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90. Student Session

Rethinking Conceptualist Ideology

Abstract

In this paper, I propose a way to (re)interpret *conceptualist* ideology. Especially, I consider the following two notions: (i) reality as amorphous lump; (ii) existence as a variable concept. For both, the core question is that such notions are somewhat inscrutable. However, there is a tension: those allegedly unintelligible notions are well-understood within (meta-) ontological debates. I try to give a semantic framework where this tension might be resolved. I proceed as follows. In §2, 3, I introduce our framework, based on Conventionalist semantics by Iris Einheuser. Then first, in §4, I consider the *amorphous world* ideology, our first subject. And in §5, I consider the recent proposal that *quantifier variance is just domain variance*. In §6, I conclude.

Keywords: Metaontology, Conventionalist semantics, Ontological relativism, Conceptual relativity, Quantifier variance

1. Introduction

In this paper, I propose a way to (re)interpret *conceptualist* ideology. Here "conceptualist" is intended to denote the view that *what there is* is depended upon *how we cut the world*, or, in other words, our existence concept (partly) determine the extension of it. Such a view have expressed by various names, like "conceptual relativism"(Putnam 1987), "quantifier variantism"(Hirsch 2010), more generally, *ontological relativism*.

Indeed, there are some suspicious glimpses about conceptualist picture. Especially, I consider the following two notions: (i) reality as amorphous lump (Eklund 2008); (ii) existence as a variable concept (Hirsch 2010). For both, the core question is that such notions are somewhat inscrutable. However, there is a tension: those allegedly unintelligible notions are well-understood within (meta-) ontological debates. I try to give a semantic framework where this tension might be resolved. I expect my account eventually to show that conceptualist ideology is intelligible than its first look.

I proceed as follows. In §2, 3, I introduce our framework, based on Conventionalist semantics by Iris Einheuser (2003). Then first, in §4, I consider the *amorphous world* ideology, our first subject. And in §5, I consider the recent proposal that *quantifier variance is just domain variance*. In §6, I conclude.

2. Preliminary: Conventionalist Framework

My approach is based on the Conventionalist semantics (henceforth, *CS*) by Iris Einheuser (2003). CS is a kind of 2D semantics, whose parameters are state, or *substratum*, and convention, or *carving*. Each standard possible world is defined as corresponding tuple of state and carving.

It can be regarded as a *vertical*-side extension of standard modal framework. There is a series of states, the *horizontal* axis, which can be identified to the old notion of necessity (Einheuser 2003, 30). And there is a series of carvings, the *vertical* axis. Now our new modal space will consist of modal points $w_{ij} = (s_i, c_j)$, where s is a state and c is a convention. Sentences are true relative to such points. In other word, the notion of truth-in-a-model is to be represented as the form "$\mathcal{M}, s, c \vDash \varphi$"

To explicate the notion, we will define the conventionalist model $\mathcal{M} = (S, C, I)$ as the triple of:

- Non-empty sets, $S(\ni s_i)$, $C(\ni c_i)$
- Let $w \in W = S \times C$
- $I: W \times \mathbf{\Phi} \to \{T, F\}$ is an interpretation function, where $\mathbf{\Phi}$ is a set of wffs.

Without accessibility relation, the truth conditions for standard modal formulae $\varphi \coloneqq p|\neg\varphi|\varphi \supset \varphi'|\Box\varphi$ can be defined in the old way, i. e.:

$$\mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \vDash p \Leftrightarrow I(w_{ij})(p) = T$$

$$\mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \vDash \neg\varphi \Leftrightarrow \mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \nvDash \varphi$$

$$\mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \vDash \varphi \supset \varphi' \Leftrightarrow \mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \vDash \varphi \text{ or } \mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \nvDash \varphi'$$

$$\mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \vDash \Box\varphi \Leftrightarrow \forall w' \mathcal{M}, w' \vDash \varphi$$

Note that the last definition does not represent the old, or *metaphysical* necessity notion. For example, if c_x were to represent mathematically deviated convention where "+" means minus, "$2 + 2 = 4$" is to be necessarily true but $\Box 2 + 2 = 4$ would not.

