

Adjectives and Contingent Identity

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0. Introduction to the Problem.

- The Statue and the Lump of Clay it's made of.

The statue cannot survive being squashed flat.

The lump of clay can survive being squashed flat.

Therefore, the statue and the lump are not identical.

- The Person and her Body.

The person might have (in the future) a different body.

The body cannot have (in the future) a different body.

Therefore, the person and her body are not identical.

⇒ A *Materialist* believes that material objects like statues and people (as well as lumps of clay and human bodies) are nothing over and above the matter that constitutes them, and so accepts the identity claims that are denied in the conclusions of these arguments.

⇒ In order to reject the soundness of these arguments, Materialists typically claim that although both premises are true, the conclusion doesn't follow due to *opacity*: whether or not the predicate 'ξ might (in the future) have a different body' applies to a given thing depends on whether it's being thought of as a person or as a body, and therefore constitutes a "context" in which substitution of co-denoting terms is not licensed,¹ since we may be prompted to think of an object in different ways depending on the phrase we're using to denote it. This opacity is generally achieved semantically by adopting some version of context-dependent counterpart theory, *e.g.*, á la David Lewis (1971). [Explain.]

- In a recent paper, Kit Fine (2003) (the archenemy of Materialism) aims to block objections to this kind of argument for such a non-identity conclusion by contriving versions of the argument to which he regards as indefensible not only the *opacity* response, but also any other response that could be given.

¹I'm using the word "context" here in the old Quinean sense, where a context is a phrasal environment for a phrase, typically a sentence with a blank in it that will be made into a sentence by putting in the appropriate type of phrase for the blank. Some now prefer to call this a "linguistic context," but I don't find that helpful, since I think of what we sometimes call semantics contexts, as being just as much linguistic contexts as the old Quinean ones are.

The following are representative examples.

In these first two examples, we have a statue made from some metal alloy (e.g., bronze) that forms a *piece* of metal alloy. We refer to them as “the statue” and “the piece of alloy.”

- (1) The statue is badly-made
It's not the case that the piece of alloy is badly-made

Therefore, the statue is not identical to the piece of alloy.
- (2) The statue is valuable
It's not the case that the piece of alloy is valuable

Therefore, the statue is not identical to the piece of alloy.
- (3) The dollar is counterfeit,
It's not the case that the piece of paper from which the dollar's made is counterfeit,

Therefore, the dollar is not identical to the piece of paper from which it's made.
- (4) The door is closed
It's not the case that the piece of wood from which door's made is closed

Therefore, the door is not identical to the piece of wood from which it's made.

- Where the denotations of s and t are coincident material objects, the general form of the argument is:

$$(5) \quad \frac{\Phi(s) \quad \neg\Phi(t)}{\therefore s \neq t}$$

Four forms for the materialist's response:

- A. Referential Shift: At least one of ‘ s ’ and ‘ t ’ doesn't refer to the same thing in the premise as it does in the conclusion.
- B. Predicational Shift: The predicate ‘ $\Phi(\xi)$ ’ doesn't express the same thing in the first premise as it does in the second premise.
- C. Opacity: Whether the predicate ‘ $\Phi(\xi)$ ’ applies to a thing depends on how that thing is described/conceived of/referred to, and so substitution is not licensed, so that the premises cannot be used for reasoning (contrapositively) with Leibniz's law, since one of the defining marks of opaque predicates is that they cannot serve as substitution instances for the schematic version of Leibniz's Law, which, effectively, just is the argument form in (5).²
- D. Bite the Bullet: Deny the truth of the premises by insisting that the predicate applies either to both or to neither. One of the premises is not true.³

²Neither Fine (2003) nor King (2006) in his response to Fine, distinguish the Opacity response as a separate response from the first two. I, however, am inclined to think that a particular opacity response may but need not be a version of the other two kinds of response. [Explain.]

³It's notable—and strange—that neither Fine nor King really consider this option.

