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Idealism and the Identity Theory of Truth

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1 Introduction

Idealism is not as popular as it once was. There was a time when you couldn't kick a stone without hitting an idealist, but now they are few and far between. However, in a recent article, Hofweber (2019) presents a new, and surprising, argument for idealism.¹ His argument is surprising because it starts with an apparently innocent premise from the philosophy of language: that 'that'-clauses do not refer.

I do not think that Hofweber's argument works, and my first aim in this paper is to explain why. However, I agree with Hofweber that what we say about 'that'-clauses has important metaphysical consequences. My second aim is to argue that far from leading us into idealism, denying that 'that'-clauses refer is the first step toward a kind of *direct realism* about belief.

2 Hofweber's idealism

Hofweber's (2019: §2) idealism concerns the relationship between facts and thoughts. Facts come in certain *forms*: e.g. the fact that Socrates is wise has the form of an object's instantiating a property. Thoughts come in corresponding forms: the thought that Socrates is wise has the form of an object's being attributed a property. Why do the forms of thoughts correspond to the forms of facts? The *realist* answers that the forms of our thoughts were shaped to fit the forms of the facts. The *idealist* answers that the forms of the facts were somehow shaped to fit the forms of our thoughts.²

On the face of it, the realist's answer seems by far the more compelling. We even have an idea of how their story would go. It would have something to do with human evolution, and how it was advantageous for our ancestors to have forms of thought which systematically represented the facts they had to deal with. There would be lots of hard details to fill in, but that is the rough shape that the story

¹Versions of this argument can also be found in: Hofweber 2016b: §10.3.4, 2018a.

²Hofweber describes this as *conceptual*, rather than *ontological*, idealism.

would take. In stark contrast, it is hard to imagine the idealist’s story in its barest outlines. How could the forms of *our* thoughts shape the forms of facts? Maybe we could get a grip on the idea if the ‘our’ was wide enough to include some kind of god or transcendental subject. But Hofweber (2019: 701–2) is very clear that when he talks about *our* thoughts, he means the thoughts of ordinary humans, like you and me.

Nevertheless, Hofweber argues that the idealist is right. He (2019: 706–8) begins by focussing on one important difference between idealism and realism. It may not be entirely clear what idealism amounts to, but it seems to imply the following: the possible forms of fact are limited by our possible forms of thought; it is in principle impossible for there to be *structurally ineffable* facts, i.e. facts whose forms we cannot represent in thought. Realism, on the other hand, seems to have the opposite implication: our forms of thought were adapted to represent the local facts we encounter day-to-day, but there is no reason to expect that they will allow us to represent all the facts there are; it is in principle possible for there to be structurally ineffable facts.

In short, idealists, and only idealists, have reason to expect the following to be in principle false:

Structural Ineffability: There is a structurally ineffable fact.

Hofweber’s strategy is to argue for idealism by arguing that *Structural Ineffability* must, as a matter of principle, be false.³

3 From ‘that’-clauses to idealism

Structural Ineffability is a generalisation about facts. How should we understand such a generalisation? Well, facts are meant to be things we refer to with ‘that’-clauses, for example:

- (1) That grass is green is plain to see.

The *Standard View* amongst philosophers is that ‘that grass is green’ appears in (1) as a singular term, referring to the fact that grass is green. ‘That’-clauses do not always refer to facts, for example:

- (2) Simon believes that grass is blue.

³The phrase ‘as a matter of principle’ carries a lot of weight. It must imply that the possible forms of fact are *constrained* by our possible forms of thought. Hofweber is clear that this is what his argument is meant to establish.

Grass is not blue, and so there is no fact that grass is blue. But the Standard View still has it that ‘that grass is blue’ is a referring singular term; it refers to the false *proposition* that grass is blue. Philosophers disagree over the exact relationship between facts and propositions. It may be that they are different kinds of thing, or it may be that facts are just true propositions. But for the time being, that issue does not matter much. The important thing is that on the Standard View, ‘that’-clauses are referring singular terms, sometimes referring to facts, and sometimes referring to propositions.

Hofweber rejects the Standard View. He denies that ‘that’-clauses are referential terms: they do not refer to facts; they do not refer to propositions; they do not refer, or even *purport* to refer, to anything at all. He (2016b: ch. 8) has argued against the Standard View at length, but I will not rehearse his arguments here. The official conclusion of Hofweber’s (2019) paper on idealism is a conditional: *if* you reject the Standard View, *then* you are led to idealism. So for now, let’s assume for the sake of argument that the Standard View is false, and follow the rest of Hofweber’s argument.

If ‘that’-clauses do not refer, then what *do* they do? That is a good question, but Hofweber does not answer it. (We will return to it in §6.) Instead, Hofweber (2019: §3.2) focusses on a challenge facing anyone who rejects the Standard View. Consider the following inference:

(3) Sharon believes that grass is green.

(4) Daniel believes that grass is green.

∴ (5) There is something that Sharon and Daniel both believe.

This inference is, I take it, obviously valid. But how should we account for its validity? It’s easy if you buy the Standard View. On the Standard View, ‘that grass is green’ appears as an ordinary, referential singular term in (3) and (4), and so (5) can be treated as a straightforward first-order existential generalisation:

(5a) $\exists x(\text{Sharon believes } x \text{ and Daniel believes } x)$.

But if we reject the Standard View, we cannot read (5) in this way.

