

Book Review

Semantic Relationism, by Kit Fine. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2007.
Pp. viii + 146. H/b £45.00.

In *Semantic Relationism*, Kit Fine presents and defends his *relationist* view of the nature of thought and language. According to Fine, the relationist view best explains the fundamental but theoretically neglected cognitive and linguistic fact that thinkers and speakers can think and say the very same thing — that they can be *same-thinkers* and *same-sayers* (p. 1). The relationist view can also, Fine argues, solve certain longstanding puzzles in the philosophy of language and mind, including Russell's antinomy of the variable, Frege's puzzle 'in its various guises' (p. 5), and Kripke's puzzle; and it promises to illuminate other puzzles, including, but not limited to, Mates's puzzle and the paradox of analysis (postscript). Finally, Fine argues that the relationist view can accomplish all of these things while adhering to a new and plausible referentialist approach to the nature of thought and language. This referentialist approach respects and is constrained by key aspects of the rival Fregean approach, but makes no appeal to senses.

Even as this minimal sketch suggests, Fine's ambition is to solve or contribute to solving some of the most fundamental and longstanding problems in analytic philosophy. A very attractive feature of the book is that it combines careful, detailed argumentation with inspiration and synoptic vision for the bigger picture. Fine is explicit early on that the book provides only a "bare-bones" account, simply intended to convey the essential ideas' (p. 5). Fine is right, and there is much more to say, both in filling out the details of his account, and in tracing consequences for the bigger picture. But on the basis of both what Fine says and what he leaves unsaid, one can reasonably expect Fine's book to be a spur for thinking about these issues for many years to come.

Fine's semantic relationist view (henceforth 'SEMANTIC RELATIONISM') can be understood as the conjunction of the following three theses:

- (1) RELATIONISM: same-thinking and same-saying are semantically relational in nature; they are irreducible relations of intrinsic semantic features (p. 3).
- (2) COORDINATION: coordination is the primary semantic relation (p. 5).
- (3) REFERENTIALISM: Reference is the primary intrinsic semantic feature (p. 5, 22, 53).

I return to the three theses of SEMANTIC RELATIONISM in a moment, but let me first consider Fine's motivations for his view.

According to Fine, SEMANTIC RELATIONISM best explains an absolutely fundamental but relatively neglected cognitive and linguistic fact — the fact that thinkers and speakers can think and say the same thing 'from one occasion to the next' (p. 1) and across their differences in perspectives. In general, cognitive and linguistic sameness are not trivial to theorize. For example, cognitive and linguistic sameness do not consist, in general, in coreference, or even in coreference together with sameness of expression or representational vehicle (p. 41). Cognitive and linguistic sameness are, however, integral to a range of cognitive and linguistic phenomena. For example, expressing one's thought in language requires one to be able to say what one thinks (p. 86); explicit reasoning requires being able to express or think the same thought throughout its occurrences in different premises (p. 1); memory requires being able to remember what one was thinking earlier (p. 1–2); tracking an object in continuous observation requires thinking about the object as the same over time (p. 67); communication requires being able to transmit a thought from speaker to speaker (p. 1); reporting the sayings or attitudes of another requires being able to say what the another has said or thought (p. 1, 87).

Typically, referentialists reject such identifications. They reject the idea that what is said is the expression in language of what is thought. They reject the idea that communication transmits thought, and that reporting attitudes requires a match between what the reporter says and what the reported thinker thinks. Fine does not say much in response to these philosophers (although see pp. 76–7, 88–9, 92). This is of a piece with the dialectical position that Fine is trying to occupy — a position that is referentialist, but not in any standard sense, and that tries to appropriate Fregean notions, motivations, and ambitions, arguing that they are better understood from a referentialist point of view. Fine seems to take the Fregean alternative to be the 'more serious challenge' (p. 42; cf. also p. 70) to SEMANTIC RELATIONISM. He takes standard referentialist views and dialectical moves to be implausible on their face (pp. 35, 76) and beset by numerous problems (pp. 40–2, 68–70, 80–3). And he develops theoretical apparatus, in particular, the related distinctions between semantic facts and semantic requirements, and classical and manifest consequence, so as to allow his view to respect a key Fregean constraint, namely that of the 'transparency of meaning' (pp. 43–50, 60–5). Of course, Fine does criticize the Fregean view. I return to that below. But one is left with the impression that Fine thinks that past incarnations of the referentialist view have failed to engage with the deeper cognitive and linguistic motivations for the Fregean view, especially those involving the 'transparency of meaning'. It is another strength of Fine's view that SEMANTIC RELATIONISM is subject to no such charge.