But we can define corresponding notion by partitioning the world. First, we can partition our modal space relative to each carving. Consider the following set: $W(c) = \{(s_i, c): s_i \in S\}$. This can be considered as a partition, since for our framework *defines* modal points as the tuple (s_i, c_j), for any $j \neq k$, $(s_i, c_j) \neq (s_i, c_k)$. In the same way, we can partition our modal space relative to each state as follows: $W(s) = \{(s, c_i): c_i \in C\}$.

Now the old necessity notion can be defined as carving relative notion:

$$\mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \vDash \Box_s \varphi \Leftrightarrow \forall s' \mathcal{M}, w_{ij}{}^{s_i}_{s'} \vDash \varphi$$

, where $w_{ij}{}^{s_i}_{s'}$ stands for s'-variant of w_{ij}, that is, (s', c_i). Similarly, we can define the following notion of alternatively qualified necessity:

$$\mathcal{M}, w_{ij} \vDash \Box_C \varphi \Leftrightarrow \forall c' \mathcal{M}, w_{ij}{}^{c_j}_{c'} \vDash \varphi$$

, where $w_{ij}{}^{c_j}_{c'}$ stands for c'-variant of w_{ij}. We can regard $\Box_s$ as *metaphysical* necessity operator, while $\Box_C$ as *conventional* necessity operator. Corresponding possibility operators, $\Diamond_S$ and $\Diamond_C$ are defined as the dual of each necessity operator.

Note that with the foregoing procedure, we can specify the (semantic) *extension* of conventions. For each partition $W(c_i)$ is proper to its convention c_i and informally, the definition of $W(c_i)$ means the set of worlds where each state holds and c_i is applied. Now we can construct a set of every convention, that is, $W(C) = \{W(c_i): c_i \in C\}$.

3. Mapping Ontologies onto Conventions

With CS, my strategy is to identify ontologies with conventions. So the next step is to find an intended model. To do this, we first construct a model then map each existence concept, or ontology, onto a convention.

Two conditions are to be imposed. The first is coherence. Every point should be coherent, i. e.,

Coherence $\forall w(\mathcal{M}, w \nvDash \varphi \wedge \neg\varphi)$

And the second is indifference. Informally, the conditions states that the intended modal space should constitute a lattice. That is,

Indifference $\forall i, j\left(s_i \in S \wedge c_j \in C \Rightarrow \left(s_i, c_j\right) \in W\right)$

Now we can map each ontology onto its convention. First, set a series of metaphysical modality as the reference space, intuitively, our ordinary conception of possibilities, $W^0 = \{w_0^0, w_1^0, w_2^0, \ldots\}$, then identify the worlds with the worlds in our model, namely, $(s_0, c_0), (s_1, c_0), (s_2, c_0), \ldots$. Now we define the semantic convention of ordinary ontology as the convention c_0, whose extension is $W(c_0)$. Then we can map any ontology onto the convention representing it by the following procedure: 1. Consider the totality of description of each w_i^0 from the ontology ω, namely, $\delta_\omega(w_i^0)$; 2. Find the series of c'-variant worlds $w_0{}^{0c}_{c'}, w_1{}^{0c}_{c'}, w_2{}^{0c}_{c'}, \ldots$, where each and only each $\delta_\omega(w_0^0), \delta_\omega(w_1^0), \delta_\omega(w_2^0), \ldots$ holds; 3.

Regard that c' represents the ontology in question, that is, the semantic convention of ω is the convention whose extension is $W(c')$.

Note that by the two conditions, we can exactly specify the convention required. By **Indiffrence**, there must exists the world $w_{i\ c'}^{0\ c}$. Moreover, by **Coherence**, once $\delta_\omega(w_i^0)$ holds, nothing more holds in $w_{i\ c'}^{0\ c}$. This concludes our goal.

4. Amorphous World as Substratum

It is widely known that conceptualism has deep connection to an *unconstructed* conception of reality. This idea has been expressed by various way: "unconstructed world"(Button 2013, 37-39), "unstructured facts"(Hirsch 2002, 58-59), "reality as an amorphous lump"(Hirsch 2008, 374; Eklund 2008). The core concept is that the reality is an entity which is not fully carved itself, but with conceptual apparatus, can be described in multiple way. The problem with the concept is that this notion makes the world as somewhat *vague* entity. However, there seems not to be any vague object, as Evans (1978) well points out. How can we make the conception more intelligible?

