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The Naming of Facts

and the methodology of language-based metaphysics

Arianna Betti*

To Kevin Mulligan,
on the occasion of his 60th birthday

Why, on what lines will you look,
Socrates, for a thing of whose nature
you know nothing at all?
Plato, *Meno* 80de

The naming of cats is a difficult matter
It isn't just one of your holiday games
T.S. Eliot, *Old Possum's Book*
of Practical Cats, 1939

Dear Kevin,

As you and I and many others well know, some metaphysicians consider analysing how we talk about entities important for arguing for or against including such entities in our catalogue of the world. Particularly, it is often argued that some specific kinds of expressions *name* or *singularly refer* to certain categories of entities. For instance, some defenders of facts insist that we have a way to name facts in this sense, e.g. they say that expressions like 'the fact that *p*' function as definite descriptions for the entities they allegedly refer to, namely specific facts.

You agree that 'the fact that *p*' is an especially interesting expression for any philosopher of facts. As you write:

> Any philosophy of facts owes us an account of the form of such expressions as "the fact that Sam is sad" (Lowe 1998) (Mulligan & Correia 2008, section 1).

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There are two things that puzzle me about this statement. First, once you seemed to accept tropes and deny both universals and facts. Now you seem to do the opposite (though your acceptance of either facts or universals is not to be read off from that statement). I do not know exactly why you accept facts. I ask because I am critical of facts, although in what follows I will not give any sustained arguments against them (what I have to say against facts is contained in Betti 2011a).

Second, I do not see why it should be necessary for *any* philosophy of facts to provide an account of the form of the expression 'the fact that *p*', nor do I see even that it would be *important* for such a philosophy to do so. Those who accept facts and take up an attitude that usually goes under the label of *revisionary* metaphysics, I think, would not find having such an account important. Revisionary metaphysics, as is well known, contrasts with *descriptive* metaphysics:

> Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure (Strawson 1959: 9).

So I see why a descriptive metaphysician accepting facts should care about the naming of facts; but I do not see why a revisionary metaphysician should: I do not see whether a revisionary metaphysician accepting facts should care even as to whether it is at all *possible* to name them. So I am not sure why you think it is so important for the revisionary metaphysician to have an account of the expression 'the fact that *p'*. Unless, of course, yours is not a neutral statement, but a statement made from the perspective of a descriptive metaphysician. But are you one of them? I am also not sure why you attach so much importance to Herbert Hochberg's account of the expression 'the fact that *p*' as a definite description. Again, I do not quite understand why his account would be of use to revisionary metaphysicians.

In what follows I will explain my reasons for bringing up the point I just mentioned. I shall also, moving from the debate on the naming of facts, offer a critical examination of the methodology of metaphysics that relies on language-based arguments. My criticism is that this kind of metaphysics often places the wrong kind of methodological emphasis

on language data, and thus gives a distorted image of both the workings and goals of this methodology. And then I will ask you: do you agree?

Here's what I will do. In section 1, I introduce two kinds of facts, compositional and propositional: the first are tendentially defended by revisionary metaphysicians, the second by descriptive ones. In section 2, I briefly introduce an argument which I reconstruct as underlying the descriptive reasoning which defends facts drawing from the way we talk about them: I call it the Argument from Nominal Reference. This is an argument I distill from representative descriptive positions such as Kit Fine's, and in which the naming of facts by means of 'the fact that p' taken to be a singular term is an important presupposition. I then proceed to discuss Hochberg's analysis of 'the fact that p' as a definite description. My main criticism regards the circumstance that this analysis destroys the *prima facie* syntax of 'the fact that p' in natural language, that from the very start it builds in theoretical presuppositions as to what facts are, and that thus the descriptive metaphysician should consider it a useless tool. I say that for revisionary metaphysicians, by contrast, such an analysis is not particularly relevant, since no revisionary metaphysician should put much value in how we talk about facts: the only interesting question here is whether we should accept facts as the best candidates to play certain metaphysical roles. And the playing of such roles, in a revisionary framework, must be argued for by means other than linguistic analysis. In section 3, I go on to critique the methodology of ordinary language philosophy, maintaining that, far from being based on empirical findings of language use, the choice of linguistic examples made by natural language philosophers to support philosophical points about the nature of facts is question-begging; actually, it can be shown that 'facts' in natural language does not mean *philosophers*' facts. In section 4, I argue that the only possible position with respect to the notion of reference to facts is the position according to which facts are taken *by stipulation* to be the *semantic value* of certain expressions. It is possible to defend this position, however, only if we manage to show on the basis of arguments other than linguistic ones that we have good reasons to acknowledge facts. (I doubt that we can manage to show that, but never mind this here.) In doing all this I will touch upon the notion of ontological commitment, natural language paraphrases in metaphysics and the role of the translation into first-order classical predicate calculus,

and the reliability of evidence given by the kind, quality, and scope of language-data as used in the descriptive metaphysicians' practice.