Hofweber solves this problem by distinguishing between two readings of natural language quantification. There is the *external* (or ‘domain-condition’) reading. This is the familiar reading we were all taught in our first-year logic modules. On this reading, ‘There is something such that $F(\text{it})$ ’ is true iff something in the domain satisfies the condition expressed by $F(\dots)$. But there is also the *internal* (or ‘inferential’) reading. On this reading, ‘There is something such that $F(\text{it})$ ’ is equivalent

to the big (perhaps infinite) disjunction of all the instances of $F(x)$ in our language, which we can abbreviate as $\bigvee_x F(x)$. For example, on its internal reading, ‘Someone is wise’ is equivalent to ‘ $\bigvee_x x$ is wise’, which abbreviates ‘Socrates is wise \vee Plato is wise \vee Aristotle is wise $\vee \dots$ ’. This disjunction carries on until it has run through every English instance of ‘ x is wise’.⁴

Now let’s return to (5). If we reject the Standard View, we cannot give the quantification in (5) the external reading. But we can give it the internal reading:

(5b) \bigvee_p (Sharon believes that p and Daniel believes that p).

This is an infinitely long disjunction, where each disjunct is a grammatical English instance of ‘Sharon believes that p and Daniel believes that p ’. Since one disjunct will be ‘Sharon believes that grass is green and Daniel believes that grass is green’, (5b) can be validly inferred from (3) and (4).

The important point here is that, according to Hofweber, quantification ‘over propositions’ or ‘over facts’ must be given the internal reading. It must because quantification over these things is quantification into the position of ‘that’-clauses, and by rejecting the Standard View, we have lost access to the external reading here. So now let’s return to *Structural Ineffability*. This is quantification ‘over facts’, and so must be given the internal reading:

\bigvee_p (Our forms of thought cannot represent that p).

This is an infinitely long disjunction, one disjunct for each English instance of ‘Our forms of thought cannot represent that p ’. But since each disjunct is an *English* instance, it is clear that each disjunct is false. English sentences can be long and complicated, but no English sentence expresses something which transcends the limits of our forms of thought. So the disjunction is false.

Recall that Hofweber’s strategy was to argue for idealism by arguing that *Structural Ineffability* must, as a matter of principle, be false. At this point, then, Hofweber (2019: 716–20) concludes that idealism is true.

4 Higher-order quantification

The aim of the next two sections is to undermine Hofweber’s argument for idealism. One strategy would be to defend the Standard View, but that will not be my strategy, for two reasons. First, I also reject the Standard View (see Trueman

⁴This is Hofweber’s (2019: §3.2) simplified account of internal quantification. His (2016b: ch. 9) full account is more complicated, but these complications will not affect the argument of this paper. (For further discussion, see fn. 12.)

2018a, forthcoming: chs 12–3).⁵ Second, as I mentioned earlier, Hofweber’s official conclusion is merely conditional: *if* you reject the Standard View, *then* you are led to idealism. So let’s continue to assume that the Standard View is false.

What I want to challenge is Hofweber’s way of understanding quantification ‘over facts’ and ‘over propositions’. Hofweber is surely right that if we reject the Standard View then we cannot give this kind of quantification the familiar external reading. Hofweber jumps from here to the conclusion that we must give it his internal reading. But Hofweber neglects an alternative. Rather than reading (5) as (5b), we might read it as:

(5c) $\exists p(\text{Sharon believes that } p \text{ and Daniel believes that } p)$.

The quantifier in (5c) is not first-order. First-order quantifiers bind variables in term-position, but p is in sentence-position. The quantifier in (5c) is *higher-order*.

Philosophers have historically been suspicious of higher-order quantification. Many have subscribed to the Quinean (1970: 66–8) dogma that all real quantification is first-order. The closest to higher-order quantification that we can get is mere *substitutional* quantification. Indeed, Hofweber’s distinction between external and internal quantification is just a new manifestation of this Quinean dogma: external quantification is real first-order quantification, and internal quantification is merely substitutional.

However, the tide has started to turn in recent philosophy. More and more philosophers are willing to accept a more liberal conception of quantification.⁶ On this more liberal conception, quantifiers can bind variables in any syntactic position. Here is how MacBride puts it:

the role of a quantifier that binds a position X is to generalize upon the semantic function of the category of constant expressions that occupy X ; *how* a quantifier generalizes depends upon *what* semantic function the corresponding category of constant expressions perform. (MacBride 2006: 445)

Singular terms refer to objects, and so first-order quantifiers — which bind variables in term-position — quantify over objects. But sentences don’t refer to objects.⁷ We use sentences to express claims about how the world is. ‘Grass is green’ expresses a

⁵Here are some more philosophers who reject the Standard View: Bach 1997; McKinsey 1999; Moltmann 2003, 2013: ch. 4; Rosefeldt 2008.

⁶I defend this more liberal conception of quantification in: Trueman forthcoming. For more defences, see: Boolos 1985; Grover 1992b; Prior 1971; Rayo and Yablo 2001; Rosefeldt 2008; Rumfitt 2014; Uzquiano 2018; Williamson 2003, 2013: ch. 5; Wright 2007.

⁷That is a bald assertion. For an argument to support it, see: Trueman forthcoming: ch. 11.

way the world is, ‘Grass is blue’ expresses a way the world isn’t, but both sentences express ways for the world to be. Quantification into sentence-position should, then, be understood as quantification over ways for the world to be.

If this is how we read quantification into sentence-position, then (5c) becomes:

- (5d) There is a way for the world to be, such that Sharon believes that the world is that way, and Daniel believes that the world is that way.

