

Metalinguistic negation and metaphysical affirmation

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Abstract In a series of articles, Fine (Monist 83:357–361, 2000; Mind 112:195–234, 2003; Mind 115:1059–1082, 2006) presents some highly compelling objections to monism, the doctrine that spatially coincident objects are identical. His objections rely on Leibniz’s Law and linguistic environments that appear to be immune to the standard charge of non-transparency and substitution failure. In this paper, I respond to Fine’s objections on behalf of the monist. Following Schnieder (Philosophical Quarterly 56:39–54, 2006), I observe that arguments from Leibniz’s Law are valid only if they involve descriptive, rather than metalinguistic, negation. Then I show that the monist is justified in treating the negation in Fine’s objections as metalinguistic in nature. Along the way I make a few methodological remarks about the interaction between the study of natural language and metaphysics. I also present evidence that some of the linguistic environments which Fine relies on are, contrary to appearances, non-transparent.

Keywords Metalinguistic negation · Leibniz’s Law · Monism · Pluralism · Identity · Coincidence

1 Introduction

Imagine a world ever so slightly different from ours. In it, there’s a conventional restriction on the range of descriptive terms one may use to talk about official presidential acts. In particular, it would be a violation of the convention to say ‘The President signed a piece a paper’. The noun phrase, ‘The President’, signals that an official presidential act is under discussion, but the verb phrase, ‘signed a piece of paper’, is too informal to properly describe such an act, because the convention

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dictates that one's description be commensurate with the formality of the situation under discussion. One would have to say 'The President enacted a law', or something similar. One could say, without violating the convention, 'Barack Obama signed a piece a paper', but then it would be presupposed or implied, given the convention, that one wasn't talking about an official presidential act, but something that Obama did qua private citizen. There's very little to recommend this way of talking, so it's not surprising that we don't actually talk this way, but it strikes me as a coherent practice, so we may well have. For convenience, call the hypothetical language governed by this convention 'English⁺'.

Now suppose that Metaphysicus (an inhabitant of the world we're imagining and a native speaker of English⁺) observes Obama signing an autograph and reasons as follows.

- (1) Obama signed a piece of paper.
- (2) The President didn't sign a piece of paper.
- (3) Therefore, Obama isn't the President.

The argument above relies on Leibniz's Law, the principle that identicals are indiscernible. Metaphysicus takes himself to have identified a respect in which Obama and the President are discernible. The former but not the latter, he judges, signed a piece of paper. ('The President signed a piece of paper' is, after all, unacceptable in English⁺, and the use of negation marks its unacceptability.) On the basis of this judgment Metaphysicus infers that Obama and the President are distinct.

Something has gone terribly wrong. Surely the argument above fails. If English⁺ were in use, Obama might still be President. But if Metaphysicus were right, then he wouldn't. *Mutatis mutandis*, no one would. The President would be a *sui generis* entity. Nothing so metaphysically extravagant should follow from so modest a supposition as that English⁺ is in use. It's incumbent on us, then, to identify an error in the reasoning. Where has Metaphysicus gone wrong?

Metaphysicus has committed a sin—the sin of confusing metalinguistic with descriptive negation. Confusion of this sort undermines the validity of his reasoning. Let me elaborate.

We're well acquainted with descriptive negation; we use it when we want to reject a sentence whose content we take to be false: 'Obama is not Muslim.' In contrast, metalinguistic negation is a device that allows us to reject the use of a sentence on grounds other than the falsity of its content. The application of metalinguistic negation is thus perfectly consistent with the truth of the sentence to which it's applied. Consider the examples below. (Capitals signify intonational focus.)

- (4) I'm not a SECRETARY; I'm an ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT.
- (5) For a pessimist like him, the cup isn't half full.¹
- (6) One shouldn't make RESOLUTIONS; one should have GOALS.

¹ This example is closely based on one found in Laurence Horn (1985, p. 133).

Presumably, ‘secretary’ and ‘administrative assistant’ are coextensional, yet one can imagine a semantically competent speaker uttering (4). “I’m not a SECRETARY; I’m an ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT.” So make your own damn sandwich. Note that, in this context, (4) doesn’t even seem contradictory. The reason is that the speaker rejects ‘I am a secretary’ not on the grounds that it, as uttered by him, expresses a falsehood. After all, we’re assuming the speaker acknowledges that administrative assistants are secretaries and that he himself is an administrative assistant. The speaker rejects ‘I am a secretary’ on the grounds that ‘secretary’ has a connotation that makes it an objectionable way of describing his occupation. ‘Administrative assistant’ doesn’t have the same objectionable connotation. The use of negation in (4) thus marks an apparent infelicity in the way a particular content is expressed, not the falsity of the content.

Something similar is true of (5) and (6). Given common knowledge about pessimists, and about the idiom ‘the cup is half full’, there’s something incongruous about describing a pessimist’s attitude with that idiom, even though (i) necessarily the cup is half full iff the cup is half empty, and (ii) it would be perfectly appropriate to describe the pessimist’s attitude in terms of ‘the cup is half empty’. A speaker who utters (5) is thus exploiting negation to reject the incongruity in the way pessimism is being characterized; he isn’t rejecting the content of that characterization.

I encountered (6) while watching CNN shortly after New Year’s Day. A commentator was invited to talk about lifestyle choices for the new year. She began by uttering (6). She then tried to explain that the contrast is substantive. Her explanation failed. Insofar as there is a contrast, it’s a contrast at the level of connotation. Perhaps ‘goal’ connotes something a little more flexible, something that needn’t constrain one’s behavior daily. It might be that ‘resolution’ lacks this connotation. The speaker simply wanted to emphasize that it’s ok to occasionally indulge one’s bad habit; it will improve one’s chances to actually stick with one’s new lifestyle choice in the long-run.

Like (4) and (5), (6) is best interpreted as an instance of metalinguistic negation; it’s supposed to encourage you to describe your lifestyle choice in one way rather than another. Describing it in this alternative way is preferable because of its potential psychological effects. What’s interesting about the example is that the speaker took herself to be drawing a substantive distinction, not merely a terminological contrast. This suggests that ordinary speakers aren’t always sensitive to the difference between metalinguistic and descriptive negation. That’s not surprising, since it took some amount of theorizing to appreciate the difference.² So competent language users might detect that it would be unacceptable to utter a particular sentence, choose to reject the sentence by exploiting metalinguistic negation, fail to recognize that the negated sentence is actually true, and thereby draw unwarranted conclusions. The argument above, (1)–(3), exemplifies just this mistake.

