards
doing ø’… It is the specific role of (ii), I suggest, to indicate the existence
of level of activity … which is ensuring, or has ensured, the satisfaction of
the intrinsic enabling conditions for ø.44

I interpret Bhaskar to mean that the difference between tendency1 and ten-
dency2 has something to do with a difference within the intrinsic enabling
conditions themselves. A thing with a tendency1 has some, or the least impor-
tant, of its intrinsic conditions satisfied, whereas a thing with a tendency2 has
more, most, or the most important intrinsic enabling conditions satisfied. Refer-
ence to ‘some’, ‘least’, ‘least important’, ‘most’ or ‘the most important’ of the
intrinsic enabling conditions implies:

(i) that it is a difference within the category of intrinsic properties or
intrinsic enabling conditions themselves that differentiates ten-
dency1 from tendency2.

(ii) that intrinsic properties or intrinsic enabling conditions are not of
an either/or, discrete, dichotomous or discontinuous nature, but are
continuous.

40 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 230, emphasis added.
41 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 235.
42 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 233.
43 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 231, emphasis added.
44 Bhaskar [1975] 1978, 231 and 234.

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I accept the plausibility of these implications. But claiming that a thing with
a tendency\(_1\) has some, or the least important, of its intrinsic conditions satis-
fied, whereas a thing with a tendency\(_2\) has more, most, or the most important
intrinsic enabling conditions satisfied is far too ambiguous to make any real
sense. Allow me to disambiguate this by re-stating the same point via different
terminology.

Of any thing, there is a set of intrinsic properties or intrinsic enabling
conditions – denoted ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\) – that must be satisfied if it is to have an
exercised tendency\(_1\) to do \(\phi\); and if it does not have ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\), then it does not
have this exercised tendency\(_1\) to do \(\phi\). Of any thing, there may be a further
set of intrinsic properties or intrinsic enabling conditions – denoted ic\(_y\) and
ic\(_z\) – that must be satisfied if it is to have an actualized tendency\(_2\) to do \(\phi\); and
if it does not have ic\(_y\) and ic\(_z\), then it does not have this actualized tendency\(_2\)
to do \(\phi\).

We have come across this before, in the example of a car with the engine
running and the gear in neutral, and this same car with its engine running
and first gear selected. A car with the engine running and the gear in
neutral has a set of intrinsic enabling conditions – denoted ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\) – sat-
sified, giving it an exercised tendency\(_1\) to transport its passengers. The same
car with the engine running and first gear selected also has a further set
of intrinsic enabling conditions – denoted ic\(_y\) and ic\(_z\) – satisfied, giving it,
in addition to the exercised tendency\(_1\), the actualized tendency\(_2\) to transport
its passengers. I call this the new critical realist conceptualization of tendencies.
Let me reproduce part of the existing critical realist conceptualization of
tendencies outlined in section one, and then let us compare it to the new
version.

*The existing critical realist conceptualization of tendencies*

Tendency\(_1\) is exercised

– intrinsic enabling conditions are ambiguous

Tendency\(_2\) is actualized

– intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied

Tendency\(_3\) is prone

– intrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
– + extrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied
The new critical realist conceptualization of tendencies

Tendency\(_1\) is exercised

- a set of intrinsic enabling conditions – ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\) – are satisfied

Tendency\(_2\) is actualized

- a set of intrinsic enabling conditions – ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\) – are satisfied
- + a further set of intrinsic enabling conditions – ic\(_y\) and ic\(_z\) – are satisfied

Tendency\(_3\) is prone

- a set of intrinsic enabling conditions – ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\) – are satisfied
- a further set of intrinsic enabling conditions – ic\(_y\) and ic\(_z\) – are satisfied
- + extrinsic enabling conditions are satisfied

To make it even clearer, consider Table 2, a truncated version of Table 1.

| Moments in the causal chain | Denotation | Enabling conditions | Stimulating or releasing conditions |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                             |            | Intrinsic | Extrinsic  | Intrinsic | Extrinsic |
| Tendency\(_1\) exercised    | √ ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\) | x         |            |           |           |
| Tendency\(_2\) actualized   | √ ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\) + ic\(_y\) and ic\(_z\) | x | x | x |
| Tendency\(_3\) prone        | √ ic\(_w\) and ic\(_x\) + ic\(_y\) and ic\(_z\) | √ | x | x |