But SEMANTIC RELATIONISM is under a reciprocal threat of dialectical appropriation, for the Fregean will counter that SEMANTIC RELATIONISM is not an alternative to the Fregean view but an elaboration of it. This is a charge that Fregeans have levelled against referentialist views before (see, e.g. Graeme Forbes (*Philosophical Review*, 96 (1987), pp. 455–8) and A. D. Smith's (*Mind*, 97 (1988), pp. 136–7) reviews of Nathan Salmon's *Frege's Puzzle*; for another example, see section 6 of Gareth Evans's response ('Understanding Demonstratives', reprinted in his *Collected Papers*, Oxford University Press) to John Perry's 'Frege on Demonstratives' (*Philosophical Review*, 86 (1977), pp. 474–97), but one need not find these past invocations of the charge plausible in order to appreciate its resonance when directed against Fine. I explain in the context of critically elaborating the three theses of SEMANTIC RELATIONISM, with special attention to COORDINATION.

As is strongly suggested by Fine's title, Fine takes RELATIONISM to be the key innovation of SEMANTIC RELATIONISM. Fine explains the relationist idea as a kind of anti-supervenience idea (although Fine does not use 'supervenience') — one that denies the *intrinsicist* idea that there can be 'no difference in intrinsic semantic relationship without a difference in intrinsic semantic feature' (p. 23). For example, the relationist holds that there can be a difference in the semantic relation between the *pairs* of expressions 'Cicero', 'Cicero', and 'Cicero', 'Tully' (e.g. in 'Cicero is Cicero' and 'Cicero is Tully') even though there is no difference in intrinsic semantic feature between 'Cicero' and 'Tully'. Semantic relations do not supervene on intrinsic semantic features. Fine compares the view to that of the substantivalist about space who holds that objects have spatial locations, but where spatial relations do not supervene on spatial location (p. 4; for another comparison involving the metaphysics of space, see p. 24).

However, it is not clear that the real action in SEMANTIC RELATIONISM is in RELATIONISM. RELATIONISM sets out Fine's view schematically. COORDINATION and REFERENTIALISM fill out specifics. The specific content of Fine's view depends both upon what are taken to be the primary intrinsic semantic features and the primary forms of semantic relation. This invites two related suspicions. The first is that RELATIONISM is plausible only given REFERENTIALISM: were primary semantic features to be conceived of differently, perhaps RELATIONISM would drop out, even while leaving much of the rest of Fine's view intact. Most pertinent for Fine's aims in the book is whether such a possibility exists for a Fregean alternative that rejects REFERENTIALISM, and that insists that the primary intrinsic semantic feature is that of having a sense that semantically determines its reference. Second, there seems to be no bar to making intrinsic semantic features such as to have a certain kind of relation built right into them. There is precedent for this on Fine's view already. On Fine's understanding of the intrinsic/relational distinction, semantic *relations* can be *intrinsic* to *pairs* (and generally n-tuples) of expressions (p. 22). But there is another point of relevance. Fine's primary intrinsic semantic

feature is reference, but presumably reference is not an intrinsic feature of an expression in the way that mass is an intrinsic feature of an object. That is not the relevant notion of intrinsic (if it is, then having a sense can be intrinsic in that sense too). So even if having a sense is intrinsicalist in nature, in Fine's sense, it may be relationist in another sense, again while leaving much of the rest of Fine's view intact. These suspicions undermine the idea that RELATIONISM is the load-bearing plank in Fine's SEMANTIC RELATIONISM.

What is load bearing in SEMANTIC RELATIONISM is COORDINATION, and the key question for the issue of dialectical appropriation becomes that of the Fregean credentials of coordination. The notion of coordination is introduced as '[t]he principal, though not the only, form of semantic relation' (p. 5), and its importance for the book is clear from the fact that 'the various chapters are loosely organized around how the different forms of coordination might be manifested' (p. 5) in the different puzzles. Unfortunately, despite the key role of coordination in Fine's view, Fine does not provide any definitive account of what coordination is. But we can try to cull some general characterization of coordination from what Fine says explicitly about it, and from the role that it plays in solving the various puzzles.