It is important to emphasise that *ways for the world to be* are not meant to be thought of as a kind of object, to be referred to with terms and quantified over with first-order quantifiers. Rather, ‘the world is that way’ as a whole is meant to be thought of as a pro-sentence, the natural language analogue of the sentence-variable p (just as a pro-noun is the natural language analogue of a term-variable). The quantifier ‘there is a way for the world to be’ is then meant to bind that pro-sentence. If we don’t mind a clumsy turn of phrase, we could follow a suggestion of Prior’s (1971: 37–9), and make this clearer by translating (5c) as:

- (5e) Sharon believes that the world is somehow, and Daniel believes that the world is thus too.

Now there is no suggestion that we are quantifying over special objects called ‘ways for the world to be’.⁸ That is certainly more perspicuous, but for ease of expression, I will continue talking in terms of *ways*. I would just like to repeat the key point that these *ways* are not a kind of object: they are not things you refer to with terms; they are what you express with sentences. If we were to forget that, we would immediately be confronted with some embarrassing metaphysical questions. For example, are *ways for the world to be* abstract or concrete? On the one hand, they do not seem concrete. As Strawson wrote,

they are not, like things or happenings on the face of the globe, witnessed or heard or seen, broken or overturned, interrupted or prolonged, kicked, destroyed, mended or noisy. (Strawson 1950: 196)

On the other hand, it seems a mistake to relocate *ways for the world to be* to some abstract third realm. That would distance the *ways* from the concrete objects they concern. But really, *ways* are neither abstract nor concrete. Those are classifications for objects, not for *ways*. When we say that Sharon ‘is some way’, we are not saying that she is part of some sentence-shaped chunk of concrete reality, and nor are we introducing some relation between Sharon and a remote abstract object. We are

⁸This way of translating quantification into sentence-position has its roots in a remark of Wittgenstein’s (1953: §134). It has recently been recommended by Rumfitt (2014: 27).

really just saying that Sharon is somehow — that she is funny, or clever, or however else.

Ways for the world to be should not, then, be thought of as special objects. It is also important to emphasise that they should not be thought of as properties of a special object called ‘the world’. ‘The world’ is a syncategorematic part of the whole pro-sentence ‘the world is that way’, and of the whole quantifier phrase ‘there is a way for the world to be’; it is really just a dummy term, a bit like the ‘it’ in ‘It is raining’. (On this score, it might be better to talk about ways for *it* to be.) We can still think of *ways for the world to be* as properties if we like, but only in a somewhat unusual sense. As a general rule, n -adic properties are expressed by n -adic predicates, which are expressions that require n terms to make a sentence. (So monadic properties are expressed by monadic predicates, which are expressions that require one term to make a sentence, like ‘... is wise’ or ‘... is funny’.) As Prior (1971: 33) pointed out, sentences can be thought of as 0-adic predicates: they are expressions which require 0 terms to make a sentence.⁹ So by the general rule just given, *ways for the world to be* are 0-adic properties. These are properties which do not need to be completed by bearers, because they are already complete in themselves. When a 0-adic property is instantiated, it is not instantiated *by* any objects; it is just instantiated, *full stop*.

Hofweber does not discuss higher-order quantification in his argument for idealism, but he does discuss it elsewhere (Hofweber 2018b: §3).¹⁰ He grants that *sui generis* higher-order quantification is intelligible, but he objects to it as a reading of English quantification. The trouble is that English does not appear to respect rigid type distinctions. Consider the following generalisation:

- (6) Something is annoying Simon.

This sentence could be validly inferred from either of the following:

- (7) Daniel is annoying Simon.
(8) That he hasn’t eaten yet is annoying Simon.

If we interpret quantification ‘over facts’ as higher-order quantification, then we must distinguish between two readings of (6): if it is inferred from (7), then it must be read as a first-order quantification; if it is inferred from (8), then it must be read as a higher-order quantification. On neither reading is (6) implied by both (7) and (8). But on the face of it, that is implausible. After all, we might assert (6)

⁹This explains why quantification into sentence-position counts as a kind of *higher-order quantification*: higher-order variables appear in predicate position, and sentences are 0-adic predicates.

¹⁰Hofweber was replying to Uzquiano (2018: §3).

precisely because we know that one of (7) and (8) is true, but not which. What is more, Hofweber claims that he has the resources to accommodate these inferences: Hofweber also distinguishes between two readings of (6) — the external and the internal — and he does insist that read as an external quantification, (6) follows only from (7); but crucially, he (2018b: 331–2) also maintains that read as an *internal* quantification, (6) follows neutrally from either (7) or (8).

There is an important objection here, but I do not think that its target is really the first-order/higher-order distinction. The objection really enters the scene as soon as you reject the Standard View. In (7), ‘... is annoying Simon’ predicates something of the person referred to by ‘Daniel’: it says of that person that he is annoying Simon. (That is what makes it possible to read (6) as an external quantification.) But if we reject the Standard View, then we cannot think of ‘... is annoying Simon’ as playing the same role in (8): the ‘that’-clause does not refer, or even *purport* to refer, to anything for ‘... is annoying Simon’ to predicate something of.¹¹ It seems, then, that we must distinguish between two readings of ‘... is annoying Simon’, one for (7) and one for (8). So even if we agreed to read the quantifier internally, there would *still* be two readings of (6), depending on how we read ‘... is annoying Simon’: on one reading it would follow from (7), on the other it would follow from (8), but on no reading would it follow from both.

Now, you might think that this just shows that we should not reject the Standard View in the first place. But that is a debate for another day. The important point here is that if we do reject the Standard View, as Hofweber advises us to, then there is no further objection to reading quantification ‘over facts’ or ‘over propositions’ as higher-order.