The hypothetical convention governing descriptions of official presidential acts renders ‘The President signed a piece of paper’ objectionable. Given the convention,

² See Laurence Horn (1985, 2001).

use of ‘The President’ presupposes or implies that the situation under discussion is one in which Obama acted qua commander-in-chief. But use of ‘signed a piece of paper’ presupposes or implies that he didn’t. We thus have a kind of incongruity in the way a particular content is expressed. So Metaphysicus is right to negate the sentence, but he fails to recognize that only metalinguistic negation is licensed, since incongruity of the sort he wants to reject is consistent with the truth of the content expressed. But, for an application of Leibniz’s Law to be warranted, the negated sentence must not be true. So the argument above, (1)-(3), is simply invalid.

If Metaphysicus were the only philosopher to ever commit the sin of confusing metalinguistic with descriptive negation, then the error would be of little philosophical interest. I want to present an attractive package of metaphysical and semantical views according to which a very similar sort of error infects a recent argument from Leibniz’s Law. The argument is due to Fine (2003, 2006), and it challenges monism—the doctrine that spatially coincident objects are identical.

The first discussion of how metalinguistic negation might (and, in some cases, probably does) vitiate arguments based on Leibniz’s Law is, to my knowledge, due to Schnieder (2006). He illustrates the potential interaction by presenting a hypothetical argument similar to the one I’ve attributed to Metaphysicus. He doesn’t, however, discuss the bearing of his observations on the metaphysics of material constitution. One might think the application is pretty straightforward, but it actually requires a little bit of fancy footwork, since Schnieder’s rationale for thinking that, in his central examples, the occurrence of negation is metalinguistic doesn’t automatically carry over. His rationale is based on the ungrammaticality (p. 47) or uninterpretability (p. 51) of the negated sentences. But the arguments from Leibniz’s Law which I will discuss don’t exploit the ungrammaticality or uninterpretability of particular constructions. They exploit infelicity of a different sort. It will require some work to explain why the relevant sort of infelicity licenses the use of metalinguistic, rather than descriptive, negation. In any event, Schnieder’s influence is apparent and gratefully acknowledged.

2 The statue and the piece of alloy

Imagine a Romanesque alloy statue. The statue and the piece of alloy from which it’s made spatially coincide, so there’s some intuitive pressure to say they’re identical. Suppose I point to the statue and ask someone who hasn’t been exposed to professional philosophy, how many statue-shaped objects are there in that region? Assuming she isn’t utterly baffled by a question with such an obvious answer, she’s likely to say, ‘Just one’. This observation seems to suggest that, insofar as commonsense is concerned, the statue and the piece of alloy aren’t distinct statue-shaped objects. So commonsense appears to dictate that the statue and the piece of alloy are numerically identical, since each is surely statue-shaped. Note that I say “appears” and “seems to suggest”. I’m intentionally hedging here because it’s far from clear whether commonsense is unequivocally committed to monism. More likely, our naive opinions about the nature of medium-sized physical objects are conflicted. On the one hand, the naive judgment that no two things can occupy the

same space at the same time feels like a platitude. People are strongly disposed to accept it, and until they encounter a philosopher, they have difficulty seeing how it could possibly be false. But, on the other hand, there are powerful intuitive considerations, which we will look at momentarily, that put pressure on the naive judgment. To deny any of them without in some way accommodating corresponding truths in the vicinity strikes many as completely gratuitous. The puzzle is to reconcile our apparently conflicting opinions in a way that does as little damage as possible to our overall system of beliefs.

The standard objection to monism is that it fails to take into account modal and temporal differences between the statue and the piece of alloy. For example:

- (7) The statue is such that it would have been destroyed if it were melted.
- (8) The piece of alloy isn't such that it would have been destroyed if melted.
- (9) The statue is such that it wasn't in existence on Monday at noon.
- (10) The piece of alloy isn't such that it wasn't in existence on Monday at noon.

Therefore, the statue isn't the piece of alloy.

In stating the modal/temporal argument I rely on a somewhat clunky and unnatural 'such that' construction in order to make explicit that *de re* predication is involved. It thus appears as if the relevant contexts, 'ξ is such that it...', are transparent, licensing the substitution of co-referring terms. But substituting 'the statue' with 'the piece of alloy' appears to take us from a truth to a falsehood. So it seems the two terms fail to co-refer. Naturally, then, we apply negation to the false sentence in which 'the piece of alloy' occurs and obtain a truth, thus enabling us to exploit Leibniz's Law to arrive at the conclusion that the statue is distinct from the piece of alloy.

But the modal/temporal argument is ultimately ineffective. Counterpart theory provides an elegant way of reconciling the naive judgment that no two objects can occupy the same space at the same time with the intuitive considerations above that apparently challenge it. Analyzing modal/temporal discourse in terms of counterpart theory renders some *de re* predications non-transparent. "Transparency of modal predication can fail whenever the sense of the subject term is used to do anything beyond determining the actual denotation of the subject term. One further thing it might do... is select a counterpart relation" (Lewis 1971, p. 54). So the monist might avail herself of counterpart theory and say that 'the statue' and 'the piece of alloy' contribute different counterpart relations when they occur in the presence of a modal or tensed expression. She would thus interpret (7)–(10) roughly as follows:

- (7') There is a nearby world, *w*, and an artifactual counterpart of the statue, *x*, in *w* such that *x* is melted and thereby destroyed.
- (8') There is a nearby world, *w*, and a material counterpart of the piece of alloy, *x*, in *w* such that *x* is melted and not destroyed.
- (9') There is a time, Monday at noon, such that there isn't an artifactual counterpart of the statue at noon on Monday.
- (10') There is a time, Monday at noon, such that there is a material counterpart of the piece alloy at noon on Monday.

Artifactual counterparts are determined on the basis of qualitative resemblance along dimensions of similarity that are suitable for comparing artifacts (similarity with respect to representational, functional, and aesthetic properties), whereas material counterparts are determined on the basis of qualitative resemblance along dimensions suitable for comparing matter (similarity with respect to physical and mereological properties). What follows from (7')–(10') is that the relevant artifactual and material counterparts are distinct, not that the objects whose de re modal/temporal properties they represent are distinct. But, for advocates of monism, this conclusion is perfectly acceptable, since the artifactual and material counterparts don't spatially coincide at the relevant world/time.

With modality and tense eliminated, and the relevant counterpart relations made explicit, 'the statue' and 'the piece of alloy' contribute nothing more than their customary denotations in (7')–(10'). So it follows that

(7'') There is a nearby world, *w*, and an artifactual counterpart of the piece of alloy, *x*, in *w* such that *x* is melted and thereby destroyed.

(8'') There is a nearby world, *w*, and a material counterpart of the statue, *x*, in *w* such that *x* is melted and not destroyed.

(9'') There is a time, Monday at noon, such that there isn't an artifactual counterpart of the piece of alloy at noon on Monday.

(10'') There is a time, Monday at noon, such that there is a material counterpart of the statue at noon on Monday.

