

## **Identity Theories of Truth and the *Tractatus***

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### **Abstract**

The paper is concerned with the idea that the world is the totality of facts, not of things – with what is involved in thinking of the world in that way, and why one might do so. It approaches this issue through a comparison between Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and the identity theory of truth proposed by Hornsby and McDowell. The paper's positive conclusion is that there is a genuine affinity between these two. A negative contention is that the modern identity theory is vulnerable to a complaint of idealism that the *Tractatus* can deflect.

## Identity Theories of Truth and the *Tractatus*

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### §1 Introduction

This is, as they say, part of a research project. It is one of two papers on the opening statement of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, that the world is the totality of facts. The first paper (Sullivan 2000) concentrated on the idea of *totality* and asked whether there can be *one totality* of facts. This paper addresses the idea that the world is a totality of *facts* rather than of things: its concern is with what it is to conceive of the world in that way, and why one might do so. (In later stages of the project I hope to reach the third sentence of the book.)

For a long time the conception of the world as the totality of facts was associated with the correspondence theory of truth. Armstrong (1973), for instance, took himself to be in agreement with Wittgenstein in portraying the world as a totality of correspondents or truth-makers for beliefs. The association was upheld as much by opponents of correspondence as by its advocates. For instance, Strawson chose to express his opposition to any form of correspondence theory by reversing Wittgenstein's slogan: "The world", he insisted, "is the totality of things, not of facts" (Strawson 1950: 198 n.).

But things changed. The opening words of the *Tractatus* came to be used almost as a motto of an influential line of thought that is fundamentally opposed to correspondence conceptions. One leading expression of it is the following passage from McDowell's *Mind and World*.

... 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. So since the world is everything that is the case . . . , there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world.

But to say that there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world, 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)

McDowell concludes: “the world is made up of the sort of thing one can think” (1994: 27–8); and the sort of thing one thinks, if one thinks truly, is a fact. So McDowell’s thought seems to be the same as, or at any rate very much like, the one that Jennifer Hornsby presents in “the simple statement that true thinkables [or propositions] are the same as facts”, a statement which encapsulates what she calls “the identity theory of truth”. That theory, she says, “is worth considering to the extent that correspondence theories are worth avoiding” (Hornsby 1997: 1–2).

Of the many questions raised by this curious turn of events I want to discuss just one: namely, whether McDowell and Hornsby have any right to claim the Wittgensteinian formulation on behalf of their identity theory. Is there any genuine affinity between the conception of truth they advance and Wittgenstein’s thought in the *Tractatus*?

My answer will be a qualified ‘Yes’. The ‘Yes’ part of the answer is the most important, and concerns motivations. The qualification concerns an aspect of the *Tractatus* that the modern identity theorists want nothing to do with, namely, its notion of analysis. To separate the positive answer from the qualification I need to separate two ways in which thinking of the world as the totality of facts might seem to involve idealism.

While facts, as both Wittgenstein and the modern identity theorists think of them, are certainly not made *by* mind, there can seem point in saying that they are made *for* mind: facts are structured exactly so as to be thinkable, and in that way conform to the form of thought. So conceiving the world as the totality of facts might seem to involve, as the only possible explanation of that conformity, a Kantian variety of idealism (cf. Moore 1997: 118). The positive part of my answer is that both Wittgenstein and the identity theorists recognize that it does not. More than that, they have in common that they advance that conception precisely to avoid the genuinely idealist consequences of the superficially more realist-sounding alternative. In another shared slogan, their aim is to allow that thought “reaches right up to [reality]” (TLP 2.1511; cf. PI 95), rather than stopping short at something less, reality-as-we-conceive-it.

The qualification concerns a charge of idealism more like Johnson’s stone-kicking challenge to Berkeley. A totality of facts strikes many people’s intuitions as not thick or solid or brute enough to make a world. There is, I think, something right in that reaction. At the end I’ll suggest that, whereas the *Tractatus* can accommodate

or defuse what is right in it through the project of analysis, the reaction stands as an objection to the modern identity theory.

That, then, is the destination. I should give a sketch of the route I'll take to it. My starting point in §2 will be a brief review of Strawson's famous paper "Truth", in which he aligned the conception of the world-as-facts with the correspondence theory, and rejected them both. I'll claim that his arguments do not make the alignment essential. Instead, his central arguments are best seen as setting an agenda for an acceptable version of the world-as-fact conception. I'll then turn in §3 to Hornsby's advocacy of the identity theory, recommending that we see it as pursuing that agenda. §4 will give reasons for my positive conclusion, that the same agenda and the same motivations are at work in the *Tractatus*. The last section (§5) will then explain the qualification, that what Hornsby and McDowell share with the *Tractatus* is not so easily separated from other, less attractive parts of the scheme.