We can now answer the question that motivated this section of the paper: What is the difference between tendency\(_1\) and tendency\(_2\)? The difference between exercised tendency\(_1\) and actualized tendency\(_2\) is based upon differences relating to a thing’s intrinsic properties, or intrinsic enabling conditions. Actualized tendency\(_2\) is further along the causal chain than exercised tendency\(_1\) because – in an as-yet unclear sense that I will come back to in the conclusion – more of the thing’s intrinsic properties or intrinsic enabling conditions are present.

Now, let us put all that we have developed in the paper thus far into the following table.
Table 3. The full version of the new critical realist conceptualization of tendencies

| Moments in the causal chain | Denotation | Enabling conditions | Stimulating or releasing conditions |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                             |            | Intrinsic \[+\] | Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Extrinsic |
| Tendency_1 / power_i       | exercised  | \(\sqrt{+}\)   | x         | x         | x         |
| Tendency_2 / power_u       | actualized | \(\sqrt{++}\)  | x         | x         | x         |
| Tendency_3                 | prone      | \(\sqrt{+}\)   | \(\sqrt{+}\) | x         | x         |
| Tendency_4                 | motivated  | \(\sqrt{+}\)   | \(\sqrt{+}\) | \(\sqrt{+}\) | x         |
| Tendency_5                 | lapsed, lagged or late | \(\sqrt{+}\)   | \(\sqrt{+}\) | x         | \(\sqrt{+}\) |
| Tendency_6                 | realized in ‘normal’ circumstances | \(\sqrt{+}\)   | \(\sqrt{+}\) | \(\sqrt{+}\) | \(\sqrt{+}\) |
| Tendency_7                 | realized in closed systems | \(\sqrt{+}\)   | \(\sqrt{+}\) | \(\sqrt{+}\) | \(\sqrt{+}\) |
| Tendency_8                 | realized in open systems | \(\sqrt{+}\)   | \(\sqrt{+}\) | \(\sqrt{+}\) | \(\sqrt{+}\) |

This table illustrates, graphically, that the previous problems of terminological ambiguity and inconsistency have been resolved. We now have a consistent set of terminology and subscripts. Ticks and crosses are no longer ambiguous and are now in the right places. We can see that power_i and tendency_1 refer to the same phenomena, as do power_u and tendency_2. We can see that the differences between power_i/tendency_1 and power_u/tendency_2 are based upon differences relating to things’ intrinsic properties, or intrinsic enabling conditions. We can see that the difference between actualized tendency_2 and prone tendency_3 is due to the extrinsic enabling conditions being satisfied for tendency_3. And finally, although I have not focused on the point in this paper, we can also see (i) that the difference between motivated tendency_4 and lapsed, lagged or late tendency_5 is due to the satisfaction of stimulating or releasing conditions; and (ii) that the differences between realized tendency_6, realized tendency_7, and realized tendency_8 are due to the natures of the systems in which the tendencies operate.

\[+\] The symbol ‘+’ and ‘++’ denote the continuous nature of the intrinsic enabling conditions. This will become clear in the conclusion.
Conclusion: Stronger and Weaker Tendencies or Powers

I said above that I would come back to the claim that the actualized tendency is further along the causal chain than exercised tendency, because – in some as-yet unclear sense – more of the thing’s intrinsic properties or intrinsic enabling conditions are present. The term ‘more’ needs clarifying because it can easily mislead us into thinking this is simply a question of quantity. It might mislead us into thinking that the difference between intrinsic properties or intrinsic enabling conditions \( \text{ic}_w \) and \( \text{ic}_x \), and \( \text{ic}_y \) and \( \text{ic}_z \), is that in the latter, a greater quantity of properties are present, or a greater quantity of conditions are satisfied. This is not the case. To see why, and to illuminate some interesting issues on the way, let us return to the example of the capitalist company.