Once we acknowledge the counterpart relativity of modal/temporal property ascriptions, it can be seen that the statue and the piece of alloy have the same de re modal/temporal properties.³

Rescuing monism with the help of counterpart theory is unlikely to silence the critics. 'What counterpart theory enables you to do,' critics are likely to say, 'is show that we might speak in a way consistent with monism. It doesn't follow that we actually speak in such a way. Counterpart theory is, after all, a formal language and semantic framework. The mere availability of counterpart-theoretic formalizations doesn't show that the arguments really are invalid. The formalizations have to be faithful to natural language in the relevant respects. But, in this case, they aren't, since, intuitively, the inference from (7) and (8), and from (9) and (10), to non-identity is valid.'⁴

There are a number of things to say here. To begin, de re predications that rely on 'such that' constructions appear clunky and unnatural for a reason; they don't occur often in ordinary speech. When we use them to disambiguate, we're already involved in the process of regimentation. So it's unclear how much weight ordinary language intuitions carry in this context. In any case, the use of counterpart theory to analyze (7)–(10) is simply one more step in the same process we've already embarked on by using 'such that'. Admittedly, counterpart theory provides a

³ Lewis (1971) himself adopts this strategy in response to a modal objection challenging a bodily conception of persons. For strategies similar in spirit, but more revisionary in letter, see Allan Gibbard (1975) and George Myro (1986). Robert Stalnaker (1986) discusses how an actualist/presentist might take advantage of the flexibility that counterpart theory affords.

⁴ Cf. "Philosophers of a monist persuasion have been content to show that we might talk as if their views were correct rather than that we actually do so talk" (Fine 2003, p. 202).

revisionary way of regimenting natural language; it isn't an empirical hypothesis about the syntax/semantics of English. One needn't take a stand on the deep semantic structure of modality and tense in natural language in order to regard (7')–(10') as acceptable ways of paraphrasing the truth-conditions of (7)–(10). Like all regimentations, counterpart-theoretic analyses should be accepted or rejected based on the conceptual, logical, and metaphysical clarity they deliver, and the extent to which they allow the theorist to carry out her projects to her own satisfaction, not on how faithful they are to apparent or underlying facts about English, or any other natural language for that matter.⁵ But, setting all of this aside, one wonders why, in this context, critics regard the unregimented marketplace pronouncements as authoritative? Maybe the way we ordinarily talk on Main Street provides some evidence about our shared descriptive metaphysics—what we naively think the world is like at a fairly abstract and general level of description—but why think it can provide anything more? English⁺ users appear to speak as if the President is a *sui generis* entity, distinct from Barack Obama. But I take it that even among speakers of English⁺ it would be a mistake to regard this surface level phenomenon as metaphysically illuminating. Once we acknowledge that our speech habits can be deceptive in just the sort of way that bears on the question of monism, and that counterpart theory isn't intended to be an empirical semantic hypothesis but an acceptable regimentation, why should it matter whether the counterpart-theoretic response to the modal/temporal argument fails to reconcile the way we apparently speak with monism? It was never supposed to do so. From the monist's point of view, counterpart theory is an improvement over our actual way of speaking in every respect relevant for determining metaphysical commitments.⁶

As we proceed, I will have more to say about the interaction between the analysis of natural language and metaphysics. For now, I simply want to emphasize that the critic's objection is inconclusive; it relies on a questionable view about how metaphysically revealing unregimented speech is. It thus appears as if we have a dialectical standoff.

What's nice about Fine's recent critique of monism is that one can't resist it by appealing to non-transparency. It thus promises to end the standoff.

⁵ See Quine (1960, ch. 5).

⁶ Linguistically-minded philosophers are particularly resistant to the methodology I'm advocating on behalf of the monist. Consider:

In general, it is hard for philosophers to part from the idea that one can freely construct alternative semantic structures for various natural language sentences without being constrained by empirical evidence from linguistics. *Such a view, however, is tantamount to the endorsement of the hypothesis that syntax is a superficial feature of language.* We find this hypothesis implausible in the extreme (Stanley and Szabó 2000, p. 246, emphasis added).

Focus on the italicized part. Why does the construction of alternative semantic structures, such as the structures for which counterpart theory provides an interpretation, carry with it an endorsement of the hypothesis that syntax is a superficial aspect of natural language? Regimentation, understood in the intended sense, and the syntactico-semantic analysis of natural language are two different projects, answerable to rather different considerations, neither impinging on the other per se. See Quine (1960, p. 221). Embarking on the project of regimentation isn't tantamount to endorsing the admittedly crazy hypothesis that syntax is a superficial aspect of natural language; it merely involves the quite reasonable view that syntactic analyses of natural language may, on some occasions, be irrelevant for metaphysical inquiry.

THE MASTER ARGUMENT⁷

- (11) The statue is Romanesque.
- (12) The piece of alloy isn't Romanesque.
- (13) Therefore, the statue isn't the alloy.

Fine's argument relies on a one-place predicate, 'is Romanesque'. There are very few non-transparent monadic predicates. So few, in fact, that David Lewis conjectured there aren't any.⁸

⁷ 'Romanesque' is one of several predicates that Fine exploits in his (Fine 2003). His discussion focuses primarily on 'valuable' and 'badly made'.

- (i) The statue is valuable/badly made.
- (ii) The piece of alloy isn't valuable/badly made.
- (iii) Therefore, the statue isn't the piece of alloy.

I focus instead on 'Romanesque' because I believe it poses the greatest challenge to monism. Let me quickly explain why. First, consider 'valuable'. Fine says, "It has to be admitted that some of my examples are more convincing than others.... Thus if the statue is valuable, then one might on this account say that the piece of alloy is valuable..." (Fine 2006, p. 1077). A similar sort of flat-footed response to the argument involving 'Romanesque' is much less attractive. It's easy to imagine a context in which it would be natural to say 'The piece of alloy is valuable', but much harder to think of a context that would license 'The piece of alloy is Romanesque'. There appear to be some such contexts, but Fine argues that the appearance is mere. Now, consider 'badly made'. Jeffrey King (2006) criticized Fine's original argument on the grounds that 'badly made' is a gradable adjective and, hence, that its interpretation is sortal-relative, inducing non-transparency. Fine (2006) agreed that there are sortal-relative interpretations, but observed that there also appears to be an interpretation that is sortal-free. According to Fine, something can be badly made simpliciter. (There is some independent (but inconclusive) evidence for Fine's position. Suppose I ask you to write a list of some things that are badly made. You would be able to carry out the task without a problem. Suppose instead I ask you to write a list of everyone who happens to be qualified; you would immediately wonder, qualified for what?) The problem, however, is that even if one grants that 'badly made' has a sortal-free interpretation, and that it's this interpretation that's at play in Fine's argument, one can still resist the argument on grounds of non-transparency. For I assume that a bar of gold can be badly made in the sortal-free sense even when the corresponding piece of metal isn't badly made in that very sense. But surely bars of gold just are pieces of metal.