## §2 Strawson against the Correspondence Theory

"If", Strawson says, "we read 'world' (a sadly corrupted word) as 'heavens and earth', talk of facts . . . as 'included in' or 'parts of' the world is, obviously, metaphorical" (1950: 198 n.). With 'world' so read, that is clearly right. 'Heavens and earth' denotes a vast spatio-temporal complex, whose parts are located and dated, and hence not facts. But *why* should we read 'world' in that way?

One obvious reason not to is that not everything we speak or think about has a place in heavens and earth. (Numbers don't, for instance.) An independent and more relevant reason is given by Russell's well-known observation, that a catalogue merely of things – of those things that are, uncontroversially or non-metaphorically, included in heavens and earth – is not enough to fill one centrally important role that philosophy has assigned to the notion of world: the role of what thought answers to, or what thoughts are measured against to be assessed as true or false. "The world", Russell remarked, "is not described by merely naming all the objects in it" (1922: 12). If 'heavens and earth' is not up to that task, then we should understand the notion of world less restrictively.

Strawson had powerful reasons for not locating facts "in the world" (1950: 195), even in the face of Russell's observation. But I

think those reasons fall short of compelling his understanding of 'world'. Instead, the problems and confusions he points to can be taken as markers for how a conception of world-as-fact ought to be developed.

Strawson's first and most fundamental objection to counting facts parts of the world is that it fosters an illusion of explanation. The illusion is a matter of imagining that we have bridged a divide between thought and reality when all we have actually done is to shuffle around amongst truisms that remain squarely on the nearer side of it. This illusion comes about by fudging between two incompatible pulls on the notion of a fact: on the one hand, statements and facts are supposed to have a peculiarly intimate connection with each other, facts being exactly what it takes to make statements true; on the other, facts are supposed distanced from statements, as belonging to the world we describe rather than its description. To counter the illusion Strawson insists that to talk of a state of affairs' being represented is just to allude in other words to a statement's being made; likewise, for a fact to be expressed just *is* for a statement to be true. 'Statement', 'fact', and 'truth' are internally related terms which collectively signal the occurrence of informative or 'fact-stating' discourse. They belong to that discourse. They do not comment on it, and they cannot explain it. To locate facts in the world (or to imagine them located there) encourages us to mistake truisms recording the internal order of that discourse – such truisms as that a statement is true if what it expresses is a fact – for a substantial account of the relation between that discourse and something external to it that gives it its point. A correspondence theory of truth, Strawson claims, inevitably but hopelessly aspires to be just such an account (1950: 200–201).

Strawson's second complaint is still broader. Facts being "made for" statements (1950: 197), to count them constituents of reality is to "model the world on the word" (1950: 190). The complaint was already a standard one when Strawson wrote, and Austin, his immediate target, had tried to avoid it (in part<sup>1</sup>) through a similarly standard idea, that "statements fit the facts always more or less loosely,

1. This is no doubt unfair to Austin. What was standard was the attempt to avoid a threatened "collapse" (O'Connor 1975: 48) or "coalescence" (Armstrong 1973: 113) of proposition and fact by the notion of a loose-fitting garb. What is original in Austin is the idea that the fit is sensitive to context and purpose; for development of this theme in Austin, see Travis (2000), especially chs. 6 & 10.

in different ways on different occasions for different intents and purposes" (Austin 1950: 130). Strawson's simple reply aims to close off that defence. He asks: "What could fit more perfectly the fact that it is raining than the statement that it is raining?" (Strawson 1950: 197).

Suppose, as I think, that there is something right in both points. Still, Strawson gives no hint as to how Russell's observation might be respected along with them. Without that, there is an obvious danger that the pseudo-explanatory theorizing he condemns will not be halted, but instead will just be redirected to questions of how the internally related pair of statement and fact connect with the world of objects. The danger is apparent in one of Strawson's most compelling formulations of his first complaint.

