Cian Dorr's Non-Symmetric Relation

Preview: Dorr argues that necessarily all relations are symmetric. His strategy is to argue that the sentence 'There are non-symmetric relations' has no metaphysical analysis "upon which this claim is consistent." (6) This makes for a pretty intense paper because Dorr needs to set up what a metaphysical analysis is, and go through the candidate metaphysical analyses to establish this. Dorr is guided by the ideas that there are no brute necessities and there are no metaphysically "deep" spurious distinctions. And he thinks that ways of analyzing 'there are non-symmetric relations' lead to positing one or the other. There are two ways of analyzing 'there are non-symmetric relations' that he explores: (1) one is by taking the 'bears' predicate to be primitive and (2) the other ways involve taking sentences involving 'bears' to be analyzed in terms of further predicates. Either way leads to positing brute necessities or spurious distinctions (I think he thinks). Since we should avoid that, we should avoid non-symmetric relations

1 Part 1

Thesis: Necessarily, all relations are symmetric.

r is symmetric iff whenever x bears r to y, y bears r to x.

What is this 'bears' predicate? Good question, thinks Dorr. The focal point going forward is whether this predicate is primitive and if not. Primitive predicates, according to Dorr, are unanalyzable. So one question here is whether 'bears' has a metaphysical analysis.

2 What is a Metaphysical Analysis?

Examples:
"We report such analyses when we say things like to be made of water is to be composed of H2O molecules, or for one thing to be hotter than another is for the former to have a greater mean molecular kinetic energy than the latter."

A sentence is metaphysically analytic iff it can be transformed into a logical truth by: 1. Substituting analyses for analysanda. 2. Substituting co-referential proper names. 3. Replacing semantically defective predicates with logically contradictory ones.

Some features of metaphysically analytic sentences:

- Can be known a posteriori
- metaphysically necessary

3

Strategy: Argue that "There are non-symmetric relations" has no metaphysical analysis upon which the claim is consistent.

If 'There are non-symmetric relations' is true, Dorr thinks, this must be because it can be stated/analyzed in terms of a primitive 'bears' predicate or some other primitive predicate.(???) He will argue that 'bears' is not primitive, nor can other primitive predicates do the job.

4 Part 3: 'Bears' is not primitive

CONVERSE: For every r, there is an r' such that for any x and y, x bears r to y iff y bears r' to x.

If 'bears' is not primitive, then CONVERSE is not necessary.
If 'bears' is not primitive then CONVERSE is not known for certain a priori.

QUESTION: Is the distinctness of r and r' built into CONVERSE?

4.1 Argument 1:

If 'bears' is not primitive, then CONVERSE is not necessary.

Suppose 'bears' is primitive.

- P1: Possibility: If S is logically consistent and the only non-logical vocabulary in S consists of primitive predicates, then ⌜it is metaphysically possible that S⌝is true.
- P2: ¬CONVERSE only involves primitive predicates.
- P3: ¬CONVERSE is logically consistent.
- P4: ¬CONVERSE is metaphysically possible.
- C. CONVERSE is not metaphysically necessary.

*******QUESTION: Why believe that Possibility is true? (P.9)

4.2 Argument 2

If 'bears' is primitive then CONVERSE is not known for certain a priori.

Suppose 'bears' is primitive. It is supposed to follow from Knowability below that CONVERSE is not known for certain a priori

Knowability: if a sentence S is logically consistent and the only non-logical vocabulary in S consists of primitive predicates then ⌜no one could know for certain a priori that corner not-S⌝corner is true.

4.3 Why believe in Knowability and Possibility?

The impulse for both KNOWABILITY and POSSIBILITY comes from the idea that there are no brute necessities, which Dorr explains below

> Since I willbe making use of this sort of argument time and again, it will be useful to have a simple formula which encapsulates the conclusions of this section.
>
> Let us say that a sentence S is a brute necessity iff (i) S is not a logical truth; (ii) the only nonlogical vocabulary in S consists of primitive predicates; (iii) S is metaphysically necessary is true, (iv) One can know for certain a priori that S is true, and (v) all quantifiers in S are restricted to fundamental entities. Then the principle which we need can be stated succinctly as follows: there are no brute necessities.

Question: What does Dorr actually think about the status of CONVERSE?

Upshot: I *think* Dorr thinks there is good reason to take CONVERSE to be necessary and known for certain a priori. But in the next section, try to show that 'bears' isn't primitive even if we don't believe CONVERSE holds necessarily/is known a priori.

5 Part 4

Here he decides to argue for the disjunction:

bears is not primitive or CONVERSE is both necessary and known for certain a priori.

I think he's doing this because he doesn't think you need to believe that CONVERSE is both necessary and known for certain a priori in order to believe that 'bears' is not primitive. I THINK.

5.1 Spurious Distinctions

We should not treat 'bears' as primitive because it will cause us to recognize spurious distinctions:

> "Imagine a world containing (among other things) a series of simple particulars, linearly ordered by exactly two independent simple relations, r1 and r2. The two relations generate exactly the same order among the objects in the series. (Outside the series, however, the two relations are not linked by any particularly simple laws.) Do they order the series in the same, or in opposite directions? In other words, which of the following is the case?
>
> (i) For any distinct x and y in the series, x bears either r1 or r2, but not both, to y.
> (ii) For any distinct x and y in the series, x either bears both r1 and r2 to y, or bears neither r1 nor r2 to y."

"The hypothesis that bears is primitive must be rejected, since it entails that there is a deep metaphysical fact in these situations, where clearly there is nothing but arbitrariness. Unless bears is semantically defective, it must somehow be analysable."

6 What do we do now that we know 'bears' is not primitive?

Explore ways in which 'bears' is defined arbitrarily which do not maintain that we need to accept deep metaphysical distinction between i and ii above. This also preserves the contingency of Converse (Question: do we want that?! We know that Dorr does not want CONVERSE to be a brute necessity, but does he want it to be contingently true? Necessarily true? False?)

6.1 Taking a notion of "like relatedness" to be primitive.

BICONI: $xy \uparrow zw \equiv (xy\Delta r \wedge zw\Delta r) \vee (yx\Delta r \wedge wz\Delta r)$
ab r-↑ cd = a is r related to b just like c is r related to d.

To define 'bears' in terms of ↑, we need a paradigm pair, ab, for r s.t. :

Paradigms: $\forall r \exists ab \forall xyzw(xy\uparrow zw \equiv (xy\uparrow ab \wedge zw\uparrow ab) \vee (yx\uparrow ab \wedge wz\uparrow ab))$

$\forall xy(xy\Delta r \equiv xy\uparrow ab)$.

Problem:

BICON is necessary and a priori. So if ↑ is primitive, all of these consequences of BICON are brute necessities[1]
But there are no brute necessities.

[1] except for those the logical truths, ignore those.

6.2 We can analyze "being like related" but all of the ways of analyzing "being like related" lead to problems

Option 1: Primitive ways of being related.

Option 2: Primitive argument places (kind of like positionalism)

Option 3: Understanding like relatedness as "entering into states of affairs in the same way" (kind of like anti-positionalism)

7 Economy Considerations

What if we don't care about positing brute necessities? Dorr thinks that there are still theoretical virtues that point us to taking all relations to be symmetric.

> "There is anotherhighly economical systemto my mind, perhaps the most appealing of all those I have consideredwhich lets us avoid commitment to states of affairs. In this system there is just one primitive predicate, . . . holds among . . . , taking one singular and one plural term as arguments. This system clearly rules out non-symmetric relations: x bears r to y can only plausibly be analysed as r holds among x and y, which is of course logically equivalent to r holds among y and x."