An anonymous referee suggests that in the Aristotelian framework which Fine has been advocating for the last few years, one might say that bars of gold differ in form from the corresponding metal. So perhaps Fine will not agree with my observation about the non-transparency of sortal-free 'badly made'. But neither will his rationale for disagreeing put pressure on the monist to say that sortal-free 'badly made' is transparent, since monism and Aristotelianism are competing doctrines. The upshot is that arguments in terms of 'badly made' will not bring an end to the standoff.

⁸ Barbara Partee refuted the conjecture. Consider:

- (i) The temperature of Chicago in degrees Fahrenheit is rising.
- (ii) Ninety isn't rising.
- (iii) Therefore, the temperature of Chicago in degrees Fahrenheit isn't ninety.

The argument here is obviously invalid. There's a shift in reference between the first and second occurrence of 'The temperature of Chicago in degrees Fahrenheit'. In the first occurrence it denotes a physical magnitude across an interval of time; in the second occurrence it denotes a magnitude at a particular point in time. But 'Partee predicates', such as 'rising', are few and far between. They involve implicit temporal/modal evaluation. No such element is present in the interpretation of 'Romanesque'. See Takashi Yagisawa (2001) for a nice discussion of Partee's counterexample, in which the Lewis-Partee disagreement is reported on the authority of Partee. See also Lewis (1970, p. 199).

It's unlikely, then, that the subject terms—'the statue' and 'the piece of alloy'—contribute anything in addition to their customary denotations. Counterpart theory is, therefore, not at all helpful here. The monist needs a new strategy to defend her doctrine, a new way to reconcile the naive judgment that no two objects can occupy the same space at the same time with the intuitive considerations that apparently challenge it. I want to suggest that Fine's argument fails because (12) is, from the monist's point of view, best understood as an instance of metalinguistic, not descriptive, negation.

Before we plunge ahead, I should preempt a potential methodological worry. In framing the debate so far, I've made two questions salient. The first is whether spatially coincident objects are identical (in particular, whether the statue is the piece of alloy); the second is whether we ordinarily speak and think as if spatially coincident objects are identical. I'm primarily concerned with the first, and I've suggested that the answer to the second is neither straightforwardly 'yes' nor straightforwardly 'no'. Ordinary speech and naive opinion are genuinely conflicted. I've also cautioned against moving too quickly from a negative answer to the second question to a negative answer to the first.⁹ But, in light of the centrality of the first question, one might wonder why I'm so concerned with whether a particular token of natural language—the occurrence of 'not' in Fine's argument—is best interpreted metalinguistically. By treating the first question as central and defending the occasional revisionary analysis of natural language, shouldn't I take empirical linguistic questions—such as whether the occurrence of 'not' in the MASTER ARGUMENT is best interpreted metalinguistically—to be irrelevant? Why, from my perspective, should metalinguistic negation play any role at all in the debate between monists and Fine?¹⁰

Yes, sometimes one is justified in departing from surface grammar and underlying syntactic/semantic facts when formalizing a fragment of natural language for further assessment and inquiry. But these departures have to be independently motivated, otherwise regimentation will lack proper constraints and the resulting metaphysics will be ad hoc and unsubstantiated. As it happens, puzzles about modality and tense independently motivate counterpart-theoretic analyses of just the sort that serve the monist's dialectical purpose.¹¹ As far as I can see, however, there is no independent motivation for such a departure when formalizing simple subject-predicate constructions of the sort Fine exploits. So, in order to undermine the validity of Fine's reasoning, one will have to offer empirical linguistic considerations about the meanings of the predicates involved or the significance of 'not'. If, from the monist's perspective, the occurrence of 'not' in the MASTER ARGUMENT simply indicates that it would be objectionable to assertively use 'The piece of alloy is Romanesque', then the monist will be in a position to resist Fine for just the same reason that English⁺ speakers resist *Metaphysicus*.

⁹ There are philosophical orientations that would regard the two questions to be more intimately related than I take them to be.

¹⁰ Thanks to the referee for raising this point.

¹¹ See Stalnaker (1986) for a survey of these puzzles.

3 Why a Fine argument fails

Fine's MASTER ARGUMENT is one of several in a family of arguments attacking monism. The members of this family have something interesting in common: they exploit the "sphere of discourse" to which the relevant predicate (e.g., 'Romanesque') belongs. Fine (2006) writes:

...the predicates in question have felicitous application to the one subject-term but not to the other. Thus we can say that the door is open or shut but we cannot very well say that the plastic from which it is made is open or shut; a penny can be genuine or counterfeit but not the piece of metal, and I can spend the penny but not the piece of metal... As I mentioned in the original paper [Fine 2003, p. 207], these various sorts give rise to their own 'sphere of discourse'; and predicates within one sphere will often not have felicitous application to objects belonging to other spheres (pp. 1069-1070).

But what, precisely, is a sphere of discourse? Surprisingly, Fine says very little. Given what he does say, however, it's reasonable to assume that a sphere of discourse is a range of predicates that one can use to naturally describe (whether truly or falsely) objects of a particular sort. The sphere "embodies the point... of having objects of this sort in the ontology" (Fine 2003, p. 207). For example, contrast statues with alloys. They often serve different purposes. One purpose that statues typically serve, which alloys typically don't, is aesthetic appreciation. Appreciating the aesthetic properties of an object often involves historical/structural classification, and 'Romanesque' allows us to make one such classification. It's not surprising, then, that it belongs to the sphere of discourse restricting talk of statues but not the sphere of discourse associated with alloys.

When a speaker transgresses the descriptive limits imposed by a sphere of discourse, infelicity results. Fine draws our attention to the examples below.

- (14) #The plastic is open/shut.
- (15) #The piece of metal is genuine/counterfeit.
- (16) #I spent the piece of metal.
- (17) #The piece of alloy is Romanesque.

But how to characterize the infelicity in each example is an open question.¹² The monist can agree with Fine in thinking that negation affords a natural way of marking the infelicity in (14)–(17).

¹² Fine says the application of a predicate to an object of kind K results in meaninglessness if the predicate isn't a member of the sphere of discourse corresponding to Ks. Consequently, (14)–(17) are, according to Fine, meaningless. Thus the official statement of Fine's arguments can't rely on Leibniz's Law, as he himself acknowledges. Fine has to semantically ascend:

- (i) The sentence, 'The statue is Romanesque', is true.
- (ii) The sentence, 'The piece of alloy is Romanesque', isn't true.
- (iii) Therefore, 'the statue' and 'the piece of alloy' don't co-refer.

Since monism implies that the statue is the piece of alloy, it's committed to the semantic thesis that 'the statue' and 'the piece of alloy' co-refer.