And it is, indeed, very strange that people have so often proceeded by saying 'Well, we're pretty clear what a statement is, aren't we? Now let us settle *the further question*, viz. What it is for a statement to be true'. (1950: 200)

Compare that with the following: 'Well, we know what it is to describe an object, don't we? Now let us address the further question, what it is for a description to *fit* the object it describes'. The second is surely 'strange' in just the same way as the first. But by placing the division of internal from external relations where he does – statement and fact internally related on one side, these two externally related to objects on the other – Strawson invites the second strange question in the very same breath as he closes off the first. That is an indication that Strawson's fundamental point will not reach its proper conclusion until it is reconciled with Russell's observation.

Suppose, then, that we take Russell's observation as given: a catalogue of facts, and not merely of things, is needed to distinguish this world from any other, or how things are from how they might have been; in whatever sense that implies, facts belong to the world. Strawson's first complaint tells directly not against that placing, but against any imagined separation of the internally related statement-fact pairing. So the point can be adapted to Russell's observation as the insistence that truths, or true propositions, belong to the world along with facts.

That shift inevitably opens up another distance for theorizing to fill, between 'discourse', or language use, and the proposition-fact

pair. But that is as it should be. The empirical sciences of language shouldn't be left with nothing to do. The relevant point is just that the kind of pseudo-theorizing Strawson condemns patently has nothing to contribute to bridging the new gap. (Theorizing that helped itself to any of his internally related notions – as our ordinary, non-theoretical characterizations of language use always do – would be already on the proposition–fact side of the new distance.)

Strawson condemned the correspondence theory as offering a pseudo-explanation of fact-stating discourse, but he held out the possibility of genuine explanation. Anyone attempting such an explanation would, he said, have to “stand back from language and talk about the different ways in which utterances are related to the world (though he must get beyond ‘correspondence of statement and fact’ if his talk is to be fruitful)” (1950: 201). The kind of ‘standing back’ he had in mind was, I believe, a Kantian transcendental explanation: nothing less offers the chance of a non-circular grounding of the fundamental categories to be explained. But however things stand with that speculation, it is plain that the shift recommended here closes the opening Strawson left. His strictures on genuine explanation, translated into the new setting, would require it to ‘stand back from propositions and talk about the different ways they are related to the world’. If propositions already belong with facts to the world, this makes no sense at all. So part of the agenda for an identity conception set by Strawson’s arguments would be to acknowledge that there will be *no* explanation to put in place of the correspondence theory.

An identity theory’s response to Strawson’s second complaint, that a world of facts is objectionably ‘mind-shaped’, is bound to be indirect. An identity theory cannot deny that the world *has* the shape of thought – that it has propositional structure built in. Its only alternative is to deny that there is anything objectionably idealist in acknowledging that. It must insist that *to display* propositional structure need not mean *to have been structured* in conformity to propositional thought. The traditional, and I think only, defence of that insistence is to disarm supposed alternatives by comparison with which a propositionally structured world seems less than fully real.

We get one indication of how that defence should run in noting how Strawson’s second complaint also falls short of its proper conclusion. Objecting to Austin’s claim that statements fit the facts

loosely he does not altogether reject of the idea of a loose-fitting garb. His complaint is only that it is things, not facts, that wear the garb. Things, but not facts, can be variously described, for various purposes, from various perspectives, and with varying degrees of adequacy. While there could be no looseness in the internal relation of statement and fact, things are merely externally related to discourse; as external relata, *they* do not have the form of thought built in.

That, at any rate, is the picture suggested by perhaps the most memorable and striking passage of Strawson's article:

If you prise the statements off the world, you prise the facts off it too; but the world would be none the poorer. (You don't also prise off the world what the statements are about – for this you would need a different kind of lever.) (1950: 197)

This is a picture in which *objects* provide just the kind of invidious, external comparison that makes the identity theory's conception of the world appear idealist. But its separation of facts from the objects they concern opens the picture to complaint from any number of directions. In the present context it might be natural to ground the the complaint on Wittgenstein's echo of Frege's context principle, according to which the notion of an object *just is* the notion of something referred to in the expression of a proposition (TLP 3.3). A nicely *ad hominem* variant of that would be to ask the author of *The Bounds of Sense* whether the "System of all Principles" might be 'prised off the world' while leaving behind objects, the general concept of which those principles elaborate – the categories being "concepts of an object in general" (CPR B128). But the most immediately telling point is the one we have already met: that the picture invites precisely the kind of pseudo-theorizing that Strawson's first complaint rejects.