In Fine's introduction, the reader is told that coordination is 'the very strongest relation of synonymy or being semantically the same' (p. 5). In chapter one ('Coordinating Variables'), Fine tells us that coordination is the relation between and amongst variables in which variables, as a matter of semantic fact, take on the same values (what Fine calls 'semantic connection'). For example, on Fine's view, although the semantics of the variables x and y are the same, and are specified by the (identical) range of values they can take on, the pairs of variables x, y and x, x require separate semantic treatment, and indeed have distinct semantics, 'since the former will assume *any* pair of values from the given range while the latter will only assume identical pairs of values' (p. 24). This paves the way to a solution to Russell's antinomy of the variable, which asks for a semantic difference between ' $x=y$ ' and ' $x=x$ '. In chapter two ('Coordination in Language'), Fine tells us that coordination is the relation between and amongst names or uses of names in which they not only refer to the same object, but also represent the object *as the same*. For example, whereas 'Cicero' and 'Tully' have the same semantics, that of referring to one and the same object, the pairs of names 'Cicero', 'Cicero', and 'Cicero', 'Tully' require separate semantic treatment, and indeed have distinct semantics, since the former pair 'represents the object *as the same*, whereas the second pair does not' (p. 39). This paves the way for a solution to Frege's puzzle applied to names in language, which asks for a semantic difference between 'Cicero is Cicero' and 'Cicero is Tully'. In chapter three ('Coordination in Thought'), Fine, piggy-backing off the account of coordination in language, tells us that coordination is the relation between and amongst thoughts in which thoughts not only

represent the same object, but also represent them *as the same* (p. 72). This paves the way for a solution to Frege's puzzle applied to constituents of thought, which asks for a semantic difference between the thought that Cicero is Cicero and the thought that Cicero is Tully. I return to Fine's treatment of Kripke's puzzle below.

The elucidation of coordination as it occurs in the semantic treatment of variables, names, thoughts, and between thinkers and speakers thus seems to be the idea of the semantics respecting whether speakers and thinkers take variables, names, and thoughts, intra- and inter-personally, to be representing reference *as the same*. And it is at this point that one really does begin to think that SEMANTIC RELATIONISM is not an alternative to Fregean sense, but an elaboration of it, indeed very much a standard elaboration of it. For what is very commonly taken to be the heart of Frege's puzzle is the issue of whether speakers or thinkers are ignorant or knowledgeable, as a matter of their semantic competence, about coreference. This impression is further confirmed when one recognizes that Fine seeks to ensure that coordinated semantic features are such as to meet key Fregean constraints, in particular those of compositionality and transparency. In the end, what Fine really provides is an account of semantic features that insists that semantics respects when speakers and thinkers represent, as a matter of their semantic competence, reference as the same, and that aims to meet constraints of compositionality and transparency. There indeed looks to be very little separating the Fregean from Fine's brand of referentialism.

Fine does argue against the Fregean view, and against the idea that SEMANTIC RELATIONISM is an elaboration of Fregean sense. His charge against the Fregean view is that it is insufficiently articulated: 'the main problem with the Fregean position ... is to say in particular cases what the meaning or sense ... might plausibly be taken to be' (p. 35) or 'to say in particular cases ... what mode[s] of presentation might be' (p. 71). Fine supplements the charge with an example (pp. 36–7, 71–2) that is supposed to make it clear that there is nothing to say about what constitutes a difference in sense or of mode of presentation, but the example will not compel those who allow *de re*, non-descriptive senses. But more to the point, the correct answer to the question of how the senses of two expressions or tokens of a single expression are to be individuated is that difference or sameness is determined by speakers' ignorance or knowledge, respectively, of the representation of reference as the same in virtue of semantic competence alone — that is, it seems, when the representation of reference is not, or is, coordinated.

Against the idea that SEMANTIC RELATIONISM elaborates the Fregean view, Fine also makes a number of points (pp. 57–60), perhaps the most important being that 'sense is not a relational matter' and that 'sense is much more varied than coordinated content'. Against the first point, however, the Fregean ought to contend that RELATIONISM is a schematic thesis, and that although having a sense may be an intrinsic semantic feature and not a

relation of intrinsic semantic features, having a sense can itself be relational in the sense that it involves the coordination of reference. Against the second point, it should be contended that sense is as varied as, and no more varied than, coordination, since sameness of sense is a matter of knowledgeable representation as the same in virtue of semantic competence. But that is coordination. Fine is moved to think otherwise by thinking of senses in some less fundamental way, as descriptive information. But where descriptive information and coordination come apart, the Fregean should insist, with Fine, that it is coordination and not descriptive information that individuates senses. So the Fregean should agree with Fine in denying, 'one can account for ... expressions representing [an] object as the same in terms of how each [expression] represents its object' (p. 42). What matters is knowledgeable representation of the reference as the same in virtue of semantic competence alone (for related discussion, see Imogen Dickie and Gurpreet Rattan, 'Sense, Communication, and Rational Engagement', forthcoming in *dialectica*).