- (14⁷) The plastic isn't open/shut.
 (15⁷) The piece of metal isn't genuine/counterfeit.
 (16⁷) I didn't spend the metal.
 (17⁷) The piece alloy isn't Romanesque.

But this by itself doesn't go very far toward showing that the negated sentences express falsehoods. After all, there are sentences that exemplify the very same sort of infelicity, but which, for many of us, are far from obviously false. For example:

- (18) #Mass is a commodity.
 (19) #Numbers have members.¹³

Insofar as I understand what a sphere of discourse is, 'commodity' and 'member' seem not to fall within the spheres of discourse belonging to *mass* and *number*. Such predicates don't reflect the purpose for which we talk about mass and numbers. In fact, (18) and (19) sound about as bad to me as (14)-(17). But if, in general, it were dialectically appropriate to exploit the sort of infelicity present in (18) and (19), then the arguments below ought to constitute an easy and convincing refutation of Special Relativity and the set-theoretic reduction of numbers.

- (20) Energy is a commodity.
 (18⁷) Mass isn't a commodity.
 (21) Therefore, energy isn't mass.
 (22) Sets (with the exception of the empty set) have members.
 (19⁷) Numbers don't have members.
 (23) Therefore, sets aren't numbers.

Now Special Relativity and set-theoretic reductionism may ultimately be false, but it would be silly, I think, for their advocates to give up on them so easily. The disagreement can't be settled by appealing to the acceptability of (18⁷) and (19⁷); part of what's at stake is whether the embedded sentences are merely metalinguistically objectionable. Additionally, one doesn't want to dismiss in advance of theorizing the possibility that one and the same phenomenon belongs to two different sorts that, due to our descriptive interests or habits, have been paired with distinct spheres of discourse. The pairing of a sphere of discourse with a particular sort of object is a matter of convention; it "embodies", as Fine says, a purpose of ours in talking about objects belonging to that sort. But the sort to which an object belongs is a matter of metaphysics, and the metaphysics may not conveniently align with our descriptive purposes. I take all of this to amount to little more than the banal truth that we may sometimes speak (or appear to speak) as if *x* and *y* are

Footnote 12 continued

Fine's characterization of the infelicity of (14)–(17) in terms of meaninglessness is highly counter-intuitive, since we can embed each sentence in an intuitively true construction. For example, 'If the piece of alloy is Romanesque, then Fine is wrong.' Thus, I prefer to abstract away from this particular commitment and address Fine's argument in its strongest, most theoretically innocent, form, which implicitly relies on Leibniz's Law.

¹³ I'm borrowing this example from Schnieder (2006).

distinct—and this sort of as-if speech may be quite deeply entrenched within our linguistic practice—even when *x* and *y* are identical.

In order for each of (14[˘])–(17[˘]) to be part of a sound argument from Leibniz’s Law, the negation must be descriptive, not metalinguistic. But in order for the negation to be descriptive, the negated sentences must be false. The mere infelicity of (14)–(17) doesn’t guarantee falsity, as (18) and (19) illustrate. So if the monist can account for the infelicity in such a way that permits her to think each sentence expresses a truth, but in an objectionable way, then she can reasonably treat (14[˘])–(17[˘]) as instances of metalinguistic negation.

For the time being, let’s focus on

(17) #The piece alloy is Romanesque.

I will offer a monist-friendly explanation of why it’s objectionable. The explanation will rationalize acceptance of (17[˘]), but it will not license the use of Leibniz’s Law. Once we have this explanation in hand, we will ask whether an account that’s similar in shape can be applied to (14)–(16).

My explanation has three parts. In the first I draw attention to a pragmatic difference between use of ‘the piece of alloy’ and use of ‘the statue’; they trigger different conversational implicatures. In the second part of my explanation I tease out a conflict between, on the one hand, the information a speaker conversationally implicates by using ‘the piece of alloy’ and, on the other hand, the application conditions for ‘Romanesque’. A speaker would utter (17) only if she represented herself as suffering from a conflicted state of mind. No such internal conflict is implicated in an utterance of ‘The statue is Romanesque’. Finally, I explain why this pragmatic inconsistency licenses metalinguistic negation and thus warrants acceptance of (17[˘]).

3.1 The explanation

Let’s begin with some boring observations. The information one conveys by uttering or writing a sentence is partly determined by what one chooses to say, but also by how one chooses to say it. For example, I can convey information about someone by using just her first name or by using ‘Ms.’ plus her last name. If I use just her first name, then, barring some special circumstance, I probably convey that she and I know each other. If I use ‘Ms.’ plus her last name, then, barring some special circumstance, I probably convey that she and I don’t know each other, or that we’re not very close, or that we stand in some formal relationship. A special case of this sort of information exchange is conversational implicature.¹⁴ In general, what one conversationally implicates is a matter of what interpreters can reasonably infer on the basis of what one says, how one says it, what the operative conversational maxims are, and what happens to be mutually shared background information. To be clear: I take it that conversational implicatures (hereafter, simply ‘implicatures’) differ from other communicated (but not quite overtly asserted) content in that the conversational maxims play an essential role in their derivation

¹⁴ See in particular Paul Grice (1989, p. 37) on “generalized” implicatures.

from what is said. Now let's apply these boring observations to the case we care about.

A bit of alloy may or may not be a work of art. If the alloy spatially coincides with a statue, then, according to monism, (i) the piece of alloy is the statue—so you should be able to refer to the object by using 'the piece of alloy', 'the alloy statue', 'the statue', 'the artwork', etc.—and (ii) the piece of alloy is a work of art. But some of the information you convey with your speech about the object will depend on which description you decide to use. If you decide to talk about the object with a description in which 'statue' is the governing sortal term—as in 'the alloy statue', or simply 'the statue'—then your speech conveys that you believe it's a work of art. It's common knowledge, after all, that statues are works of art, so your interpreter can reasonably infer that you believe the subject of your speech is an artwork. If, however, you decide to use 'the piece of alloy', then your speech implicates that you don't believe the object is a work of art. Why's that? Well, if you believed that it was a work of art, then you could just as easily have used 'the alloy statue', thus communicating this additional bit of information—in conformity with the conversational maxim *Be informative!*—without thereby violating any other maxim. Given that you decided to withhold the information, an interpreter can reasonably infer that you don't believe the object is a work of art.