5 Re-reading *Structural Ineffability*

We can now distinguish *three* ways of reading quantification ‘over facts’. The first two are Hofweber’s: we could read it as external (first-order) quantification, or we could read it as internal quantification. The third is the *sui generis* higher-order reading. If we read it in this third way, then *Structural Ineffability* becomes:

$\exists p(\text{Our forms of thought cannot represent that } p).$

We can then translate this back into natural English in one of two ways:

There is a way for the world to be, such that our forms of thought cannot represent that the world is that way.

¹¹We can also safely assume that the ‘that’-clause does not quantify over objects which might be said to be annoying Simon.

It is not the case that however the world might be, our forms of thought can represent that the world is thus.

It was easy for Hofweber to argue that *Structural Ineffability* must be false when we read it as an internal quantification. But there is no similar easy argument to show that it must be false when we read it as a higher-order quantification. There does not seem to be anything incoherent about the idea of ways for the world to be that cannot be represented with our forms of thought.

This is enough to undermine Hofweber's argument for idealism. If we are allowed to read quantification 'over facts' as disguised higher-order quantification — and Hofweber has not shown that we cannot — then even if we reject the Standard View, we can allow that there might be structurally ineffable facts. But now I want to go further. I want to argue that it is *better* to read quantification 'over facts' as higher-order quantification than as internal quantification. To see this, consider the following claim:

English Ineffability: Some fact cannot be expressed in present-day English.

English Ineffability seems hard to deny, even if you think that no fact is structurally ineffable. Quantum mechanics could not have been expressed in any of the languages spoken 1,000 years ago. Those languages just couldn't express concepts like *lepton* or *superposition*. By analogy, it seems inevitable that in 1,000 years time, there will be theories which we cannot express in present-day English.

If we read *English Ineffability* as a higher-order quantification, then there is nothing stopping us from accepting it as true:

$\exists p(\text{Present-day English cannot express that } p).$

There is some way for the world to be, such that present-day English cannot express that the world is that way.

It is not the case that however the world might be, present-day English can express that the world is thus.

However, if we read *English Ineffability* as an internal quantification, then it must be false:

$\bigvee_p(\text{Present-day English cannot express that } p).$

This is the infinite disjunction of present-day English instances of 'Present-day English cannot express that p '. Since every such instance is trivially false, this disjunction is also false.

Hofweber (2006, 2016a, 2016b: chs 9–10) is aware that his way of understanding quantification ‘over facts’ has this surprising result. However, he argues that it is one of those surprising results that we should simply accept.¹² According to Hofweber, present-day English is already powerful enough to express 31st Century physics.

But now imagine a conversation between some future physicists. Hofweber claims that in so far as they are speaking meaningfully, we can translate everything they say into present-day English. And it may be that we can translate much of what they say: pleasantries about the weather, for example, might pose no serious problems. But as the conversation turns technical, the things they say might resist translation. Hofweber is certainly not in a position to deny that this is how things might go. All he can do is insist that if what they say cannot be translated, then it isn’t really meaningful. But it might be that the physicists carry on their conversation just as if they were speaking meaningfully. They might, for example, withhold from uttering a certain sentence until the right evidence came in. Or they might continue making inferences, and some of these inferences might involve sentences that we *can* translate as well as those we cannot. All of this would strongly suggest that they were speaking meaningfully, just in ways we cannot yet translate.

It is hard to see how Hofweber could rule out the possibility that this is how a 31st Century chat would go. Insisting that we read quantification ‘over facts’ internally does nothing to legislate against it. And if this is how things could go, then it would be implausible to maintain that English can express every fact, just as it stands. Crucially, though, we do not need to maintain that, even if we reject the Standard View. We can read *English Ineffability* as a true higher-order quantification, rather than a false internal one. But if that is how we read *English Ineffability*, then that is how we should read *Structural Ineffability* too.

6 The Prenective View

I said at the start of this paper that I had two aims. I have now finished with my first, purely negative, aim, which was to undermine Hofweber’s argument for

¹²This is a bit of a simplification. As I mentioned in fn. 4, Hofweber’s (2016b: ch. 9) full account of internal quantification is a little more complex than the one I have presented here. The complications allow Hofweber to simulate the effect of extending English by naming every object. But Hofweber stands by the claim that so extended, English can express every fact. For ease, I will set this complication to one side. On the face of it there seem to be plenty of facts which English could not express even if it had a name for every object, like the facts discussed by future physicists. These are facts that we cannot express not because we are short on names, but because we lack the means to express certain concepts. (A reviewer pointed out that Hofweber may have been able to finesse this point if he had believed in an external domain of properties. However, Hofweber (2006, 2016b: chs 8–9) disavows properties along with facts and propositions, and insists that all quantification ‘over properties’ should be given an internal reading.)

idealism. Now I want to move onto my second, more positive, aim. I will argue that rather than forcing us into Hofweber’s idealism, rejecting the Standard View can lead us to a kind of *direct realism* about belief.

The first step in this argument is to pick up an issue which Hofweber set aside: If we reject the Standard View, and deny that ‘that’-clauses refer to objects, then what *should* we say they do? In what follows, I will focus on ‘that’-clauses as they appear in belief attributions, such as:

(9a) Simon believes that Sharon is funny.

Exactly the same remarks would apply to the attributions of other propositional attitudes, but it is less clear whether it would apply to other uses of ‘that’-clauses. Fortunately, however, for our purposes it will suffice to deal exclusively with belief.

Recall that on the Standard View, (9a) should be parsed as follows:

[Simon] believes [that Sharon is funny].