1. How many (conceptions of) facts?

There are two conceptions of facts: compositional and propositional.[1]

<table>
<tr><th>Compositional facts
(key figure: David Armstrong)</th><th>Propositional facts
(key figure: G. E. Moore)</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">are</td></tr>
<tr><td>1 complex objects with a fixed number of constituents (in the simplest case minimally two and maximally three) which they comprehend in their reticulation</td><td>not composed of the objects they are 'about'</td></tr>
<tr><td>2 categorically heterogeneous</td><td rowspan="4">unstructured</td></tr>
<tr><td>3 non-mereologically composed</td></tr>
<tr><td>4 ontologically heterogeneous</td></tr>
<tr><td>5 structured in a formal way</td></tr>
<tr><td>6 part of the furniture of the world</td><td>not part of the furniture of the world (and they are essentially ideal entities, i.e. non-causal).</td></tr>
<tr><td>7 semantically idle</td><td>not statements, or propositions, though they are as fine-grained as propositions, and, like propositions, they are about something</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Identity criterion: two facts are identical iff</td></tr>
<tr><td>(Empirical)
they are necessarily equivalent, if they necessarily co-exist
(Compositional)
They have the same constituents in the same arrangement</td><td>(Quasi-structural)
the propositions to which they correspond are identical.</td></tr>
</table>

One interesting question that emerges from this classification is whether propositional facts (Fine 1982's terminology) are the same as the 'non-compositional facts' of philosophers like Plantinga, Pollock, and Barwise. Contemporary reference works

[1] I characterize facts and their identity criteria in detail in chapters 1 and 2 (compositional) and chapters 3 and 4 (propositional) of Betti 2011a.

(including yours and Fabrice's, Mulligan & Correia 2008) ignore propositional facts, leaving it unclear whether we should consider non-compositional facts a variant of the compositional ones after all, or whether instead they are an unfortunate mix of compositional and propositional facts. I am inclined toward the unfortunate mix reading, and prefer to stick with my taxonomy. The problem with classifying these 'non-compositional' positions on facts is without a doubt due largely to the problems of those positions themselves: they offer unconvincing treatments of (a) the criteria of identity for facts and of (b) the relation between a fact and the objects it is about (see Lewis 1986's criticism on pp. 174-191 of what he calls 'magical ersatzism' of Plantinga and others) and (c) the plausibility of the view that such facts can play the role of truthmakers. As to (b), non-compositional facts seem to be half-worldly entities rather than ideal ones, since, to speak with Meinong, they are *superiora* that *do* involve particulars as *inferiora*. The characterisation of a fact as 'involving' the particulars the fact is said to be 'about' in this sense is often attributed to propositional facts, too (but this is no help: it just complicates things, rather than clarifying them). As to (a) if we follow Wetzel 2003, we should say that the empirical identity criterion applies to non-compositional facts in the following way: a fact *f* is identical with another fact *f'* iff it is not possible that *f* should obtain without *f'* obtaining and it is not possible that *f'* should obtain without *f* obtaining (Fine 1982: 58; Pollock 1984: 52-56; Olson 1987). This criterion yields a very coarse-grained conception (Wetzel sect. 5) which is plausibly applicable only to real, *compositional* facts, not to *ideal*, propositional facts. As to (c): non-compositional facts are different from propositional facts and nearer to compositional ones in that non-compositional facts, like compositional ones, are taken to play the role of truthmakers, while propositional facts are not taken to play that role (the position of Searle, who seemingly both has propositional facts *and* has them play the role of truthmakers, seems an exception in the propositional camp).

