Advanced course*: Revisiting Event Semantics*

ESSLLI 2024

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**Handout 5**

**On the Ontology of Acts**

**1. The ontology of acts**

**1.1. The puzzle about acts**

Are these descriptions of a single act or of three acts?

(1) a. the act of moving the finger

b. the act of pulling the trigger

c. the act of killing Jones

Two positions:

1. monism: there is a single act, described differently

2. pluralism: there are different acts being specified (defined) by the act descriptions

Fine’s argument for pluralism:

The predicate *intentional*:

(2) a. The act of killing Jones is intentional.

b. The act of moving the finger was intentional.

c. The act I was speaking about was intentional.

The monists’ argument: *intentional* is an intensional predicate.

But *intentional* is not a predicate that would allow for *de re* and *de dicto* interpretations of (2a), and (2c) should have only a single reading

Distinction between *descriptive* and *definitive* aspects of act specifications

(3) a. Smith’s loud act of singing

*Loud* is descriptive or definitive.

(3) b. Smith’s act of singing loudly.

*Loudly* can only be definitive not descriptive.

Recall: the definitive – descriptive distinction was already made in Kim (1976):

Event-constitutive and event-characterizing modifiers.

Fact:

Davidsonian event semantics does not allow for definitive functions of adverbials.

Question:

Was Davidson mistaken by taking adverbials to be descriptive rather than definitive?

Or is the definitive function restricted to action descriptions?

Fine

The nouns *act* triggers definitive readings of adverbials in its clausal modifier

Linguistic remark

Fine’s act descriptions involve clausal gerunds (imperfect nominals), usually reserved for facts (where everything in the fact description is fact-constitutive).

**1.2. Fine’s notion of a qua object**

For an object d and a property P, d/P is the object *d qua P*

D: base

P: gloss

Applied to objects:

1. The statue: The clay qua having a form

Clay: base, having a particular shape: gloss.

Note: statues are not rigid embodiments: permit the replacement of material.

2. John qua teacher

John base, being a teacher: gloss

3. The killing of Jones:

The movement of the finger qua pulling the trigger qua causing Jones’ death

Conditions on qua objects (Fine 1982)

Existence:

For an object d and a property P, d/P exists (at t) iff P holds of d (at t).

Identity:

Two qua objects d/P and d’/P’ are identical iff d = d’ and P = P’.

Inheritance:

For an *ordinary* property A a qua object d/P has A if d has A during the time d/P exists.

Part relation:

Both d and P are part of d/P

Rigidity (essentiality): a qua object d/P is essentially the object d/P

Issues:

1. Inheritance:

Mainly meant for temporal and spatial location:

(4) a. The statue is where the clay is.

b. The statue exists as long as the clay has the statue-defining shape.

More problematic cases:

Properties of shape / form:

(5) a. The statue is tall / round.

b. ??? The clay is tall / round.

Properties of evaluation:

(6) a. The statue is elegant.

b. ??? The clay is elegant.

(7) a. The statue is a masterpiece.

b. ??? The clay is a masterpiece.

Other properties:

(8) a. The statue is new.

b. The clay is old.

John as a teacher: properties must be based on John’s being a teacher, not just automatically inherited

(10) a. John likes cats.

b. ??? John as a teacher likes cats.

c. John as a teacher has a lot of success.

Facts

Qua objects do not inherit all the properties from their base.

Qua objects obtain properties in other ways than by inheritance.

Composition of qua objects

1. Horizontal: d/(P & P’)

Sum formation – goes along with conjoining glosses

(11) a. The act John’s speaking loudly in the rain

b. The act of John’s speaking loudly and the act of John’s speaking in the rain.

2. Vertical: (d/P)/P’

(12) a. The acting of killing Jones

b. (The act of moving the finger / causing the shot to be fired) / causing Jone’s death

**1.3. Applications**

**Timing of acts**

The puzzle about the location of the killing Jones:

Is that act just where the hand movement or pulling of the trigger occurred or also where Jones dies?

Fine’s solution: conceive of the killing of Jones as a qua object:

The act of killing Jones = Pulling of the trigger/being the cause of the death of Jones

Jones death is an aspectual part (= part of the gloss), not a component part of the act

The by-relation

Doing one thing by doing another

The notion of a qua object provides a straightforward account of the by relation:

d/P: is done by doing d

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**2. Semantics with acts as qua objects**

Fine focuses on act descriptions:

the act of killing Jones = the act of triggering a short qua being a killing of Jones.

A general and serious concern:

How can the can the act of triggering a short **be** a killing? The qua object is supposed to be ontologically distinct from the base!

Further remarks Fine makes:

*Act* is like an intensional operator.

Description specifies the qua object.

Distinction between descriptive and definitive aspects of act specifications

(3) a. Smith’s loud act of singing

*Loud* can be descriptive or definitive.

(3) b. Smith’s act of singing loudly

*Loudly* can only be definitive, not descriptive.

Fine’s critique of Davidson’s event semantics

Adverbials for Davidson can only have a descriptive, not a definite function.

What does Fine’s view mean for the semantics of adverbials?

Alternation:

(4) a. The act of Bob’s killing Jones was intentional.

b. Bob intentionally killed Jones.

(5) a. The act of killing Jones slowly was intentional.

b. Bob intentionally killed Jones slowly.

Fine’s view for the act-definitive function seems to be:

*Bob kill Jones* and *slowly* are act predicates, but on an act-specifying function.

Here what such a semantics may look like:

For an act e, *Bob kill Jones*(e) iff for some act d, e = d/the property of being a killing of Jones by Bob.

*Slowly*(e) iff for some act d, e = d/the property of being slow.

Two forms of composition with qua objects:

1. Horizontal: d/(P & P’)

Sum formation – goes along with conjoining glosses

(6) a. The act John’s speaking loudly in the rain

b. The act of John’s speaking loudly and the act of John’s speaking in the rain.

2. Vertical: (d/P)/P’

(7) a. The acting of killing Jones

b. (The act of moving the finger / causing the shot to be fired) / causing Jones’ death

Example: the act of killing Jones slowly:

Horizontal composition:

(8) *Bob kill Jones slowly*(e) iff for some act d,

e = d/the property of being a killing of Jones by Bob and being slow

Vertical composition:

(9) *Bob kill Jones slowly*(e) iff for some act d,

e = (d/the property of being a killing of Jones by Bob)/ being slow

I.e. the act of Bob killing Jones qua being slow

The alternative account of adverbial stacking in terms f additional iplicit arguments.

1. Tropes (odes) as implicit arguments of adjectives / adverbs:

(10) a. Bob intentionally killed Jones slowly.

b. The slowness of the killing of Jones by Bob was intentional.

Note: (10b) is the only reading when adverb stacking is treated in terms of implicit trope arguments of adjectives.

Slow(d, e): d is the slowness of e

Recall motivations for implicit trope arguments of adjectives:

(11) a. Mary is deeply unhappy.

b. Mary’s unhappiness is deep

c. ∃t(unhappy(t, Mary) & deep(t))

(12) a. the depth of Mary’s unhappiness

b. the t[(depth(t, Mary’s unhappiness)]

2. Petersen’s account of adverbial stacking: posit additional event arguments for adverbials.

The problem

Additional implicit arguments of adjectives/adverbials won’t give the horizontal reading of act-definitive predicates!

Further issues:

Indefinite specifications of intentional acts

(13) a. the act of killing a woman was intentional (but not the act of killing Sue)

b. Bob intentionally killed a woman (but he did not intentionally kill Sue)

An issue for the truthmaker-account of adverb stacking.

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**References**

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