Symbolic representation and inference: the intuitive idea

Marco Piastra

An aside: *solving equations*

- Solving quadratic equations

$$x^2 + ax + b = 0$$
$$x^2 + 2(a/2)x + a^2/4 - a^2/4 + b = 0$$
$$(x + a/2)^2 - a^2/4 + b = 0$$
$$(x + a/2)^2 = a^2/4 - b$$
$$x = -a/2 \pm (a^2/4 - b)^{1/2}$$

A sequence of steps: at each step a *transformation rule* is applied

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From start to end

Start point: a premise (*i.e. we assume the truth of something*)

End point: a conclusion (*i.e. we state that something else must <u>also</u> be true*)

(*both points are decided by us*)

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Sequence of steps

Each transformation rule is based on a *semantic equivalence*

Each step must be *correct*, in the above sense

Symbolic Reasoning

Symbolic descriptions can *abstract*

- Symbolic descriptions have *abstraction* capabilities:
  for instance, many linguistic phenomena are *systemic*
  (i.e. their structural complexity goes beyond a *pattern-matching*)

Someone may understand English or not.

But no human being can understand the sentence:

"*Sally* ***likes*** *Harry*"

without being able to understand:

"*Harry* ***likes*** *Sally*"

or any other sentences of the kind:

"X ***likes*** Y"

where X and Y can be any nouns or definite descriptions:

"*Ronald's girlfriend* ***likes*** *the cat that Linda brought home yesterday*"

(freely adapted from [Fodor e Phylyshyn, 1988])

Reasoning and schemas: *syllogism*

Many (intuitively) valid arguments obey an abstract schema

All (*humans*) are (*mortals*)
All (*Greeks*) are (*humans*) hence

All (*Greeks*) are (*mortals*)

Abstract schema:

All ***H*** are ***M***
All ***G*** are ***H*** hence

All ***G*** are ***M***

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Abstract schema:

All ***H*** are ***M*** hence
All ***G*** are ***H***
All ***G*** are ***M***

CAUTION!
The position of the line IS relevant:
in this case the schema does <u>not</u> work

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Abstract schema:

All ***H*** are ***M***
All ***G*** are ***M*** hence
All ***G*** are ***H***

CAUTION!
The ordering of sentences IS relevant:
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All (*humans*) are (*mortals*)
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All (*Greeks*) are (*mortals*)

Abstract schema:

All ***H*** are ***M***
All ***G*** are ***H*** hence
All ***G*** are ***M***

The validity of schemas does not depend on *meaning*:

All (*enchanted frogs*) are (*princes*)
All (*princes*) are (*young and beautiful*) hence
All (*enchanted frogs*) are (*young and beautiful*)

Same schema,
different impression

Fallacies (*paralogisms*)

Wrong sequence:

All (*humans*) are (*mortals*)
All (*Greeks*) are (*mortals*)

All (*Greeks*) are (*humans*)

The last two sentences have been switched

Referential ambiguities:

(*Nothing*) is better than (*eternal happiness*)
(*One ham sandwich*) is better than (*nothing*)

(*One ham sandwich*) is better than (*eternal happiness*)

'Obscure' subtleties (obscure for now):

All (*enchanted frogs*) are (*princes*)
All (*enchanted frogs*) are (*young and beautiful*)
There is an (*enchanted frog*) which is (*a young and beautiful princes*)

What do we mean by "all"? Do we need at least one specimen to say "all"?

In such case, the schema would be valid
(*in formal logic it is not, as we will see*)

What is the purpose of *symbolic* logic?

To distinguish correct reasoning
from incorrect reasoning

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To distinguish correct reasoning
from incorrect reasoning

*by the **formal, symbolic** structure alone*

Truth and Possible Worlds: the quest for formal semantics

What is *true*?

- **A world of *cats***

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom	x			
Spot	x		x	
Kitty		x	x	
Felix			x	

- **Sentences about this world**

  "Spot likes Tom" and "Tom does not like Spot"
  "Tom likes himself"
  "Kitty likes Spot" and "Spot likes Kitty"
  "Kitty likes herself"
  "Felix likes Kitty"

  *All these sentences are **true**, in the world above*

What is *true*?

- **A world of *cats***

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom	x			
Spot	x		x	
Kitty		x	x	
Felix			x	

- **Sentences about this world**

  "Spot likes Felix"
  "Spot likes himself"
  "Kitty does not like herself"
  "Felix likes Spot"

  *All these sentences are **false**, in the world above*

What is *true*?

- **A world of *cats***

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom	x			
Spot	x		x	
Kitty		x	x	
Felix			x	

- **Sentences about this world** (i.e. with *generalization*)

  "Every cat likes a cat" *is* ***true***
  "Every cat likes another cat" *is* ***false***
  "Tom does not like any other cat" *is* ***true***
  "Kitty is liked by every cat" *is* ***false***

  "Every cat that likes another cat also likes her/himself" *is* ***?***

How to make a sentence *true*?