Here is the solution. With respect to worlds in a model, namely, modal points, worlds are not vague. Every world has its proper specification. From the metalogical point of view, for any two worlds w_{ij} and w_{nm}, $w_{ij} \neq w_{nm}$ if $i \neq n$ or $j \neq m$. Thus, there is no vague identity. Neither vague, so to speak, ascription exists. For as we mapped ontologies to worlds, unless our (metaphysically) possible worlds were itself vague so that the mapping has failed, world property, namely its descriptions, is exact to each world, viz., $\delta(w_i^0)$.

If any semantic indeterminacy exists in our semantics, it is not for modal points, but for *substrata*. If we regard worlds in, so to speak, a *metaphysical* sense, so that put aside any conceptual dimension, our world-talk on w_k^0 is to be the one on $w_{i\ \emptyset}^{0\ s_k}$. In this case, things get changed. the world-talk would be semantically indeterminate one, for $(s_k, \_)$ cannot (rigidly) designate any world properly. To make the discourse clear, we need to precisify it, via specifying on which convention(s) is applied.

This approach reduces *vagueness* of worlds to (*semantic*) *ambiguity* of world-talks. i. e., the semantic values are underdetermined (cf. Fine 1975, 266). Do we have any apparatus to represent this ambiguity? Yes. In §2, we have partitioned our modal space relative to each state s_i, viz., $W(s_i)$. This set itself is to be the semantic value for "w_i^0", where any conceptual dimension casted off.

Indeed, with this interpretation, we can render *prima facie* vagueness-talk properly. Would there is true indefinite identity statement? Partly yes. When $i \neq j$, it is *definitely* false that i-substratum world is identical with j-substratum world ($W(s_i) = W(s_j)$). When $i = j$ is undetermined, it would not have definite truth value, but this indeterminacy is not from the conception in question. How about true indefinite description? Totally yes. For even when i is fixed, whether $\delta_\omega(w_i^0)$ or $\delta_{\omega'}(w_i^0)$ is to be attributed would not be settled. However, this is not a big problem. For our world-description itself depends on our conceptual apparatus, so that without considering any conceptual dimension, any world-description would not be settled. There is no harmful semantic indeterminacy.

5. Quantifier Variance as Domain Variance, But …

Above consideration has a connection with another subject. According to Mankowitz (2021), the more reasonable way to interpret the notion of quantifier variance is to regard it as *domain* variance. The rationale is that, according to the theories of generalised quantifiers (GQ theories), quantifier meaning (in model-theoretic sense) should be fixed, so that the only way to make sense *quantifier variance* is to interpret the thesis as *domain variance* thesis.

Indeed, our approach, based on CS, satisfies the two conditions which Mankowitz (2021, 622) presents:

Domain multiplicity The models associated with some ontological languages include non-identical domains.

Predicate multiplicity The models associated with some ontological languages include non-identical interpretations (intensionally described) of at least one predicate that occurs in all of those languages (identified via phonology and syntax).

Since for any two ontologies ω_1 and ω_2, their conventions c_1, c_2, respectively, would have different domains, namely, $\bigcup_i D^{(s_i, c_1)}$ and $\bigcup_i D^{(s_i, c_2)}$, and thus the intension of each predicate be different. Mankowitz sees those two conditions somewhat "counter-intuitive" (Mankowitz 2021, 622). Thus, Mankowitz (2021, 623) concludes that "the multiplicity doctrine of quantifier variance cannot be reconciled with GQ theories."

However, from the conceptualist point of view, this is not so. For according to the view, each quantifier of ontology is itself restricted in model-theoretic sense. The problem conceptualist arises is that which (restricted) domain is to be chosen, in other words, which convention is the one we would accept. If unrestricted domain, namely, $\bigcup_j \bigcup_i D^{(s_i, c_j\}}$, is, more severe counter-intuition occurs. Maximalist quantifier (as Matti Eklund (2006) suggested) would be the sole quantifier we can accept, so that literally anything would exist. This is not the case ontologists intended to.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I introduced Conventional semantics by Iris Einheuser to give a charitable interpretation for conceptualist ideology. As I argued, the two seemingly suspicious notion, unstructured world, and quantifier variance itself, are not so harmful. I hope my argument is successful so that some doubts on conceptualist view to be resolved.

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