This consideration of Strawson's article has suggested a two-stage agenda for an identity theory. It should first accept Russell's observation, that the world is, as one might say, *not less than* the totality of facts. The second and more delicate part of the conception to make out will hold that the world is *not more than that*, or to borrow from Wittgenstein, that there is nothing "outside the facts" (cf. NB 51). Along the way we've noted two further points about this agenda. First, that to avoid the charge of idealism it will be important that objects are not left over as something "outside the facts". And sec-

ondly, that adopting this agenda will involve renouncing completely, and not merely transposing, the kind of explanatory ambitions that Strawson associates with the correspondence theory.

### §3 Hornsby against the Correspondence Theory

I suggest that we read advocates of the modern identity theory as, in part, pursuing that agenda, and in this section will illustrate the suggestion by sketching Hornsby's criticism of the correspondence theory. While her criticism at first seems directed against kinds of correspondence theory somewhat different from Strawson's target, the overall shape of the complaint is similar. She presents the correspondence theory as a product of misguided ambitions characteristic of an outlook we are better off leaving behind: "philosophers formations are", she says, "apt to create an outlook that is forsworn when an identity theory displaces a correspondence theory" (Hornsby 1997: 9). Closer parallels will emerge when we follow through the complaint in a little more detail.

Central to Hornsby's complaint is a contrast between the explanatory modesty of her own identity theory and the correspondence theorist's characteristic

willingness to reconstruct thinkables from posited entities of a different sort, entities which make things true . . . [the correspondents] are supposed to be items which we can specify independently of an account of thinkables, items which may confer truth upon a thinkable. When they are introduced, however, we cannot hold onto the truism that inspires the identity theory. The fact . . . that autumn has begun, if it were [such a thing as a correspondence theory claims], would not be the same as what I think when I think truly that autumn has begun. (1997: 8)

The willingness mentioned here can be seen as the result of a piece of reasoning. Correspondence is a general theory, but involves specific commitments: there must be an answer to the question, for a given true proposition, what it corresponds with; for instance, there must be something about the way things are, or about what there is, that makes true the proposition that the Eiger is steep. Now the proposition that the Eiger is steep is itself a specification of a way things are, which seems exactly to meet that bill. But correspondence implies difference, a difference that will be invisible if the correspondent is specified in terms too close to those of the original

proposition, for instance, as ‘the steepness of the Eiger’ or ‘the Eiger’s being steep’. So to preserve the difference his theory requires a correspondence theorist will naturally resort to other terms. For instance, he might speak of the ratio of the Eiger’s height to its base area being relatively large.

One can see, then, why a correspondence theorist might be willing, and might even feel compelled, to specify a correspondent for a given proposition differently from the proposition itself. But it doesn’t emerge from that train of thought what is philosophically suspect about that willingness. Specifying something differently is getting a different angle on it, and that often seems a good thing to do. Hornsby, though, clearly has in mind a much more radical departure from one’s first view of things.

[I]t will be distinctive of correspondence theorists to seek items located outside the realm of thinkables, and outside the realm of ordinary objects of reference, but related, some of them, to whole thinkables. The idea is widespread and it takes various guises. In the Russell of *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* . . . the basic correspondents are percepts . . . In the Quine of *Philosophy of Logic*, the correspondents are cosmic distributions of particles. (1997: 7)

That the ratio of the Eiger’s height to its area is relatively large is something one can think. So that specification, on the face of it, isn’t of something “outside the realm of thinkables”. The same would hold of any other specification one might come up with. So what might it be to find anything of the kind that the correspondence theorist is here said to seek?

Hornsby’s examples give a grammatical clue. To specify a proposition is to propound it, and propounding is done in a sentence. Collections of percepts or particle distributions seem rather the kind of thing that one might refer to by a singular term. Something “outside the realm of thinkables” would then be something lacking propositional articulation reflected in a sentence expressing it. An example, so far, would be a chair. A chair is something one can refer to, hence think *about*, but not something one can think. A correspondence theorist’s correspondents are to be in that respect like chairs, but unlike a chair in being a correlate of a whole sentence rather than a referential part of one. If a correspondence theorist were committed to specifying such a thing his position would surely be hopeless, since the very notion of it imposes inconsistent demands on the form the specification is to take.

To this point Hornsby's argument parallels one formulation of Strawson's first objection to the correspondence theory, that it overrides "the complete difference of type" (Strawson 1950: 195) between fact and thing, or between stating and referring. When the notion of a fact is pulled towards 'discourse', a fact is thought of as what a statement *expresses*; when it is pulled towards the world, it becomes what a statement is *about* (1950: 194–5). Correcting that confusion needs only the grammatical reminder that nothing less than a statement will do to specify what makes a statement true. But that is just Russell's observation in linguistic dress. So correcting the confusion and respecting the observation yields only the first stage of the agenda, that the world is *nothing less* than the totality of facts. We have to introduce a further theme to explain how Hornsby addresses the second stage of the agenda.

