*Philosophy of Language: Revisiting Events Semantics*

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**Handout 8**

**The Ontology of Acts Continued**

**1. Summary and critical discussion of Fine’s (1982, 2022) notion of an act as a qua object**

Fine’s argument for pluralism

The predicate *intentional*:

(1) 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.

*Intentional* applies to different acts in (1a) and (1b).

(1c) has different readings.

The act of killing Jones = the act of triggering qua being a killing of Jones

The act of triggering a shot = the act of moving the finger qua triggering a short

The by-relation

The act of killing Jones was done *by* triggering a short.

The act of triggering a short was done *by* moving the finger.

The 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

d/P: d qua P

d/P is done by doing d.

Conditions on qua objects:

Existence

For an entity 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

Both d and P are part of d/P.

Rigidity (essentiality):

a qua object d/P is essentially the object d/P.

‘d/P’ rigidly refers to d/P.

Inheritance is problematic

The properties to be inherited from the base are highly restricted:

spatio-temporal location seems ok, but what other properties?

What is the notion of the notion of an ordinary property being appealed to? Not even properties like being slow, being noticeable wlll do.

A general concern:

The notion of a qua object is to deliver existence conditions, but it does not help fix the properties of a qua object I virtue of the properties of its base.

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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 intenstionally kill Sue)

An issue for the truthmaker-account of adverb stacking.

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**References**

Fine, K. (1982): ‘Acts, Events and Things’, in Leinfellner, W., Kraemer, E., and Schank, J.

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