It is not only hard to see on which grounds non-compositional facts, which are ideal (and thus necessarily existing) and unstructured, can be said to obey the empirical criterion and play the role of truthmakers, it is also nearly impossible to give a general characterization for these facts. For example, *pace* Wetzel, the empirical criterion cannot be Barwise's, since Barwise accepts fine-grained facts (even though these ideal

entities have constituents in them).[2] The fact that reference works like Wetzel 2003 and Mulligan & Correia 2008 do not offer a clear and comprehensive classification of non-compositional positions into a general taxonomy is arguably due to an excessive (and unjustified) focus on the conceptions of facts of philosophers like Plantinga, Pollock, and Barwise as *representative* alternatives to compositional facts. For one should not forget that Plantinga, Pollock, and Barwise's facts are apparently motivated by the specific needs of possible world semantics, and these needs are very different from the concerns of philosophers like Strawson and others (who adhere to propositional facts). In what follows I will ignore non-compositional facts, and stick to my classification.

2. No reference to facts

According to Ingarden, the fact which is the correlate of a sentence *p* of the form '*A* is *b*' can be named both by 'the being *b* of *A*' and by 'that *p*'.[3] Notice however that while the former kind of expression is favoured by defenders of compositional facts, like Armstrong (call them *fact-compositionalists*), that-clauses are favoured by defenders of propositional facts, like Moore or Strawson at some point (call them *fact-propositionalists*).[4] It is not by chance that fact-compositionalists tend to prefer a more artificial-sounding expression to name a fact, and that fact-propositionalists prefer by contrast a more natural-sounding one. For these two groups of philosophers tend to differ vastly in their methodological views of metaphysics and of the link between language and reality. Roughly, fact-compositionalists are tendentially revisionary metaphysicians, while fact-compositionalists are descriptive metaphysicians. They reply in a very different way to the question: why should we accept facts? Fact-propositionalists tend to give reasons from language: natural language shows reference

[2] Barwise's facts are different *both* from events (which he calls 'concrete situations') and from propositions – note that Barwise accepts all three kinds of entities, facts, propositions and events, even if it is unclear to me why he needs all three (Barwise 1989: 233, 260).

[3] Cf. Ingarden 1948: Ch. XII, §50 (2nd ed.: 110), and the note to Ingarden 1960: 199. Cf. also Biłat 2001: 255. Ingarden refers, more generally, to states of affairs, but I will only focus on facts here.

[4] To be precise, those who think that that-clauses are good names for facts do not argue that *all* that-clauses refer to facts, but only that *some* that-clauses do - more or less explicitly following Vendler's view that non-factive that-clauses refer to propositions while factive that-clauses refer to facts (I will not pay attention to this issue here; for more see chapters 4 and 5 of Betti 2011a; see also section 4 below.)

to facts. Fact-compositionalists tend to give metaphysical reasons: we need facts because they are the best candidates to play certain metaphysical roles. The first group, but not the second, takes reference to facts in natural language to be a sort of incontrovertible *datum* and a crucial one at that. From this they conclude that there are (propositional) facts. It is the descriptive methodological attitude of the first group that I criticize in this paper.

In arguing for the implausibility of the claim that there is no reference whatsoever to facts, Fine observes

> Surely when we say that not all of the relevant facts have been considered or that the recently discovered fact will prove critical, there is reference of some sort to facts, a reference that will show up either in the use of nominal or sentential variables (Fine 1982: 45)

In Betti 2011a (chapter 4) I argue that in this passage 'surely' has as much argumentative force as 'obviously' in 'obviously, when I say that you did it for her sake, there is reference to some sort of sake'[5] – that is, zero. There is neither definite reference to facts nor indefinite reference to facts either. I propose the following argument (inspired by Quine, though not Quinean), as a reconstruction of the reasoning of Fine and others (Betti 2011a, Introduction to Part Two):

Argument from Nominal Reference for Facts

(0) Facts exist iff statements of natural language are true which are ontologically committed to facts.

A statement *s* of natural language is true which is ontologically committed to facts iff

(1) *s* implies a true first-order statement of the form $\exists x$F*x* (indefinite reference), where 'F' is 'is a fact'

(a) A sufficient condition for (1) is that *s* contains singular terms for facts in natural language (definite reference).

[5] Cf. Quine 1960: 236.

Sufficient conditions for (a) are

(i) some (kinds of) that-clauses are singular terms referring to facts;

(ii) 'the fact that *p*' is a singular term referring to the fact that *p*;

(b) A necessary condition for (1) is that 'is a fact' functions genuinely as a predicate in predications of the form '*x* is a fact'.

(2) We have identity criteria for facts.
(3) The quantification over facts in natural language is ineliminable.