I. Fine's distinction: Relativity to a Respect versus Relativity to a Comparison Class.⁴

- Relativity to a Respect:

- (6) Joan is qualified for the position of professor,
(adjective is complement of copula, 'for'-phrase gives the respect, and is an *argument* of the adjective);
- (7) Joan is a good dancer,
(adjective is prenominal, nominal gives the respect);
- (8) Joan is good at dancing,
(adjective is complement of copula, at-phrase gives the respect, and is an *argument* of the adjective);
- (9) a. Your Ford pick-up is damaged *as* a truck/*qua* truck,
(adjective is complement of copula, respect is given explicitly by 'as'-phrase);
b. Your Ford pick-up is damaged,
(adjective is complement of copula, respect is given implicitly by subject term);
- (10) Rodin's *Balzac* is a well-made statue,
(adjective is prenominal, nominal gives the respect).
⇒ It's not surprising that 'well-made' (or 'damaged' and 'qualified', for that matter) should behave in relevant respects like 'good' given the semantic connection between them.

- Relativity to a comparison class:

Imagine here that when left implicit, the respects for the adjectives in (11–14) are determined by the context to be the same as those of their counterparts in (6–10).

- (11) Joan is pretty qualified for a twenty-two year old;
(12) Joan is pretty good for an academic;
(13) Your Ford pick-up is pretty damaged, even for a truck,
(14) Rodin's *Balzac* is well-made for a statue that was so poorly received.

The reason for thinking there are two different kinds of relativity here is that they can occur in combination, but neither can occur in iteration.

⁴Fine, in the first paper under discussion (2003), calls the two halves of the distinction "respect relativity" and "sortal relativity," but then in his (2006) reply to King (2006), he calls the distinction "relativity to a sortal status" (respect-relativity) versus "relativity to a sortal standard" (relativity to a comparison class) (e.g., on page 1069).

- In combination:

(15) For a twenty-two year old, Joan is pretty qualified for the position of professor,

(16) For an academic, Joan is pretty good at dancing;

(17) Joan is pretty good at dancing for an academic

(18) Your Ford pick-up is damaged *even* for a truck.

⇒ This example shows that the respect and the comparison class can be the same.

(19) Rodin's *Balzac* is a well-made statue for one that was so poorly received.

- But not in iteration:

(20) a. * Joan is qualified for the position of janitor for the position of professor,

b. * For the position of professor, Joan is qualified for the position of janitor;

(21) a. * Joan is a good dancer roller-skater,

b. * Joan is a good dancer at roller-skating,

Since 'good' requires a respect, imagine that in the following two examples, the respect is given implicitly as "dancer/dancing."

c. * Joan is good for an academic for a roller-skater,

d. * For a roller-skater, Joan is good for an academic.

(22) a. * Joan is good at dancing at roller-skating,

b. * At roller-skating, Joan is good at dancing;

(23) a. * As a contemporary art installation, your Ford pick-up is damaged as a truck,

b. * Your Ford pick-up is damaged as a truck, *qua* art installation,

c. * Your Ford pick-up is damaged for an installation for a truck;

(24) a. * As a statue, *Balzac* is well made as a bird rest,

b. * *Balzac* is well made for a bird rest for a statue.

c. * For a statue, *Balzac* is well made for a bird rest.

- Not every 'for'-phrase gives a comparison class:

An important point that emerges from these considerations is that not every 'for'-phrase gives a comparison class. In (6), for example,

(6) Joan is qualified for the position of professor,

the 'for'-phrase provides an argument to the gradable adjective 'qualified'; not a comparison class, much less a standard, but rather a respect in which Joan is being said to be qualified. Thus I disagree with King when he says,

“... with clear cases of GAs such as ‘qualified’ one can specify the standard relevant to interpreting the GA by means of a prepositional phrase (in this case, a ‘for’ phrase). So we can say things like ‘The person who applied for the position of professor is qualified *for the position of janitor*’, using the prepositional phrase to specify the standard relative to which the person is qualified” (King 2006, 1040).⁵

- Diagnostic for comparison class:

First Stab: Subject must be in the comparison class. But:

(25) Joan is tall for a woman... She’s so tall, she’s even tall for a man.