Hornsby's argument involves, not just the notion of a thinkable, but that of a *realm* of thinkables. Like McDowell she opposes any position on which a notion of normative significance – justification in McDowell's case, truth in ours – rests on the obtaining of a relation between something within and something outside that realm. It seems that a correspondence theorist could be pushed towards such a position only by a radical generalization of the line of thought that prompts him to specify the correspondent for a proposition differently from the way it is specified in the proposition itself. Applied locally – one proposition at a time, as it were – that seems only to push one around one's repertoire of description to find a new conceptual angle. But those local commitments derive from a general theory of what it is for *anything* one might think to be made true by a corresponding reality. Allowing the same impetus to operate at a global level yields the idea that the whole system of our thoughts is true if it corresponds to reality – but now, a reality the only adequate specification of which must be different from anything we might think or say. The 'other angle' called for by this global application of the correspondence theorist's thought is thus a perspective that we, trivially, cannot occupy. The result is not that we cannot describe the reality that makes our propositions true. That we do so is a starting point. But the mere idea of that other angle suggests that any employment of our concepts yields only a description from *this* angle, and so a description only of reality as it appears to a mind equipped with our concepts. If one were then tempted to gesture towards how reality might present itself to that other angle, the gram-

matical inarticulacy we noted in Hornsby's examples would seem suited to the ambition: lack of propositional structure in the specification would register that what one aims to specify is a reality not conditioned by our conceptual perspective.<sup>2</sup> Relations between our thoughts and such a reality are necessarily inscrutable to us. So resting normative notions on the obtaining of such relations presents the traditional choice, between scepticism and an idealism that preserves knowledge claims by restricting their pretensions to appearances.

Those, I think, are the threatened consequences that lead Hornsby to reject the ambitions of the correspondence theory to rest with the explanatory modesty of the identity theory's truisms. A correspondent for the whole scheme of our thoughts would be an external object of invidious comparison, a comparison that reduces what we *can* think to mere appearance. To reject the theory that calls for that correspondent is to accept that the world is *no more than* the totality of facts. It completes the second stage of the agenda.

#### §4 Parallel Thoughts in the *Tractatus*

Supposing what I've said is at least partly right about what motivates the modern identity theory, and about the sense it gives to its Tractarian motto, how do things stand with my opening question, whether there is any genuine affinity between this recent line of thought and the *Tractatus*? That question divides, I think, into two. First, does the shared claim also have the sense in the *Tractatus* that the world is 'no more than' the totality of facts? In this section I will argue that the answer to that is 'Yes'. That answer gives rise to a second question, that I will consider in the next and final section: namely, whether its having that sense is separable from other Tractarian commitments that proponents of the modern identity theory would certainly not be willing to endorse. My answer to the second question will be 'No'.

Part of the correspondence package that Hornsby rejects is any "reconstruction of thinkables from something else" (1997: 10). McDowell likewise has long rejected any ambition to explain meaning 'as from outside'. 'From outside' means from a perspective

2. To avoid confusion: I said it would *register* that intention, not realize it.

other than the standpoint that our concepts provide, and therefore a perspective whose bare possibility threatens to reduce to mere appearances the facts that present themselves to our standpoint. Justifying a positive answer to our first question about the *Tractatus* thus has an easy and a hard part. To show that it too rejects any 'side-on' perspective is easy. To argue that its rejection of that perspective serves to avoid an idealist reduction of the facts presented to our standpoint is harder. I'll do the easy thing first, before sketching how one might go about doing the harder one.

Central to the picture theory is that the form of a picture constitutes its *standpoint* on the reality it represents, a standpoint that cannot be transcended to become an object of representation in turn.

A picture represents its object from without. (Its standpoint is its form of representation.) That is how a picture represents its object truly or falsely.

A picture cannot, however, place itself outside its form of representation.

(TLP 2.173–4)

So far that might seem to leave open the possibility of stepping aside from the standpoint of any particular proposition or region of thought by shifting to another. But the unity implied by the generality of logic ensures that there is a single such standpoint:

Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form.

In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to position ourselves with propositions outside logic, that is, outside the world.