- **Consider the sentence**

  "Kitty likes Spot" and "Spot likes Tom"

  It can be made true in many different ways

  "It may be true in many different *possible worlds*"

  Examples (i.e. of other *possible worlds* of cats):

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom				
Spot	x			
Kitty		x		
Felix				

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom	x			
Spot	x		x	
Kitty		x	x	
Felix			x	

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom	x	x	x	x
Spot	x	x	x	x
Kitty	x	x	x	x
Felix	x	x	x	x

How to make a sentence *true*?

- **Consider the sentence**

  "Kitty likes Spot" and "Kitty does not like Spot"

  There is no way to *make it true*

  "There is no *possible world* where this can be true"

Sentences may be related

- **Three sentences**

  1) "Every cat that likes Kitty likes Spot as well"
  2) "Tom likes Kitty"
  3) "Tom likes Spot"

  There is no way to make true sentences 1) *and* 2) *without making sentence* 3) *true as well…*

  (just give it a try…)

*This is just a small subset of **all** possible worlds …*

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom				
Spot	x			
Kitty		x		
Felix		x	x	

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom				
Spot	x	x	x	
Kitty		x	x	
Felix		x	x	

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom	x			
Spot			x	
Kitty		x		
Felix				x

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Tom				
Spot	x	x	x	x
Kitty			x	
Felix		x	x	

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Spot				
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Tom	x	x	x	
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Tom	x	x	x	x
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Sentence 1) is **true** in these worlds

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Tom				
Spot	x			
Kitty		x		
Felix		x	x	

likes	Tom	Spot	Kitty	Felix
Tom				
Spot	x	x	x	
Kitty		x	x	
Felix		x	x	

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Tom	x			
Spot			x	
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Felix				x

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Spot	x	x	x	x
Kitty			x	
Felix		x	x	

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Sentence 2) is **true** in these worlds

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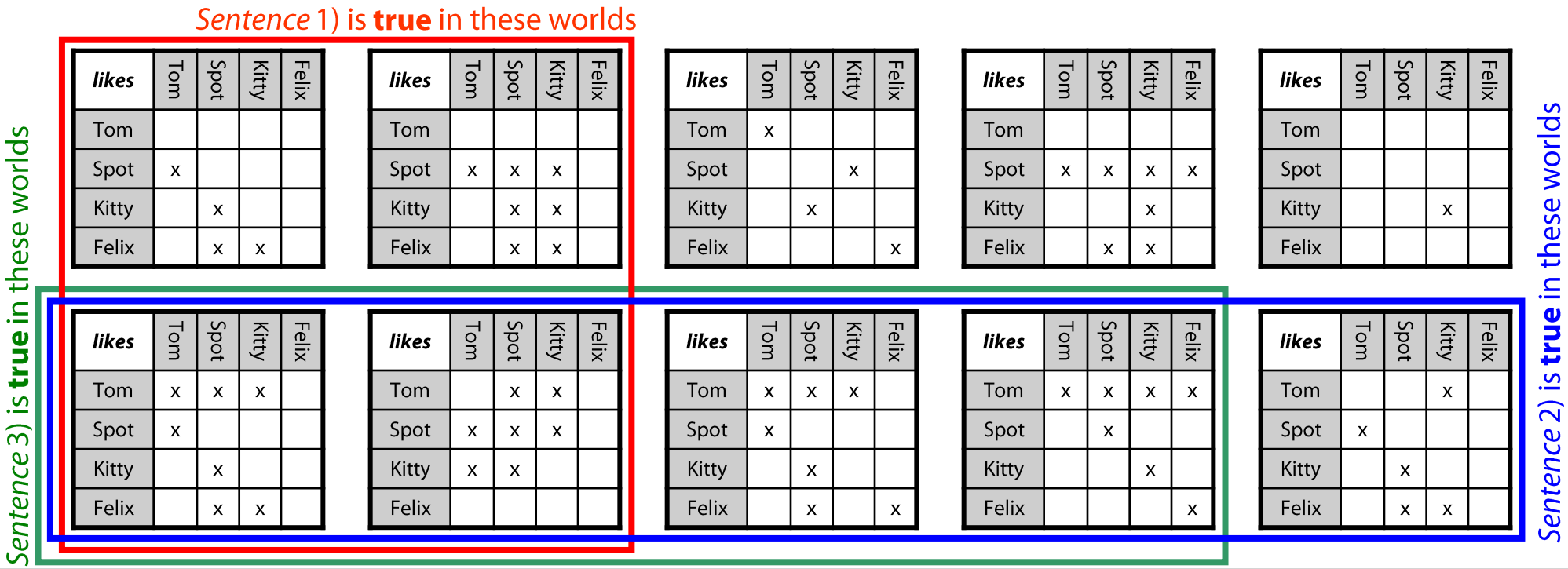
(just give it a try)



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Questions:

Was this just coincidence?

How many possible worlds must we consider in order to be sure?

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Hint:

All of them.