Second Stab: The comparison class must be *capable of containing the subject*.

II. My distinction: Relativity to a Comparison Class versus Relativity to a Standard within the Comparison Class

- I take it that to be tall for an F is to have (significantly) more height than is *typical* for an F ; to be old for an F is to have (significantly) more age than is typical for an F .

⇒ Since there are different respects in which a degree of height, or of age, can be typical, we would not expect comparison classes alone to fix an interpretation for a gradable adjective, even once required respect-relativity is fixed.

⇒ This is borne out.

(26) (Fara 2000)

- a. Fido is old for a dog,
(Fido is fourteen years old);
- b. Rover is old for a dog,
(Rover is twenty years old).

(27) Harold is light-weight for a jockey,

1. True when standard compares Harold to actual jockeys, who’ve become heavy-weight in recent years;
2. False when standard is normative—what jockeys actually *should* be.

⁵For the sake of smooth interaction, King as adopted Fine’s non-standard terminology, using “relativity to a standard” to mean “relativity to a comparison class.”

III. Kamp's Distinction: Non-intersective versus Non-extensional Adjectives

- An adjective G is *non-intersective* when the following entailment pattern doesn't generally hold:

$$\frac{\begin{array}{l} A \text{ is a } G F \\ A \text{ is an } H \end{array}}{\therefore A \text{ is a } G H}$$

- An adjective is *non-extensional* when the following entailment doesn't generally hold.

$$\frac{\begin{array}{l} A \text{ is a } G F \\ \forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Hx) \end{array}}{\therefore A \text{ is a } G H}$$

In principle, the two distinctions cut across each other, but I know of no gradable adjective that's both extensional and non-intersective. In fact, given my gloss on how relativization to a comparison class works, we'd expect no gradable adjective to be extensional, since what's *typical* for an F is probably never an extensional matter.

Note that many of the adjectives we think of as paradigmatically belonging to either of these classes in fact belong to both:

- 'Good' is both non-intersective and non-extensional.
 - (28) Joan is a good dancer, and as a matter of weird, accidental fact, all and only dancers are philosophers; yet Joan is not a good philosopher (non-extensional);
 - (29) Joan is a good dancer, and she's a philosopher, yet she's not a good philosopher (non-intersective);
- 'Fake' is both non-intersective and non-extensional.
 - (30) Joan is a fake princess, and as a matter of weird, accidental fact, all and only princesses are dancers; yet Joan is not a fake dancer (non-extensional);
 - (31) Joan is a fake princess, and she's a dancer, yet she's not a fake dancer (non-intersective);
- Assuming that when a gradable adjective occurs in prenominal position, the modified noun provides the comparison class that's being relativized to, more run-of-the-mill gradable adjectives are also both non-intersective and non-extensional:

- (32) Roberto is a tall jockey, and as a matter of weird, accidental fact, all and only jockeys are basketball players; yet Roberto is not a tall basketball player (non-extensional);
- (33) Roberto is a tall jockey, and he's also a basketball player, yet he's not a tall basketball player (non-intersective).

IV. Fine's list of dividing adjectives:

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|----------------------|------------------|
| • statue-bronze | • dollar-paper |
| (34) defective | (44) counterfeit |
| (35) substandard | (45) earned |
| (36) well/badly made | (46) spent |
| (37) valuable | • chair-wood |
| (38) ugly | (47) comfortable |
| (39) Romanesque | • door-plastic |
| (40) admired | (48) closed |
| (41) light-weight ? | |
| (42) multi-colored ? | |
| (43) insured | |

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⁶Last modified: "Wednesday, 25 Jul 2007, 11:33"