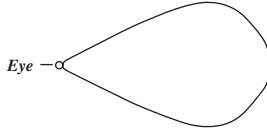
(TLP 4.12)

Because of the all-embracingness of the logical perspective, the idea of a side-ways view on it is just the empty impossible idea of extra-logical thought (TLP 3.03). That is all that needs to be said, I think, to answer the easy part of the question.

To answer the hard part would be to show how in the *Tractatus* the impossibility of a side-on view counters a threatened idealist reduction of the facts on which my language provides a standpoint. That is to say, it would be to explain how that idea contributes to Wittgenstein's treatment of solipsism, to show that the impetus of solipsism evaporates to leave a kind of realism. I have attempted that

elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> so know that it is not just lack of space that prevents me succeeding fully in it here. But any persuasive answer would have to make central Wittgenstein's metaphor of the visual field.

5.6331 For the form of the visual field is surely not like this:



The centrally important fact about this metaphor is that it is introduced by Wittgenstein's idealist interlocutor, and then immediately subjected to criticism. Wittgenstein points out that as a representation of the visual field, rather than a third person's representation of a region of the world falling within the range of the eye, everything about the drawing is wrong. In the first place, "you really do *not* see the eye" (TLP 5.633): the eye can have no place in a representation of the field, but must provide the perspective of the representation. But then in immediate consequence of that, the rest of the drawing is wrong too: from the perspective of the eye, the field has no boundary.

Wittgenstein's intention in the passage is to suggest that an analogous representation of the relation of the subject to its world makes the same mistakes. That representation, Wittgenstein holds, may be prompted by a genuine insight, that the notions of thought, and of what it is for there to be a world, are internally related. That, again, is the upshot of Strawson's first point, shifted, as we recommended, to suit Russell's observation. It yields the first stage of the agenda, that the world is *not less than* the totality of facts. But the insight lends itself, as McDowell remarked, to high-flown expression. In McDowell its high-flown form is that "there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world" (1994: 27). In Wittgenstein it becomes: "The world is my world" (TLP 5.62). However natural, that way of voicing the insight makes the same mistakes as the picture. It makes the first mistake, of *placing* the subject. And in consequence of that it is forced into the second mistake of drawing a boundary around the subject's world. That the second mistake *is* a mistake is, outside of the metaphor, no longer a phenomenological point. Drawing a boundary around the world is a mistake just because nothing so bounded can be *everything* that is the case, or

3. Sullivan 1996; this and the following paragraph draw on §II of that paper.

claim for itself the title of the *world*. Whatever is representable belongs to the world. We therefore have no choice but to award that title, no longer to the region circumscribed in the representation, but to all that presents itself to the external perspective of the representation in which the subject and its 'world' are placed. And in doing that we necessarily reduce the subject's 'world' to appearance, and allow the principles that structure it only a conditioned necessity. Kantian idealism rests with that retreat, counting the restricted objectivity it secures as at any rate better than none. Wittgenstein diagnoses it instead as an imposition of an external representation that distorts the very thing it was invoked to capture, the internal connection between thought and world. Once that is recognized as a distortion one has no further use for the external perspective, and the threat of idealist reduction it carried then simply lapses. As before, abandoning the impetus to that external perspective is accepting that the world is *no more than* the totality of facts. It yields the second stage of the common agenda.

### §5 A Significant Point of Divergence

The answer to our first question, then, is that recent advocates of the identity theory share much more than a turn of phrase with the *Tractatus*. They give to its opening characterization of the world a sense informed by a similar vision of the metaphysical alternatives, and their endorsement of it derives in part from the same pressures.

But only in part. And that raises the second question, whether accepting that the world is 'no more than' the totality of facts is separable from other Tractarian commitments which Hornsby and McDowell would not recognize.

The question is best approached by noting a division I have so far suppressed between three historical advocates of the identity theory: Moore, Russell, and Frege.<sup>4</sup> For Moore and Russell the con-

4. The idea of an identity between true propositions and facts has had a discontinuous career. It was subscribed to, at least for a while, and in one form or another, by the three founding figures of analytical philosophy. It was advanced by Moore in "The nature of judgement" (1899), and retracted in *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (1953, written 1910–11). Russell accepted it in *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903), argued most explicitly for it in his 1904 articles critical of Meinong (reprinted in *Essays in Analysis*, 1973), first expressed reservations about it in "On the nature of truth" (1906), and rejected it in the 1910 essay "On the nature of truth and false-

stituents of propositions, and so of facts, include those things a proposition is about. For Frege the constituents of a proposition (or 'thought') are senses, while what the proposition is about are the referents determined by those senses.