Here we are supposed to have two singular terms, ‘Simon’ and ‘that Sharon is funny’, and a two-place predicate joining them together, ‘ x believes y ’; the idea is that ‘Simon’ refers to a thinking subject, ‘that Sharon is funny’ refers to the proposition that Sharon is funny, and ‘ x believes y ’ expresses the *believing* relation that holds between them.

How should we read (9a) if we reject the Standard View? I think we can make a good start by following Prior (1971: ch. 2), who parsed (9a) as follows:

[Simon] believes that [Sharon is funny].

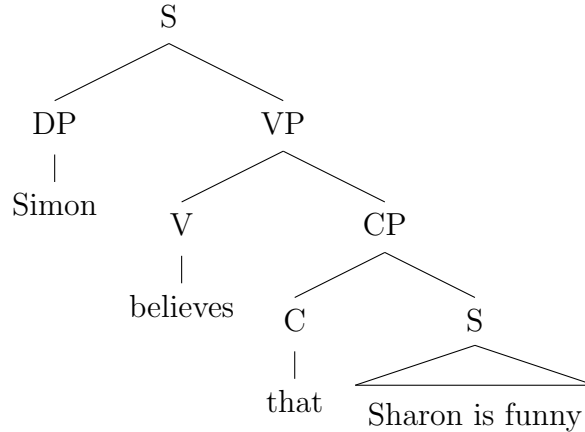
Now we have a singular term, ‘Simon’, a sentence ‘Sharon is funny’, and what is sometimes called a *prenective* joining them together, ‘ x believes that p ’. (‘ x believes that p ’ is called a ‘prenective’ because it behaves like a predicate at one end, and a sentential connective on the other: x marks an argument place for a singular term, and p marks an argument place for a sentence.¹³) When we read (9a) in this way, we neatly avoid the reification of propositions. There is no term referring to a proposition in (9a). Instead of getting at the content of Simon’s belief by using a term to refer to a proposition, we simply use the sentence ‘Sharon is funny’ to express that content for ourselves.

Prior’s *Prenective View* is a simple, philosophically attractive alternative to the Standard View. Unfortunately, however, it is almost certainly false. According to Prior, ‘that Sharon is funny’ does not appear as a syntactic unit in (9a). But it certainly seems to. We can, for example, transform (9a) into (9b):

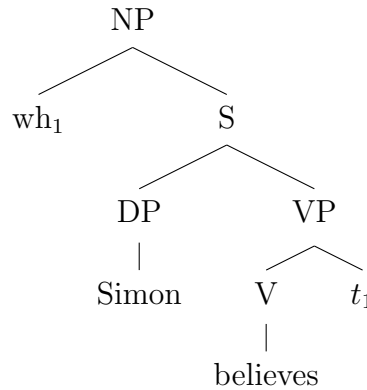
¹³The word ‘prenective’ was coined by Künne (2003: 68).

(9b) That Sharon is funny is what Simon believes.

When we move from (9a) to (9b), the ‘that’ follows ‘Sharon is funny’; it does not stick where it is, on the other side of ‘believes’. And as Künné (2003: 68–9) points out, this strongly suggests that ‘that Sharon is funny’ appears as a syntactic unit.¹⁴ What is more, this suggestion has been taken up by empirical linguists. They standardly represent (9a) with the following phrase structure tree:¹⁵



In this tree, the sentence ‘Sharon is funny’ is first combined with the complementiser ‘that’, and the whole complement phrase ‘that Sharon is funny’ is combined with the verb ‘believes’. It is then easy to transform this into a tree for the relative clause ‘what Simon believes’:



In this tree, ‘wh₁’ binds the trace ‘t₁’, and importantly, that trace replaces the *entire* complement phrase ‘that Sharon is funny’.

This is a serious problem for Prior’s version of the Prenective View, but I do not think it requires rejecting it entirely. We just need to tweak it slightly. I want to propose a new version of the view, which concedes to the Standard View that

¹⁴I was insufficiently sensitive to this point in (Trueman 2018a). The rest of this section should be seen as a correction to that paper.

¹⁵For an excellent textbook introduction to phrase structure trees, see: Heim and Kratzer 1998.

‘that Sharon is funny’ *is* a syntactic unit, but denies that it functions as a singular term. Instead, my version of the Prenective View has it that ‘that Sharon is funny’ functions as a *sentence* in (9a). In other words, this use of the complementiser ‘that’ is semantically vacuous, and ‘that Sharon is funny’ has exactly the same sense as ‘Sharon is funny’: ‘that Sharon is funny’ is there to express a claim about how the world is, just like the unadorned sentence ‘Sharon is funny’; they both simply say that Sharon is funny.

This is still a version of the Prenective View. (9a) still breaks down into a term, a sentence and a prenective. The only difference between my theory and Prior’s is that Prior took the prenective to be ‘*x* believes that *p*’, whereas I take it to be ‘*x* believes *p*’. On a purely syntactic level, ‘that Sharon is funny’ is a complement clause, not a sentence. But on my view, this is a syntactic distinction without a semantic difference. So ‘*x* believes *p*’ counts as a prenective, because it combines with a term on the left, and something with the semantic role of a sentence on the right.¹⁶

There is no obvious contradiction between this new version of the Prenective View and empirical linguistics. It is certainly not a given that if ‘that Sharon is funny’ is a syntactic unit, then it functions as a singular term. It is philosophers, not linguists, who make that jump. Of course, what is true is that linguists standardly assign entities they call ‘propositions’ (which are normally just functions from indices to truth-values) to ‘that’-clauses as their semantic values. But as Hofweber (2016b: 210–4) rightly emphasises, it is a big leap from there to the conclusion that ‘that’-clauses are singular terms which refer to those semantic values.¹⁷ Indeed, it is also common to assign the very same semantic values to sentences themselves, but no one would take that as proof that sentences are a kind of singular term.