Now suppose I utter (17) without any indication that I'm being insincere or intentionally uncooperative. What I say by performing this speech act could just as easily have been communicated by using 'the alloy statue'. We're assuming, after all, that the piece of alloy is the statue. But I chose to use 'the piece of alloy' instead. Thus I implicate (my interpreter can reasonably infer in the manner described above) that I don't believe the subject of my statement is a work of art. But I also indicate that I believe it is a work of art, since I'm asserting that it's Romanesque, and it's common knowledge that Romanesque artifacts (statues, sculptures, buildings, etc.) are works of art. Thus I represent myself as suffering from a conflicted state of mind. The incongruity here is reminiscent of the incongruity in 'The President signed a piece of paper' as uttered by an English⁺ speaker. In both cases one is warranted in rejecting the pragmatically inconsistent statement. But pragmatic inconsistency is, of course, consistent with truth. Moore's paradox provides a nice example. Consider the sentence 'It's raining, but I don't believe that it's raining'. Both conjuncts may well be true, and yet I would represent myself with contradictory beliefs were I to utter it (Williamson 2000). Singular negative existential statements provide another example.

(24) Ned Stark doesn't exist.

According to some authors—perhaps most notably, Gottlob Frege—the use of a proper name is accompanied by the presupposition that it has a referent.¹⁵ So a speaker who sincerely utters (24) presupposes that there is something to which 'Ned Stark' refers, but also believes that there isn't any such thing. In this case, however, there's no better way to achieve the purpose for which a speaker would utter (24).

¹⁵ "If anything is asserted there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have reference" (Frege 1892, p. 162).

What better way is there to say that Ned Stark doesn't exist than to utter 'Ned Stark doesn't exist'? Furthermore, the speaker's conflicting state of mind itself plays a role in communicating the proposition that Ned Stark doesn't exist, because it serves to signal the fact that she wants to disavow something which, in the relevant context, is a live possibility, namely, that Ned Stark exists. In other words, the speaker strategically presupposes that there is something to which 'Ned Stark' refers in order to contradict herself and thereby signal that the presupposition ought to be abandoned.¹⁶ Nothing like this is true in the case that interests us, however. When I utter (17), my apparently conflicted mental state itself serves no conversational purpose.

What I want to emphasize is that an utterance of (24), or of 'The king of France doesn't exist', is pragmatically inconsistent but surely true. Likewise, the monist can say, (17) is pragmatically inconsistent but true nevertheless. What distinguishes (17) from a true negative existential statement is that the pragmatic inconsistency generated by an utterance of the latter serves a communicative purpose. Since the inconsistency associated with (17) doesn't, we're disposed to negate it. Of course, the use of negation mustn't be descriptive, since we're rejecting (17) on grounds that are consistent with its truth. So, the monist concludes, (17) must be an instance of metalinguistic negation.

Suppose I want to cancel the implicature that using 'the piece of alloy' would typically trigger. How might I do so? By saying something that would render a particular interpretive inference unreasonable. One straightforward way of doing so is by prefacing my speech with something like,

(25) The piece of alloy is a work of art.

If I were to utter (25), for example, and I were to give no sign of insincerity or of being intentionally uncooperative, then it would be unreasonable for the interpreter to infer from my later uses of 'the piece of alloy' that I don't believe the alloy is a work of art. After all, if I were to utter (25), I would manifestly express my belief that the piece of alloy is a work of art. I wouldn't be able to achieve my communicative purpose in this case—canceling the implicature that 'the piece of alloy' triggers—if I had used 'the statue'. Unlike (25), however, use of 'the piece of alloy' in (17) isn't necessary for achieving my communicative purpose, since what I want to say could be conveyed just as well by using 'the alloy statue'. That's why my use of 'the piece of alloy' in (17) triggers the problematic implicature.

The account I've offered makes a prediction that's worth considering. If one preemptively cancels the implicature that typically accompanies the use of 'the piece of alloy' and then utters (17), no pragmatic inconsistency should result. So, if the unacceptability of (17) is rooted in this inconsistency, then one should expect (17) to be acceptable in such a setting. I think this expectation is more or less satisfied. Consider:

¹⁶ I'm relying here on Mark Crimmins (1998), Kendall Walton (1990), and especially Frederick Kroon (2000, 2004).

(26) I was at the junk yard the other day and I saw a piece of alloy that had to be a work of art. The form and structure were remarkable! If I had to bet, I would bet the piece of alloy is Romanesque.

My informants tell me that, embedded in the discourse fragment above, (17) sounds significantly better than it does in isolation. Some say it's still a little awkward, but that may be because it's more natural to use an anaphoric pronoun in the last sentence, rather than 'the piece of alloy'. Consider:

(27) I was at the junk yard the other day and I saw a piece of alloy that had to be a work of art. The form and structure were remarkable! If I had to bet, I would bet it's Romanesque.

Without exception my informants tell me that (27) is perfectly acceptable.

The literature on discourse anaphora is vast and complicated, but according to one highly attractive and widely accepted theory, 'it' in (27) is, at the level of logical form, a disguised definite description that inherits its descriptive content from the antecedent determiner and the adjoining clause.¹⁷ Thus 'it' in (27) amounts to *the piece of alloy that is a work of art*. Note that, according to the 'disguised description' analysis of unbound anaphora, the descriptive material in the subordinate phrase, 'that is a work of art', is governed by the sortal term 'piece of alloy'. "In general, when using a sortally governed phrase such as 'the statue that...' or 'The piece of alloy that...', the sort that might be relevant to subsequent predications is simply a function of the governing sortal term ('statue' or 'piece of alloy') and not of the ensuing qualification" (Fine 2003, p. 212). So the felicity of (27) verifies the prediction I drew your attention to above.

The take-home message should be clear: even if monism were true, (17) would be objectionable in a way that warrants (17). Thus the monist can resist Fine in just the way that speakers of English⁺ resist Metaphysicus.

3.2 Objections and replies

Before we shift focus from (17) to (14)–(16), I want to address some worries about the monist-friendly account I've offered.

Objection. Metalinguistic negations are often marked by a change in intonation. Recall the examples that were offered earlier:

- (4) I'm not a SECRETARY; I'm an ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT.
 (6) One shouldn't make RESOLUTIONS; one should have GOALS.

¹⁷ See Gareth Evans (1977), Irene Heim (1990), Stephen Neale (1990), Gennaro Chierchia (1995), and Paul Elbourne (2005). The most basic consideration in support of this treatment of unbound anaphora stems from so-called 'donkey sentences', e.g., 'Every farmer who owns a donkey beats it.' The 'it' here is anaphorically linked to 'a donkey', but fails to occur within its scope. So the formal syntactic relationship between them appears not to be bondage. Furthermore, the most straightforward translations of the canonical donkey sentence into predicate logic misrepresent its truth-conditions. The hypothesis that 'it' is a disguised definite provides an explanation and a satisfactory specification of truth-conditions that appears to cohere nicely with related data. See especially Heim (1990) and Neale (1990).

A referee points out that even if, in this context, 'it' were to function as a referring device, the felicity of (27) would support my point.

There are other examples, as well.

- (28) Lovers don't COPULATE; they MAKE LOVE.
 (29) The troops aren't DEMOCRATS or REPUBLICANS; they're AMERICANS.