The opposition between these conceptions was a running theme of the correspondence between Frege and Russell in 1903–4 (Frege 1980: 130–70). Frege's central argument in those letters is now very

hood" (in *Philosophical Essays*). Frege's case is somewhat different: he never rejected the identity claim, but it is perhaps unclear how early he would have subscribed to it. His only explicit endorsement of the claim comes in the 1918 essay "Thoughts", where in answer to the question "What is a fact?" he says: "A fact is a thought that is true" (Frege 1984: 368).

Recent interest in the identity claim derives from Richard Cartwright's paper "A neglected theory of truth" (1987). The role of the claim as a connection between Bradley and Moore is explored in papers by Tom Baldwin (1991) and Stewart Candlish (1989, 1995), and it seems to be Candlish who first spoke of an "identity theory of truth" (1989: 338). Whilst these authors' interest was primarily historical, Hornsby and Dodd advocate versions of such a theory in its own right (Dodd and Hornsby 1992), while disagreeing over which version to advocate: see Dodd (1999) and Hornsby (1999) in response.

A line of thought common to the three historical advocates of the identity claim runs as follows. One who believes truly believes things to be how they are. What he believes is that things are thus-and-so, and things are thus-and-so. Otherwise put, what is believed *is* how things are. And if what is believed were not how things are, how could the belief be true? There can, then, be no distinction between what is truly believed and what is so. In particular, there can be no such distinction between a truth, and that in virtue of which it is a truth, as is presupposed in a correspondence theory.

In Russell this line of thought appears as a compressed objection to the idea that "a true proposition expresses fact":

This at once raises the problem: What is a fact? And the difficulty of this problem lies in this, that a fact appears to be merely a true proposition, so that what seem a significant assertion becomes a tautology. (1904: 75)

In Moore (1902) the presentation is more developed and more clearly focused on a presupposition of correspondence theories:

It is commonly supposed that the truth of a proposition consists in some relation which it bears to reality, and falsehood in the absence of this relation. The relation in question is generally called a 'correspondence' or 'agreement'; and it seems to be generally conceived as one of partial similarity to something else, and hence it is essential to the theory that a truth should differ in some specific way from the reality, in relation to which its truth is to consist. It is the impossibility of finding any such difference between a truth and the reality to which it is supposed to correspond which refutes the theory.

Finally, and succinctly, in Frege:

A correspondence can only be perfect if the corresponding things coincide and so are just not different things. (1984: 352–3)

familiar: the things it is about cannot be the constituents of a proposition, because there are significant differences between propositions which do not differ in what they are about; expressed linguistically, substitution of co-designative terms in a sentence can alter the proposition expressed (1980: 164). Russell's opposed argument is much less familiar, and seems to turn on the status of the relation that Frege must presume between the sense figuring in a proposition and the thing it is about. He wrote:

I believe that in spite of all its snow fields Mont Blanc itself is a component part of what is actually asserted in the proposition 'Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high'. We do not assert the thought, for this is a private psychological matter: we assert the object of the thought, and this is, to my mind, a certain complex (an objective proposition, one might say) in which Mont Blanc is itself a component part. If we do not admit this, we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc. (Russell to Frege, 12.12.04, in Frege 1980: 169)

Why Russell should think that conclusion follows is not exactly obvious, but comparison with the argument that was to appear six months later in "On denoting" suggests a kind of regress argument. Grasp of the sense cannot make possible knowledge of the thing, Russell is saying, without an appreciation of the relation between the sense and the thing. But knowledge of that relation can be of help only if the thing can figure in its own right in what is then known. If it cannot so figure, then the problem of connecting knowledge with the thing is just reiterated. But if it can, then we might just as well accept that it can likewise figure in the original proposition.

Suppose – because we cannot here assess them – that there is force in *both* arguments. The position they jointly dictate is, barring terminological shifts, the position of the *Tractatus*. Objects figure in their own right in propositions: "The name means the object. The object is its meaning." (TLP 3.203) But grasp of these objects meets Frege's constraint on the grasp of senses: it is impossible that one should grasp the same object in significantly different ways (TLP 4.243). Objects, in consequence, must be simple (TLP 2.02). Acquaintance with them is an all or nothing matter: in knowing an object one knows all there is to its being that object (TLP 2.01231). Objects are not the kind of things on which there could be another

angle. (So, though it carries some danger, there would be point in saying that, if Wittgenstein's objects were to be described in Frege's terms, they should be counted more as minimal elements of sense than of reference.)

