Selection and Propositional Structure

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1 Background

Propositions have truth conditions. Moreover, particular propositions have the particular truth conditions they do as a matter of (absolute) necessity. These facts stand in need of explanation.

Us: one lesson of Lewis's "argument from magic" (Lewis 1986) is that many (most?) contemporary theories in the metaphysics of propositions are not up to the task.

2 Lewis's Dilemma

Lewis's "magic" argument against ersatz modal realism generalizes:

- "Aimers": originally, the world (in Lewis 1986) but for our purposes, also worldly entities (situations, facts, individuals; more generally: urelements).

- "Targets": ersatz worlds in Lewis 1986; here, *propositions* (and also *sets*; §3.2)

- Schematic LD:[1]

    1. Selection between aimer α and target τ is either *internal* or it is *external*.[2]

    2. Suppose it is internal. Then α's selecting τ is grounded in some (relevant) intrinsic feature F of τ's (together with the intrinsic nature of α).

    3. Propositions as characterized by [Theory X] lack such a relevantly intrinsic F. (§3)

    4. So selection is external [on Theory X].   (1-3)

    5. External selection is (problematically) magical.[3]

    6. So selection [on Theory X] is (problematically) magical.   (4, 5)

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[1] See Lewis 1986, 177–87; also van Inwagen 1986 and Jubien 1991.

[2] On Lewis's (1986) classification R is internal when aRb holds in virtue of the intrinsic natures of both a and b; otherwise R is external.

[3] Lewis 1986, 179: "I ask: how can these connections be necessary? It seems to be one fact that somewhere within [a world], a [particular fact or situation obtains]; and an entirely independent fact that [that] world enters into a certain external relation with [certain propositions and not others]. What stops it from going the other way? Why can't anything coexist with anything here: any pattern of goings-on within [a] world, and any pattern of external relations of [a] world to various propositions?"

3 Theories of Propositions

3.1 The Simple Theory[4]

- Propositions have no internal "structure": they are abstract, mereological simples that (somehow) possess their truth conditions primitively and fundamentally.

- Unsurprisingly, the Simple Theory does not evade LD. (Appealing to intrinsic "representational" properties doesn't help).

3.2 Set-like and set-theoretic propositions

3.2.1 Stalnaker propositions[5]

- Propositions are truth conditions (sets of worlds).
- But set-theoretic structure is insufficient to evade LD.

3.2.2 Structured propositions

i. Russellian structure[6]
   - Constituents are "ordinary" objects and properties.
   - Constituents are not parts. (Salmón p.c.)
ii. Fregean structure[7]
   - Constituents are "senses" or "conceptual contents"
   - Constituents are not parts. (Frege 1923/1963)

Propositional constituents are insufficient to evade LD.

3.2.3 Selection as overlap

i. Lewis's *Parts of Classes* (Lewis 1991)
ii. Stalnaker revisited
iii. Structure revisited
   - Fregean mereologically structured propositions
   - Russellian mereologically structured propositions

Verdict: The most promising view, when confining ourselves to the internal horn of Lewis's Dilemma, is a Russellian view of structured propositions on which constituents are (mereological proper) parts.

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[4] Merricks 2015; also Bealer 1998, van Inwagen 2004, and Keller 2022.

[5] Stalnaker 1978, 1984.

[6] Russell 1903, 1904; Salmón 1986.

[7] Frege 1892/1960, 1918/1956.

4 External Selection

4.1 Syntactically structured propositions (King 2007, 2009, 2019)

- (Conventional) interpretation of syntactic predication explains the selection facts.
- Selection is external.

4.2 Propositions as theoretical posits (Richard 1990, Forthcoming)

- Selection facts explained by the roles propositions are posited to play in semantic theorizing.
- Selection is external.

4.3 Instrumentalism about structured propositions (Simchen Forthcoming)

- Selection mediated via non-realistic (instrumental) representations of content.
- Selection is external.

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