The semantic value of an expression is meant to encode the *semantic role* of that expression, i.e. the contribution which that expression makes to the truth-values of the sentences in which it appears. So when we say that the semantic value of a ‘that’-clause is a certain function from indices to truth-values, we are saying that the semantic role of that ‘that’-clause can somehow be extracted from the fact that it has that function as its value. When we then deny that ‘that’-clauses *refer* to their values, we are denying that a sentence which *uses* a ‘that’-clause thereby *says something about* the semantic value of that ‘that’-clause.¹⁸ (9a), for example, does not express a relation between Simon and the semantic value of ‘that Sharon is

¹⁶In the terminology of (Trueman 2018b, forthcoming), (9a) is a result of sense-substituting ‘Sharon is funny’ for ‘*p*’ in ‘Simon believes *p*’, even if it is not a result of the corresponding simple-substitution.

¹⁷Rosefeldt (2008: 318 & 325) also makes this point.

¹⁸For similar remarks, see: Grover 1992a: 140–3.

funny’. What it expresses is a relation between Simon and a way for the world to be, the way expressed by ‘Sharon is funny’.

At this point, though, you may wonder why we bother turning sentences into ‘that’-clauses if I am right, and ‘that’ is semantically vacuous. But it may be that ‘that’ has a useful *non-semantic* role to play. If nothing else, ‘that’ plays a useful *syntactic* role. By attaching ‘that’ to ‘Sharon is funny’ in (9a), we indicate that ‘Sharon is funny’ appears as the complement to ‘believes’, rather than as a free standing sentence. Now, this may not seem all that useful when we focus on sentences like (9a), since the word order makes it clear that this is how ‘Sharon is funny’ appears. (Indeed, English grammar allows us to omit the ‘that’ from (9a).) But the value of this syntactic device becomes clear when we consider sentences like (9b), where word order is not such a helpful guide.

I want to recommend this version of the Prenective View to anyone who rejects the Standard View. What do ‘that’-clauses do if they do not refer to propositions? They do exactly what sentences do! I will not try to argue for this recommendation here. (I present my arguments in: Trueman 2018a, forthcoming: chs 12–3.¹⁹) I simply intend to explore what happens next if we accept it. However, I hope that the attractions of the Prenective View will be obvious to anyone who is in the market for an alternative to the Standard View. That includes Hofweber, whose own remarks about ‘that’-clauses fit well with the Prenective View:

On the face of it [‘that’-clauses] do not stand for an object, but specify the content of a belief. They do not refer to the content, but say or specify what that content is. (Hofweber 2016b: 205)²⁰

7 The identity theory of truth

In this section, I will argue that if we accept the Prenective View, then we will be led to a kind of direct realism about belief. I begin with a principle first proposed by Ramsey in his unfinished manuscript *On Truth* (1991: 9):

(T) x has a true belief $\leftrightarrow \exists p(x \text{ believes that } p, \text{ and } p)$.

Anyone who is happy with higher-order quantification should be happy with (T). It is just a higher-order formalisation of the truism that for someone to have a true belief, they must believe that the world is a way that it is.²¹ However, exactly how

¹⁹For a related argument, see: Jones 2019.

²⁰A similar view is suggested by McKinsey (1999) and Rosefeldt (2008).

²¹For the record, you could in principle accept the Prenective View but reject higher-order quantification. We are only led to my brand of direct realism when we combine the two.

you should *understand* (T) will depend on whether you subscribe to the Standard View or the Prenective View.

Consider the following two questions we might ask about someone's belief:

- (i) What does x believe?
- (ii) How must the world be for x 's belief to be true?

If we read (T) in accordance with the Standard View, then we will give these questions different answers: we will answer (i) by referring to a proposition with a singular term, 'that p '; we will answer (ii) by expressing a way for the world to be with a whole sentence, ' p '. This is the difference between referring to the proposition that Sharon is funny, and actually saying that Sharon is funny.

But if we read (T) in accordance with the Prenective View, then we will give (i) and (ii) exactly the same answer. On the Prenective View, 'that p ' is not a term referring to a proposition. There is no semantic difference between 'that p ' and ' p ': they both simply express ways for the world to be. So setting aside a purely syntactic distinction, p is both what x believes, and how the world has to be for that belief to be true. Put another way: saying what x believes is itself a matter of saying how the world must be for x 's belief to be true.

By giving the same answer to both questions, advocates of the Prenective View subscribe to a version of the *identity theory of truth*. Admittedly, it is not quite the *classical* version of the identity theory. The classical theory deals with facts and propositions, both thought of as species of object, and gets its name by *identifying* facts with true propositions. But by rejecting the Standard View, we have set these reified facts and propositions to one side. (We can still retain talk about 'facts' and 'propositions', but only as a handy, rough-and-ready way of translating higher-order quantification into natural language.) However, we still have a version of the identity theory: on the Prenective View, if x has a true belief, then what x believes is a way the world is. McDowell articulates the core of this identity theory as follows:

there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks is what *is* the case. So since the world is everything that is the case [...], there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world. [... But that] is just to dress up a truism in high-flown language. All the point comes to is that one can think, for instance, *that spring has begun*, and that very same thing, *that spring has begun*, can be the case. (McDowell 1994: 27)

This version of the identity theory is, I contend, a form of direct realism applied to belief. This might initially be a little surprising. When people are first introduced to the identity theory, they often accuse it of being a version of idealism. The argument runs as follows:

On one very influential conception, the world is all that is the case.²² In other words, the world is nothing over and above all the ways that the world is. But on the identity theory, a *way the world is* is the type of thing that can be thought. In that sense, these *ways* are thoughts. So the world is a totality of thoughts. What clearer statement of idealism could there be?