The moment the owners/controllers of capital assemble some appropriate set of components, a capitalist company emerges. At the same spatio-temporal moment, the company’s internal properties or intrinsic enabling conditions – e.g. having a workforce, plant, machinery, IT systems, semi-finished products, raw materials and socio-cultural management techniques – emerge, as do its tendencies – e.g. to generate profit. But a capitalist company that does not have all of these properties, or maybe has them all but of an inferior quality, or maybe has them badly coordinated, might still have this tendency. To keep matters simple, let us abstract from the other intrinsic properties or intrinsic enabling conditions and focus on the workforce. Let us also abstract from any changes in the extrinsic enabling conditions.

In order to have a tendency – ignore whether this is tendency or tendency for the moment – to generate profit, those who own/control the company must pay attention to – at least – three things:

- the quantity of its workforce, ensuring that the shop floor is, broadly speaking, sufficiently staffed.
- the quality of its workforce, ensuring that the workforce is, broadly speaking, sufficiently educated, skilled and trained.
- the coordination between individuals, ensuring that it is sufficient (individuals must be in the right place at the right time).

There must exist some minimal state, prior to which the company will not have achieved sufficiency in terms of quantity, quality and/or coordination to have an

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46 Clearly, there must also be coordination between individuals and their means of production (i.e. individuals and plant, machinery, IT systems and raw materials must be in the right place at the right time) but I am abstracting from anything other than the workforce in this example.

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exercised tendency\textsubscript{1} to generate profit.\textsuperscript{47} This state might be difficult if not impossible to identify empirically, at least with any precision, but this does not mean such a state does not exist. Upon reaching this minimal state, the company will have achieved this sufficiency and tendency\textsubscript{1} will be exercised. It is, however, entirely conceivable that a company could go on to improve the quantity, quality and/or coordination of its workforce, such that it would go beyond this minimal state. If so, then the exercised tendency\textsubscript{1} might become an actualized tendency\textsubscript{2} to generate profit. This follows from the recognition – noted above – that (i) there is a difference \textit{within} the category of intrinsic properties or enabling conditions themselves, which differentiates tendency\textsubscript{1} from tendency\textsubscript{2}; and (ii) intrinsic properties or enabling conditions are not of an either/or, discrete, dichotomous or \textit{discontinuous} nature but are \textit{continuous}.

It appears, then, that we have stumbled upon something that allows us to give a slightly more nuanced meaning to being ‘further along the causal chain’. The difference between the company having an exercised tendency\textsubscript{1} and having an actualized tendency\textsubscript{2} is not that in the former the company does \textit{not} have a tendency to generate profit and in the latter it \textit{does}. Rather, if the company improves the quantity, quality and/or coordination of its workforce then it almost certainly will have a \textit{stronger} tendency to generate profit. Again, this might be difficult if not impossible to identify empirically, at least with any precision, but this does not mean that tendencies do not come in stronger or weaker forms. Indeed, the existence of stronger and weaker tendencies is entirely plausible.\textsuperscript{48} We can say, therefore, that tendency\textsubscript{2} is stronger than tendency\textsubscript{1}. If we accept tendencies and powers as synonymous, then the same goes for powers: \textit{power\textsubscript{2}} is stronger than \textit{power\textsubscript{1}}.

The conclusion that there are stronger and weaker tendencies and powers has significant potential implications for applied analysis. Most critical realists will be keen to establish empirically whether the tendencies or powers they are investigating are strong or weak. Indeed, when it comes to considering the interplay of several tendencies or powers – often couched in terms of tendencies and countervailing tendencies – it may be very important to try and get some idea of whether the tendencies are stronger than the countervailing tendencies. We now have the rudiments of an underlying conceptualization that is adequate for undertaking such empirical work.

\textsuperscript{47} Such a state might exist when the company was being set up and only some of the workforce was recruited and/or trained.

\textsuperscript{48} The closest thing I can find is when Harré and Madden mention the concept of ‘capacities’. They use the language of powers, but because for them powers and tendencies are synonymous, we can refer, with them, to the ‘impairment of capacities’ or ‘being incapacitated’. This idea of powers and tendencies being impaired seems entirely consistent with their being weakened or diminished.
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