I close now with what seem to me two genuine points of difference between Fine's view and the Fregean view. The first concerns Fine's discussion of Kripke's puzzle in chapter four ('Coordination Between Speakers'). Fine's discussion is essential reading for work on the puzzle. Fine spends roughly the first half of the chapter stripping away surface features of the puzzle, and arrives, in section E, at what he calls 'the deeper puzzle' (substantially the same puzzle was first introduced, I believe, by William Taschek, on pp. 347–8 of his 1998 paper 'On Ascribing Beliefs: Content in Context', *Journal of Philosophy*, 95, pp. 323–53). The deeper puzzle concerns problems with the transitivity of same-saying and same-thinking across the different perspectives of reporter and believer.

Here is a simple example (not Fine's) that can be used to bring up the deeper puzzle. Suppose that at t_1 you and I are jointly attending to an object that we represent in demonstrative thinking as the same. Suppose then that while I continuously attend to the object, your view of the object is obscured until t_2 , at which time we again jointly attend to the object and represent it as the same. Then our demonstrative thinking will be coordinated at t_1 , my demonstrative thinking will be coordinated from t_1 to t_2 , and our demonstrative thinking will be coordinated at t_2 . But your demonstrative thinking will not be coordinated from t_1 to t_2 : you do not, or need not, represent the object as the same from t_1 to t_2 . How can that be? To deal with this kind of problem, Fine bifurcates the notion of coordination, explaining it in terms of the notions of *internal* and *external links*, where

two tokens of a name, when uttered by a single speaker, are *internally linked* just in case the speaker takes them to have the same [reference], and that two tokens of a name, when uttered by different speakers, are *externally linked*, just in case the one speaker's use of the first token is directly derived from the other speaker's use of the second token or vice-versa. (p. 107)

Token names are then coordinated for a single speaker iff they are internally linked, and coordinated for different speakers if they are externally linked (external linkage can be effected in ways other than the direct acquisition of the use of a name from another). In these terms, the deeper puzzle is to resolve the conflict between transitivity and the link principles (p. 107). Fine's solution involves giving up on transitivity. But most relevant here is that both the bifurcation of coordination and the rejection of transitivity distinguish Fine's view from the Fregean view which construes senses as objects. But this way of putting space between his own view and the Fregean view comes with a very significant cost, for once coordination is bifurcated and transitivity is rejected, it is difficult to see how the key phenomenon of *same*-saying and *same*-thinking can possibly be explained.

The second genuine point of difference with the Fregean view becomes apparent through a consideration of a tension between Fine's account of coordination of reference as the same and the other general characterization he provides, namely that of coordination as 'the strongest relation of synonymy or being semantically the same'. The natural Fregean analogue of 'the strongest relation of synonymy or being semantically the same' is that of two expressions being such as to have not only the same first-order or customary sense, but also to have identical higher order senses, all the way up the Fregean hierarchy. If 'representation as the same' is interpreted like this, then Fine's view limits the resources of a Fregean hierarchy by limiting the relations between senses of order greater than one and the senses they are senses of to being one-to-one, rather than many-to-one. This produces what Terence Parsons ('Frege's Hierarchies of Indirect Senses and the Paradox of Analysis', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 6 (1981), 37–57) calls a 'rigid' hierarchy, to be contrasted with the many-to-one 'libertine' hierarchies. (Parsons also argues that rigid hierarchies are reducible to one-level theories that construe words to have only customary senses, and if Parsons is correct this makes Fine's views even more limiting of the resources of hierarchy.) On the other hand, if 'representation as the same' is not interpreted like that and it is possible for two expressions or tokens of a single expression to represent reference as the same even though they can be represented in higher order or meta-representational thinking and language as representing differently, then Fine's general characterization of coordination as 'the strongest relation of synonymy or being semantically the same' must be relinquished. Fine's very brief account of the paradox of analysis (pp. 131–2) suggests that his view conforms to the former option and not the latter. In my view, a libertine hierarchy is an important resource for solving a range of fundamental puzzles (including, but not limited to, the ones Fine discusses), and that its availability constitutes a significant point of advantage for a Fregean view over, even, Fine's subtle and sensitive version of referentialism. But that is a

topic that goes beyond the scope of a review of Fine's engaging and stimulating book.

(Many thanks to Philip Kremer and Sergio Tenenbaum for valuable discussions, and to Sergio for very helpful written comments on a draft of this review.)

Department of Philosophy
University of Toronto
170 St. George Street
Toronto, ON M5R 2M8
Canada

GURPREET RATTAN

doi:10.1093/mind/fzp117