But (17) needn't be read with an intonational focus in order to be acceptable. In fact, one naturally reads it without any change in tone. So it mustn't really be an instance of metalinguistic negation.¹⁸

Reply. Two things should be kept in mind. First, it's true that paradigm examples of metalinguistic negation involve intonational focus, but even some of the examples in the early literature on this subject didn't require that there be any such focus.¹⁹ Recall one of our earlier examples:

- (5) For a pessimist like him, the glass isn't half full.

Second, cases that naturally elicit a focus effect involve a pair of sentences, one of which rectifies the infelicity present in the other. The intonation is supposed to make it easier for one's interpreter to detect the error. But (17), like (5), is a stand-alone sentence; when one utters or reads it, one isn't necessarily intending to contrast it with some other sentence. This explains why it doesn't naturally generate an intonational focus. The focus is supposed to highlight a contrast, and when there's just one sentence by itself, there isn't any contrast to be highlighted. If one combines (17) with a follow-up sentence—reading both in one breath—then there is a natural intonational focus.

- (30) The piece of ALLOY isn't Romanesque; but the STATUE is.

When I present Fine's MASTER ARGUMENT in an informal conversation to undergraduates or curious civilians, I find myself combining the premises into one complex construction that elicits intonational changes in pronunciation. Furthermore, as (30) illustrates, the change in intonation naturally focuses on the implicature-triggering terms that generate the pragmatic infelicity, just as the intonation changes in (4), (6), (28), and (29) center around the infelicity one wants to highlight. So, rather than presenting a challenge to my monist-friendly proposal, the interaction between metalinguistic negation and intonational focus provides some additional evidence in favor of it.

Objection. An utterance of (17) doesn't feel pragmatically inconsistent.

Reply. Maybe, but neither does an utterance of (24), and yet, plausibly, it is. At any rate, it might be that when one says something like, 'The piece of alloy isn't the sort of thing that could be Romanesque', as so many often do, one is voicing an inchoate sense that (17) is pragmatically inconsistent. After all, naive speakers aren't always sensitive to the difference between assertability and truth; so the feeling that (17) is pragmatically inconsistent, that there's no possible context in

¹⁸ This is one of two objections due to Ofra Magidor (2011). The second is that there is no truth-consistent explanation of the unacceptability of (17). But the account I sketched in Sect. 3.1 addresses her second worry.

¹⁹ See Horn (1985, p. 133).

which it would be assertable, is expressed in terms that imply there's no possible situation in which it would be true.

Objection. There are objections to monism for which the strategy in Sect. 3.1 can't work. For example, imagine two rooms separated by a thick parchment. The man who inhabits one room writes a message to his wife on one side of the parchment as the woman who inhabits the other room writes a message to her husband on the other side of the parchment. Fine (2000) believes that both the man and the woman managed to write a letter, and that the letters they managed to write are distinct coincidents. After all, Fine says, the front and back sides of the man's letter differs from the front and back sides of the woman's. The man's letter is addressed to his wife and, let's assume, it says that he has been cheating on her, while the woman's letter is addressed to her husband and, we may suppose, it says that she has been completely faithful. So, Fine continues, the letters have different properties and must, therefore, be distinct. But since one and the same sortal term, 'letter', occurs in each premise of the argument, the descriptions don't express different implicatures. Without a difference in implicated content, one can't diagnose the argument in a way that coheres with monism.

Reply. Why think that the conclusion of this argument challenges monism? It would pose a challenge only if the letter the man wrote is spatially coincident with the letter the woman wrote. But we needn't think that the letters spatially coincide, because we can identify the letter the man wrote with the series of inscriptions he produced, and we can identify the letter the woman wrote with the series of inscriptions that she produced, and the two series of inscriptions are spatially disjoint. Given this conception of letters, the conclusion is compatible with monism.

Now Fine (2000, p. 356) presents a case that may appear to devastate my reply:

Fluent wishes to write a letter to his elder daughter, who only understands Prittle, and a letter to his younger daughter, who only understands Prattle. The peculiarities of Prittle and Prattle are such that the same inscriptions will often serve to convey different contents in the two languages and, being adept at exploiting these peculiarities, Fluent is able to write the letter to his elder daughter in Prittle while simultaneously writing the letter to his younger daughter in Prattle. The first letter (under a rough translation from Prittle) begins as follows: "I write this letter, dear first-born, in order to demonstrate my skill at parallel penmanship—for as I write this letter to you in Prittle, I am simultaneously writing a letter to your sister in Prattle..." and the second letter begins in a similar vein, though is much more florid in its style and extravagant in its claims. It seems, for much the same reasons as before, that the two letters are distinct.

What I want to say about this case is that Fluent writes a single letter that conveys two contents by means of one and the same inscription. Which content one recovers from the inscription depends on how one interprets it. But contents aren't spatially coincident; they're abstract. The basic strategy in all such cases is going to involve a reasonable-sounding alternative description either in terms of spatially distinct inscriptions (letters), or one and the same inscription expressing different contents. The disjunctive strategy here corresponds, I think, to a genuine ambiguity in the way

we use sortal terms like ‘letter’ and ‘novel’. Compare: ‘That’s not the letter/novel I wrote, it’s merely a copy’ (meaning the token inscriptions on that piece of paper are a facsimile of the token inscriptions I actually produced); ‘A lot of people own Martin’s letter/novel’ (meaning many people own copies of the inscriptions that George R.R. Martin produced).

This concludes my survey of possible objections. Perhaps there are lingering worries. At all events, my hope is that the preceding discussion advances the dialectic in a new direction. To summarize, the monist is confronted with a challenging datum: ‘The piece of alloy is Romanesque’ is problematic in a way that makes its negation, ‘The piece of alloy isn’t Romanesque’, acceptable. The monist has an empirically well-supported hypothesis about why the datum obtains which coheres with her metaphysical doctrine and which vitiates the inference to non-identity. The explanation relies on independently motivated, generally available resources. No ad hoc assumptions need to be made. I conclude, therefore, that Fine’s MASTER ARGUMENT fails to end the standoff between the monist and her rivals.

How general is the strategy I’ve implemented here? Can it be applied to other Fine arguments? I address these questions below.

3.3 Loose ends

The discussion has focused on (17). But what about (14)–(16)?

- (14) #The plastic is open/shut.
- (15) #The piece of metal is genuine/counterfeit.
- (16) #I spent the piece of metal.