But then how can such objects constitute an external world? Part of what is involved in externality is what common sense talks of as the cussedness of things, their having other sides responsible for often unexpected and sometimes unwanted consequences. External things do not reveal themselves completely to a single viewpoint, and our grasp of them will be in various ways incomplete.

The answer to the question I just posed, of how Wittgenstein's simple objects could compose an external world, is that they *don't*. The features of externality I mentioned are not neglected in the *Tractatus*. They are, though, located at a different level of analysis. It is complexes that constitute the external world, and it is complexes that display the multi-facetedness and contingency of external things. Taking different angles on a complex involves the recognition of different facts (TLP 5.5423), and realizing the common bearing of those different takes is recognizing still further facts. The effect of the scheme of analysis in the *Tractatus* is in that way to remove a source of tension between a conception of the world as the totality of facts and a legitimate sense in which it is also a world of things.

Now compare with this the conception of our modern advocates of the identity claim, McDowell and Hornsby. The true propositions with which they identify facts are Fregean thoughts. These thoughts, and their constituents, are cognitive *relata* that completely determine a mind's cognitive relation to them.<sup>5</sup> The standard they are required to meet is: same item—same grasp; different grasp—different item grasped. So they, too, are not the kind of thing on which there can be different takes or different angles. So again, to identify the world with the totality of such facts so far fails to accommodate the contingency and multi-facetedness of things. In contrast to the *Tractatus*, however, ordinary objects provide no anchor for these characteristic features of externality at another level of analysis. Instead, ordinary objects seem to have dropped out of the frame altogether.

5. This is the theoretical essence of Frege's notion of sense: Frege's 'thoughts' are to be objects of thought which have built into them every logically or epistemologically relevant similarity and difference between thoughts with those objects; or, as one might tendentiously express the point, they are 'thoughts with their understanding built in'. Cf. McDowell (1994: 180).

This is, I realize, an extraordinary charge to bring against a leading advocate of object-dependent senses, as McDowell is.<sup>6</sup> But then the charge is precisely that he has made an extraordinary mistake. It is not, however, an inexplicable mistake. We saw, in connection with Strawson, that to cast objects in the role of something ‘outside the facts’ would make for the kind of invidious comparison that grounds the threat of a Kantian version of idealism. That threat is something McDowell is conscious of and keen to avoid. So, lacking Wittgenstein’s way of locating objects ‘inside the facts’, he responds to the invidious comparison in a cruder and historically more common way: by cutting off the offending limb. But what then remains is a picture in which the ordinary features of externality have no anchor at all. It is one that positively invites the Johnsonian, stone-kicking charge of idealism.<sup>7</sup>

Essentially the same point can be made in connection with Hornsby’s advocacy of the identity theory. Her identification of the world with the totality of facts aims to avoid the idealist consequences of treating the world as a common focus between our own and an impossibly external perspective. I agreed, and took the *Tractatus* to agree, that to do that is a mistake. But again, it is not a gratuitous or inexplicable mistake. It appeared rather in our discussion of Hornsby to be an excessive generalization of a good thought, indeed a thought that one might regard as non-negotiable: that reality *does* serve as the common focus of those perspectives that *are* possible. In one way or another, that is, reality must include the kind of thing on which different angles are possible. The *Tractatus* has an

6. McDowell anticipates an objection that the “drift” of this account is “idealistic” in providing, as he puts it, for “an alignment of mind with the realm of sense, not with the realm of reference” (1994: 179); and he replies, in effect, that on the right view of sense an alignment with senses *is* an alignment with references. That is, he presumes that the objection must be motivated by a wholly descriptive or specifi-catory conception of the relation of sense to reference, and so takes it to be ruled out by the account of object-dependent senses he shares with Evans (McDowell 1977, 1984; Evans 1982). Even if McDowell’s diagnosis of the objection was right, I think this response is too local to be effective: the descriptive conception of sense is, after all, not universally wrong. But more important than that is that McDowell misconstrues the objection, which has to do with his characterization of reality rather than any question of ‘alignment’.

7. The invitation is obvious in one of McDowell’s metaphorical summaries of his view, that “thought and reality meet in the realm of sense” (1984: 180). If that is right, then to identify the world with a totality drawn from that realm is to identify the world with its meeting point with mind.

unexpected way of acknowledging that. So far as I can see, modern proponents of the identity theory have no way at all.<sup>8</sup>

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