There is absolutely nothing wrong with this train of thought, *except* the suggestion that it leads us to a version of idealism. The first thing to emphasise is that there is an important difference between *acts* of thinking, and the things which *can be thought*. Here is Hornsby on this distinction:

Someone who objects to [the identity theory] supposes that, by denying any gap between thought and the world, one commits oneself to a sort of idealism. But such an objector confuses people’s thinkings of things with the contents of their thoughts. If one says that there is no ontological gap between thoughts and what is the case, meaning by ‘thoughts’ cognitive activity on the part of beings such as ourselves, then one is indeed committed to a sort of idealism: one has to allow that nothing would be the case unless there were cognitive activity — that there could not be a mindless world. But someone who means by ‘thoughts’ the contents of such activity, and who denies a gap between thoughts and what is the case, suggests only that what someone thinks can be the case. (Hornsby 1997: 1–2)

A *way the world is* is a ‘thought’ only in the sense that it is the type of thing which can be thought. Following McDowell (1994: 28), we might call it a *thinkable*. But even this label needs to be treated with care. As I emphasised in §5, there is nothing incoherent in the suggestion that there are ways for the world to be which humans simply cannot think. Now, maybe we can grant that with enough idealisation, each way for the world to be could be thought by some possible agent or other. But that is not part and parcel of the Prenective View. We could endorse that view, and the

²²This is the Tractarian conception of the world (1922: 1). Hofweber (2019: 703) also makes use of this conception, but is keen to emphasise that this is just one legitimate conception, no better or worse than a conception of the world as a totality of *things*.

identity theory which flows out of it, and still insist that some ways for the world to be simply could not be thought by anyone at all. Ways for the world to be are ‘thinkables’ only in the sense that they are the *type* of thing which can be thought, and by ‘type’ I mean *logical type*: we express ways for the world to be with whole sentences, and we also use whole sentences to express what people believe.

Very well, according to the identity theory, the world is a totality of thinkables. How is *that* not a statement of idealism? It is at this point that it becomes helpful to compare the Prenective View with *direct realism* about perception. I have in mind the kind of direct realism which opposes the sense-data theory. According to the sense-data theory, we perceive objects in our environment only indirectly; the direct objects of perception are sense-data, which somehow represent the worldly objects. Direct realism is a rejection of this picture of perception. According to direct realism, perception is a direct relation between a perceiver and the objects in their environment, without any representational intermediaries.²³

The Standard View is a lot like the sense-data theory. To have a belief is to take a stand on how the world is. If Simon believes that Sharon is funny, he takes a stand on whether Sharon is funny; his belief is true iff the world is a certain way — in this case, iff Sharon is funny. But on the Standard View, belief is not a direct relation between Simon and this way for the world to be. It is a direct relation between Simon and a special object, called a ‘proposition’. Somehow, standing in the *believing* relation to this proposition amounts to taking a stand on whether Sharon is funny. This is, presumably, because the proposition *represents* Sharon as being funny, and so is true iff she is funny.

You might think that we could turn the Standard View into a version of direct realism, simply by identifying facts with true propositions. (This is the classical version of the identity theory that I mentioned earlier.) A true belief that Sharon is funny would then be a direct relation to the *fact* that Sharon is funny.²⁴ However, the belief would remain at one remove from *how things are with Sharon*. By closing the gap between facts and true propositions, we open a new gap between facts and the way the world is. That might sound strange, since ‘a way the world is’ is precisely what a fact is meant to be. But it is important to remember that, on the Standard View, propositions are objects. So by identifying facts with true propositions, we treat facts as objects too. And as I emphasised in §4, a ‘way the world is’ is not

²³For careful discussion of different senses in which perception might be ‘direct’, see: Foster 2000: ch. 2. On Foster’s taxonomy, I have *weak direct realism* in mind. Modern naïve realism (Martin 1997; Campbell 2002: ch. 6; Fish 2009) and intentionalism (Tye 1995; Siegel 2010) both count as types of direct realism in this sense.

²⁴Thanks to Hofweber for suggesting this to me. The following remarks apply equally to Speaks’ (King et al 2014: ch. 5) proposal that we identify the proposition that *p* with the monadic property *x is such that p*.

an object we *refer* to with a singular term; it is something we *express* with a whole sentence. Thought of as an object, the fact that Sharon is funny can only *represent* how things are with Sharon: it represents her as being funny, by being true/a fact iff she is funny.²⁵

To get a theory of belief which is truly analogous to direct realism, we need to turn to the Prenective View. On the Prenective View, belief is not a relation to a proposition. ‘*x* believes that *p*’ has two arguments. The ‘*x*’ stands for a believer, and according to the Prenective View, ‘that *p*’ expresses a way for the world to be. ‘*x* believes that *p*’ thus expresses a direct relationship between a believer and a way for the world to be. To have a true belief that Sharon is funny is not to stand in a relation to a proposition which represents how things are with Sharon; it is to stand in a *direct* relation to how things are with Sharon. So on the Prenective View, thinkables are not propositions, special representational objects which depict ways for the world to be. Thinkables *are* ways for the world to be.²⁶

If we conceived of thinkables in the way that the Standard View told us to, as propositions which represent ways for the world to be, then to assert that the world is a totality of thinkables would be to subscribe to a form of idealism. This idealism would trade the external world for mere representations. That is not only a type of idealism, it is dubiously coherent. Propositions are meant to represent ways for the world to be. But if we then identify the world itself with a totality of propositions, what is there left for these propositions to represent?

