Metaphysical Semantics

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Ground seminar

1. Structure

1.1 Atomism

Fundamental facts versus fundamental fact-parts. (Given the latter notion, we could define a fundamental fact as a fact whose parts are all fundamental.)

1.2 Absolutism

'Fundamental fact' and 'fundamental fact-part' aren't defined in terms of an underlying comparative or relative notion (such as that of ground).

1.3 No entities

Just as Fine says "ϕ because ψ" rather "[ψ] grounds [ϕ]", I (officially) say "Structural(F)" rather than "F-ness is structural". (But I often unofficially say "F-ness (or 'F') carves at the joints".)

1.4 Beyond the predicate

If "something is charged" expresses a fundamental fact, I want to say that 'something' as well as 'is charged' carves at the joints.

1.5 Natural properties

2. Purity, connection, definition

I want to say that all facts "rest on" the fundamental facts. Purity then requires claims about resting on, such as:

> There existing a city rests on ϕ

to themselves rest on other claims. This doesn't mean we need to *define* the notion of resting on. Indeed, for all I've said so far, resting-on could be Finean ground.

3. Metaphysical semantics

But my approach is instead roughly this: every language must have a "metaphysical semantics", which gives meanings in perfectly fundamental terms. Instead of saying how nonfundamental facts are made to hold, we say how nonfundamental sentences relate to the world.

4. Examples

Example 1:

> The sentence "x is a sister of y" is true of objects u and v if and only if *x is a sibling of y and x is female*

('Female', 'sibling', and 'and' must all carve at the joints.)

Example 2:

> The sentence "There exists a table" is true if and only some things are τ (i.e. iff $\exists xx\, \tau(xx)$)

(The notions in τ, and also plural quantification, must carve at the joints.)

> It is important to bear in mind that a reduction need not proceed via proxies. The mother of all reductions, Russell's theory of descriptions, cannot readily be regarded as one in which entity gives way to entity, and another example, more pertinent to our present concerns, is that in which quantification over pairs is replaced by quantification pairs. Instead of saying 'there is a pair x such that…', one says 'there is an x_1, and an x_2 such that…'. Here there is no single entity that goes proxy for a pair. (Fine, 2003, p. 171)

5. Metaphysical versus linguistic semantics

A competent speaker could know that there is a table without knowing that there are things that are τ. So in what sense is a metaphysical semantics a "semantics"? Metaphysical vs. linguistic semantics.

6. Similarity to grounding

6.1 Object-language counterpart of 'metaphysical truth condition'

Begin with a language L_1 in which each sentence has a metaphysical truth condition. Let L_2 contain also the vocabulary needed to state the metaphysical truth conditions, plus a two-place sentence operator 'because' subject to the following metaphysical truth condition:

> 'because(ϕ, ψ)' is true in L_2 iff ϕ is the metaphysical truth condition for ψ in L_1

No iteration of 'because'; no intermediate levels of 'because'; and it's "biconditional" rather than "conditional". But still.

6.2 "Just talk"

> The sentence "There exists a table" is true if and only some things are τ (i.e. iff $\exists xx\, \tau(xx)$)

"There don't really exist tables; we just say that there are".

- 'There exists a table' is true in *our* language
- 'There don't *really* exist tables' is true if 'really ϕ' means, e.g. 'in reality, ϕ' or 'ϕ and no ψ grounds ϕ'.

6.3 Quantifier variance

- $\exists x(x$ is a table) because $\exists x\, \phi(x)$
- $\exists x(x$ is a table) because $\exists xx\, \tau(xx)$

7. Advantages to "stepping outside of language"

References

Fine, Kit (2003). "The Problem of Possibilia." In Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, 161–79. Oxford: Oxford University Press.