Fine's Neutral Relations cntd, "Antipositionalism"

Relations Seminar

Preview: In the latter half of "Neutral Relations", Fine critiques positionalism and defends antipositionalism. We will look at what advantages antipositionalism is supposed to have over positionalism and try to determine whether antipositionalism actually has those advantages!

1 Objections to Positionalism

Objections:

1. It requires us to accept argument places or positions as entities in their own right.
2. It leads to an erroneous account of symmetric relations.
3. It has a tough time with variable polyadicity

Let's look at 2:

> "The difficulty of the positionalist view here is in seeing how it is possible for there to be such relations. The neutral relation of adjacency, for example, should be endowed with two positions or argument-places according to the view. Call them Next and Nixt. Given that block a is adjacent to block b, there will be a state of adjacency obtained by assigning a to Next and b to Nixt and also a state of adjacency obtained by assigning a to Nixt and b to Next. Intuitively, these states are the same. Yet surely, under the positionalist view, they must be distinct, since the positions occupied by a and bin the respective states are distinct."

In a footnote, Fine quickly considers and dismisses two responses to the second problem. Let's go through this:

> "Two ways out have been proposed to me on the positionalist's behalf. The first is to treat a symmetric relation as a property of pluralities. But this proposal gives up on a uniform treatment of relations and is unable to deal with symmetric relations, such as overlap,that themselves hold between pluralities. The other proposal is that the relata in a symmetric relation should be taken to occupy the same position. But consider the relation R that holds of a, b, c, d when a, b, c, d are arranged in a circle (in that very order). Then the following represent the very same state s: (i) Rabcd;(ii) Rbcda;(iii) Rcdar, (iv) Rdabc. Let α, β, γ, δ be positions corresponding to the first, second, third, and fourth argument-places of R (which may be the same). Then by (i), a, b, c, d will occupy the respective positions α, β, γ, δ; by (ii), b, c, d, a will occupy the respective positions α, β, γ, δ and similarly for (iii) and (iv). Therefore, a, b, c, d will each occupy all four positions α, β, γ, δ. By the same token, a, b, c, d will each occupy all four positions α, β, γ, δ in the state represented by Racbd;and so it will be impossible, on this view, to distinguish between the states represented by Rabcd and Racbd."

2 Anti-Positionalism

Fine thinks we should look to a new theory of neutral relations. To land upon such a theory, he thinks we should focus on the kinds of completions (complexes) we want. Desiderata for our account of completions:

- 1)It takes only the relation and its relata as arguments.
- 2) It should be order insensitive.

- 3)It should "yield all relational complexes as values".

To achieve 1-3, we should understand completions as "multi-valued operations" as opposed to single-valued operations. Fine says, "We may then take "the" completion of a neutral relation R by the objects a,, a2, . . . to be a plurality of complexes, one for each way in which the relation might be completed by the objects."

Question: How do we distinguish between the complex "Antony loves Cleopatra" and "Cleopatra loves Antony" on this picture?

At the moment, "we have no way of saying that R holds in one way as opposed to another. The capacity for differential application is lost."

To distinguish between the different ways that loving holds of Antony and Cleopatra, Fine thinks we should claim that "one state is the completion of a relation in the same manner as another." Fine says,

> "We are now able to distinguish between the different completions of a given relation and its relata. For they will differ in the relative manner in which they are configured. Suppose, for example, that so'is the state of Cleopatra's loving Anthony. Then we may distinguish between so and so' on the grounds that so is the completion by Anthony and Cleopatra in the same manner in which to is the completion by Abelard and Eloise, while s'o is not."

2.1 How does the Anti-Positionalist address the problems for the Positionalist?

2.1.1 Question: What does the anti-positionalist say about symmetric relations?

Fine draws an analogy with set-formation:

Consider, for example, the operation for forming a doubleton a, b from its members a and b. This operation will "combine" with its arguments to form a single set (there being no difference between {a, b} and {b,a}. It is in much the same way, then, that we may conceive of a symmetric relation combining with its relata to form a single complex.

2.1.2 Question: Does Anti-positionalism have to deal with a version of the first objection to positionalism?

The positionalist takes argument places to be primitive objects. Will the Anti-positionalist have to do the same with manners of completion?

> "the antipositionalist can treat manners of completion as derivative objects, as the products of abstraction rather than as part of the apparatus of completion. His commitment to them need require no more than a general commitment to abstraction."

2.1.3 Question: Can we explain "co-mannered completion" in other terms?

For to say that s is a completion of a relation R by a,, a2 .. ., am, in the same manner that t is a completion of R by b1, 12, ..., bm is simply to say that s is a completion of R by a,, a2 . . ., am that results from simultaneously substituting a,, a2..., am for bl, b2,..., bm (and vice versa).

2.1.4 Question: Can the Anti-positionalist recover talk of positions?

"Although the antipositionalist does not appeal to the notions of a position or of a manner of completion in his account of relations, he is still able to reconstruct these notions within the confines of his theory. For, as we have seen, he may treat manners of exemplification or completion as abstracts with respect to the equivalence relation same manner of completion.And a similar treatment may be given of position. For we may define a in s is co-positional with b in t by: s results from t by a substitution in which b goes into a (and vice versa). Positions can then be taken to be the abstracts of constituents in relational complexes with respect to the relation co-positionality."