However, the identity theory that we are interested in is the identity theory which flows out of the Prenective View. And if we conceive of thinkables in the way that the Prenective View tells us to, then there is nothing idealistic in the claim that the world is a totality of thinkables. Thinkables are *themselves* worldly. They are ways for the world to be. The identity theorist is not, then, trading the external world for mere representations. The identity theorist is rejecting the idea that belief is a relation to mere representations. If you have a true belief, then you stand in a direct relation to how the world is, without any representational intermediaries. To steal a remark from Wittgenstein:

When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we — and our meanings — do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this-is-so*. (Wittgenstein 1953: §95)

²⁵See (Johnston (2013: §5) for related discussion.

²⁶Of course, it may be that in order to have a belief, your brain has to be in a certain representational state. But the point here is that your belief is not a relation to that representational state, or to any other representation. It is a relation to a way for the world to be, the way represented by the brain state.

8 Conclusion

I had two aims for this paper. First, I wanted to undermine Hofweber’s argument for idealism. He claimed that if you reject the Standard View, then you will be compelled to read quantification ‘over facts’ internally, and this in turn will lead to a version of idealism. However, I argued that even if we reject the Standard View, we can read quantification ‘over facts’ as a variety of higher-order quantification. If we do, then we will not be forced down the path to idealism.

Although Hofweber’s argument for idealism was unsuccessful, it was based on a real insight: rejecting the Standard View has important metaphysical consequences. My second aim for this paper was to present an alternative path to Hofweber’s, one which starts with a rejection of the Standard View, but ends with a kind of direct realism about belief. If we abandon the Standard View, then we have to put *something* in its place. The Prenective View is an attractive candidate. If we accept the Prenective View, and do not balk at higher-order quantification, then we will be led to a version of the identity theory of truth, which in turn is best thought of as a brand of direct realism.

I have not tried to argue for this form of identity-theory-meets-direct-realism in this paper. Like Hofweber, I have not presented any of the arguments against the Standard View here. Nor have I tried to suggest that the Prenective View is the *only* alternative to the Standard View.²⁷ I have only tried to trace the metaphysical consequences of replacing the Standard View with the Prenective alternative.

I should also admit now that there are many unanswered questions about the identity theory. The most important of these concern *false* beliefs. It is all well and good saying that having a *true* belief is a matter of standing in a direct relation to a way the world is. But what is involved in having a *false* belief? What, if anything, are we in a direct relation to then?

At this point, we might pursue the analogy with direct realism about perception further, and try a kind of *disjunctivism* about belief: a true belief is a direct relation to a way the world is, but a false belief is not a direct relation to anything. But if, like me, you would prefer a uniform account of belief, then it would be better to say that belief in general is a direct relation to ways for the world to be: a true belief is a direct relation to a way the world *is*; a false belief is a direct relation to a way the world *isn’t*. Grass is not blue, but ‘Grass is blue’ still expresses a way for the world to be. And if you believe that grass is blue, then it is that way for the world to be,

²⁷Moltmann (2003, 2013: ch. 4) has suggested that we should resuscitate a version of Russell’s (1910a, 1913) multiple-relation theory of belief. I argue against the multiple-relation theory, conceived of as an alternative to the Prenective View, in (Trueman 2018a).

a way the world happens not to be, that you stand in the *believing* relation to.²⁸

Those are loose ends to be tied up another time. Now I would like to end this paper by contrasting my direct realism with Hofweber’s idealism. For Hofweber, the debate between idealists and realists concerns the relationship between facts and thoughts (i.e. thinkables): the forms of thoughts correspond in an obvious way to the forms of the facts that they are about; realists explain this correspondence by saying that we shaped our forms of thought to match those forms of fact; the idealists explain it by saying that we shaped the forms of fact to match our forms of thought. But once we accept my version of the identity theory, we cannot stand by this way of putting the debate. It presupposes a distinction between facts and thoughts — otherwise we would need no explanation of why the forms of our thoughts correspond to the forms of facts. And according to the identity theory, there is no such distinction: talk of ‘facts’ and talk of ‘thoughts’ should both be understood as talk about *ways for the world to be*.

However, even if we cannot draw the distinction in quite the way that Hofweber wants us to, there is clearly still an important difference between Hofweber’s idealism and my direct realism. The fundamental thought behind Hofweber’s idealism is that the possible forms of fact are somehow constrained by our cognitive activities: it is in principle impossible for there to be structurally ineffable facts, because our acts of thinking are what give facts their forms. That is something my direct realist categorically rejects. Generalisations over ‘facts’ should be read as disguised higher-order generalisations over *ways for the world to be*, and there is nothing in principle impossible about a structurally ineffable way for the world to be. On the direct realist picture, our cognitive activities do not constrain the facts; they put us into direct contact with the ways the world is (and maybe also the ways the world *isn’t*) independently of our thinking about them.²⁹

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²⁸We can even offer the following counterpart of (T) for false belief:

(F) x has a false belief $\leftrightarrow \exists p(x$ believes that p , and $\neg p$).

²⁹Thanks to Tim Button, Thomas Hofweber, Dave Ingram, and audiences at Stirling, York and Birmingham.

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