It’s important that we address each example, because part of Fine’s strategy, as I understand it, is to achieve victory by demoralizing his adversary. With a barrage of quick and compelling arguments, none of which can be resisted by appeal to non-transparency, Fine hopes to convince his interlocutor that it would be more prudent to surrender than to fend off every attack individually. One or two arguments may fail, but the cumulative effect of Fine’s assault is supposed to exhaust the monist into submission. A satisfactory defense of monism should boost morale. By addressing several of Fine’s arguments, I hope to do just that. One should keep in mind, however, that there’s no reason to expect the monist to have a fully general defensive strategy. Sometimes arguments for non-identity fail because of non-transparency (see footnote 7), sometimes they fail because they confuse metalinguistic and descriptive negation (recall (1)–(3)), and at other times they fail because a premise is straightforwardly objectionable (examples of this sort are easy to think up). So it wouldn’t undermine the strategy I’ve recommended if it weren’t fully general. My objective is to provide the monist with one more weapon in her arsenal, not to win the war for her. With this in mind, let’s consider (14)–(16).

Fine writes: “... we can say that the door is open or shut but we cannot very well say that the plastic from which it is made is open or shut; a penny can be genuine or counterfeit but not the piece of metal, and I can spend the penny but not the piece of metal...” (Ibid.). Consider the last argument in this passage:

- (31) I spent the penny.
 (16') I didn't spend the piece of metal.
 (32) Therefore, the penny isn't the metal.

The penny and the piece of metal spatially coincide, so it follows that monism is false.

Now it seems to me that the monist has two options here. She could (i) offer an explanation of why we're disposed to accept (16') consistent with her doctrine, or she could (ii) challenge the validity of the inference on the grounds that 'I spent ξ ' is a non-transparent environment. Suppose she opts for (i); she could then say that the grammatical object of 'spent' has to carry the presupposition that its denotation has monetary value, otherwise infelicity results. 'The piece of metal' isn't accompanied by any such presupposition, whereas 'the penny' is; that's why (16) is marked, whereas (31) is perfectly acceptable. But suppose she opts for (ii). She could then rely on the argument below to display the fallacy in the argument above.

- (33) I spent the piece of gold.
 (34) I didn't spend the piece of metal.
 (35) Therefore, the piece of gold isn't the piece of metal.

Pieces of gold just are pieces of metal. It follows, then, that 'spent' generates a non-transparent context.

Why should (15) be unacceptable if the penny is the piece of metal? Use of 'the piece of metal' triggers an implicature that makes it a poor way of expressing the belief that the penny is genuine/counterfeit. It's common knowledge that pennies are designed to have a specific shape. So if a speaker uses 'the penny', she conveys that she believes the subject of her speech was designed to have that shape. But if the speaker decides to use 'the piece of metal' instead, she implicates that she doesn't believe the subject of her speech was designed to have a specific shape. After all, if she did believe that the subject of her speech was designed to have a specific shape, she could just as easily have used 'the metal penny' (or simply 'the penny', since it's common knowledge that pennies are made of metal) thus communicating this additional information in conformity with the maxim *Be informative!*, but she chose not to. Interpreters can thus reasonably infer by means of this maxim that the speaker doesn't have the relevant belief. It's common knowledge that something can be genuine/counterfeit, in the relevant sense, only if it was designed to have a specific shape, a shape resembling government issued currency. So if a speaker sincerely utters (15) she implicates that she doesn't believe the subject of her speech was designed to have a specific shape, but represents herself as simultaneously believing that it does.

Suppose the door is the plastic. Why, then, is (14) unacceptable? One can give two answers. The first takes the same shape as before. Use of 'the plastic' triggers an implicature that makes it a poor way of expressing the belief that the door is open/shut. It's common knowledge that doors are designed to perform a specific function. So if a speaker uses 'the door', she conveys that she believes the subject of her speech performs that function. But if the speaker decides to use 'the plastic' instead, she implicates that she doesn't believe the subject of her speech performs that

function. After all, she could just as easily have used ‘the plastic door’, thus conveying some additional information in conformity with Be informative!, but she chose not to. Interpreters can thus reasonably infer by means of this maxim that the speaker doesn’t believe the subject performs the relevant function. Now it’s also common knowledge that something can be open/shut, in the relevant sense, only if it can perform the function that doors are designed for. So if a speaker sincerely utters (14) she implicates that she doesn’t believe the subject of her speech performs the function characteristic of doors, but represents herself as simultaneously believing that it does.

The strategy I’ve suggested on behalf of the monist enjoys some degree of general applicability. It thus vindicates the suggestion (made in passing earlier) that differences between the spheres of discourse belonging to artifactual sorts (statues, doors, pennies, etc.) and material sorts (alloy, clay, plastic, etc.) merely reflect our conventional descriptive practices, not the metaphysics of medium-sized objects. Barring some special consideration to think otherwise, the monist needn’t feel any pressure to abandon her doctrine.

One might provide an alternative explanation for the unacceptability of (14). Consider:

(36) ??The door, and my present, are open.

To my ear, (36) sounds zeugmatic. One would utter it only if one were punning on ‘open’. Why does (36) elicit the feeling of zeugma? The answer, I suggest, is that the interpretation of ‘open’ is sortal-relative, and the relevant sortal is inherited from the governing noun in subject position. ‘The door is open’ is elliptical for ‘the door is an open door’. ‘My present is open’ is elliptical for ‘my present is an open present’. The interpretation of ‘open’ can be relativized to just one sortal—either ‘door’ or ‘present’—not both. So (36) elicits the kind of feeling that paradigm examples of zeugma elicit. Compare: ‘She came in wearing a beautiful dress and a bright smile’. Now suppose you know that my present just is the door. (Knowing that my door was damaged, you purchase a new one and give it to me as a birthday gift.) It would be silly for me to try to convince you otherwise by arguing on the grounds that the door but not my present is open, since I would be illicitly relying on the semantically shifty character of ‘open’. Now consider (14). Given the shiftiness of ‘open’, it amounts to ‘The plastic is an open plastic’, which we may well suppose is false. But then the conclusion that the door is distinct from the constituent plastic isn’t sanctioned by Leibniz’s Law, since the property we would be ascribing to the door by using ‘open’ would be different from the property we would be ascribing to the plastic.

In closing, I’d like to make one final observation. I’ve been arguing that (14), (15), and (17) are, from the monist’s perspective, best interpreted as instances of metalinguistic negation. Insofar as they’re acceptable to the monist, they exploit metalinguistic negation. I haven’t been arguing that Fine intended them to be so interpreted. Indeed, he manifestly didn’t, just as Metaphysicus didn’t intend for (2) to be interpreted as an instance of metalinguistic negation. But presumably both Fine and Metaphysicus intend for their arguments to be interpreted so as to render

the premises acceptable to their interlocutors. After all, they're trying to convince their rivals that they ought to change their minds. My point is that these two intentions are in conflict. Interpreting (14'), (15'), and (17) in the way that Fine intends renders them unacceptable to the monist; interpreting them in such a way as to make them acceptable to the monist renders the corresponding arguments invalid. Either way you look at it, some Fine arguments fail.

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