(Conclusion) Under 0, facts exist because of 1 (a, i), 2, 3 or because of 1 (a, ii) 2, 3 or because of 1 (b), 2, 3.

In Betti 2011a (chapter 4) I argue that (1) is false because (a) does not hold. I also argue that (b) cannot hold, because 'is a fact' is not a genuine predicate. For what I want to say here, my argument against (1, ii), namely the refutation of the thesis that 'the fact that p' is a singular term referring to the fact that *p*, is most central. My reasoning there goes like this. Take the most inclusive list of kinds of singular terms we can come up with: proper names ('Hargle'), indexicals ('he'), simple or complex demonstratives ('this', 'that hedgehog'), definite descriptions ('Argle's cutest pet'), and descriptive appositions ('the hedgehog Hargle'). If 'the fact that p' were a singular term, what kind of singular term would it be? It could only be a *definite description* or a *descriptive apposition*. It is neither, I argue; but if it is neither, then we're out of options. Saying that 'the fact that *p*' is a singular term *sui generis* begs the question against the opponent: thus, 'the fact that *p*' is not a singular term (although, in agreement with what linguists say, it is a *noun phrase*).

You defend the view that it is possible to give an account of the form of the expression 'the fact that *p*', and you refer to Herbert Hochberg's analysis for such an account, which I have not discussed in my book and shall instead discuss here. From a conversation we had in Krakow in October 2010 I know you think that that account is important and promising. So the question I am going to ask is this: what is Hochberg's account promising *exactly*? What kind of account would we exactly need? What criteria

or constraints put on such an account would allow us to judge whether it is good or bad? And what justifies such criteria? If these questions are not answered in any new way, we are left with the classical intuition underlying the *Argument from Nominal Reference to Facts* – roughly, the following. We need an account of the form of the expression 'the fact that *p*' because we need it to name facts in the sense of a *singular term*, i.e. we have definite reference to facts (this is 'a' in the Argument), or in any case we need an analysis of linguistic expressions to reveal that we are quantifying over facts, i.e. we have indefinite reference to facts (this is 'b' in the Argument) by laying bare the form of those expressions. Hochberg's account is just another attempt to show that that expression is a definite description (we may or may not assume that definite descriptions singularly name facts; I discuss these options below).

In the next section I will discuss Hochberg's account of 'the fact that *p*' as a definite description and find it either inadequate or irrelevant to the purpose.

2.1 Hochberg's analysis of 'the fact that p'

As a warm up, I start with David's attempt to account for the form of 'the fact that p.' Following a line of reasoning similar to that of other critics (Künne and Lowe), David objects that if 'the fact that p' "is a singular term, this cannot be because it is a definite description – it's not", but adds

> Timothy Williams reminded me that we get a similar situation with 'the tallest spy is F', which seems to turn into 'there is exactly one x such that x is a/the tallest spy and x is F'. I think the comparison suggests the solution. In case of the tallest spy, one uses an analysis of tallestness: 'there is exactly one spy x such that x is taller than every other spy and x is F'. So we could use the PA [traditional, i.e. relational, *p*ropositional *a*nalysis of belief, AB] to help us with our case: 'there is exactly one proposition x such that for every S, S thinks that p iff S thinks x, and x is F'" (David 2002: 140 n. 18).

One problem with this solution is that far from obeying it, it *denies* the so-called traditional propositional analysis of belief since nothing in this analysis reflects the *identity* of *x* and whatever is supposed to be denoted by 'that p'. Suppose now we agree

on an analysis of this kind: 'there is exactly one x such that for every S, S knows that p iff S knows x, and x is F'. Here the link between the unique fact (proposition in the example) and 'that *p*' is lost in the analysis: it is not what it is supposed to be denoted by 'that p' that is F, but rather x.[6]

A different, though related problem arises in connection with Hochberg's analysis of 'the fact that *Fa*' (i.e. that Bargle is choppy) as ι*f*(**T**(*a*, *f*) & **A**(*F*, *f*) & **IN**(Φ*x*, *f*)), i.e. 'there is a unique *x* such that *x* is a fact, *x* contains 'Bargle' as a term, *x* contains 'is choppy' as an attribute and *x* is of the form Φ*x*.' Here's Hochberg's real-time analysis of 'the fact that *p*' (Hochberg 2001: 124):

1 *A*: Hey, H, I've read that you've shown the logical form of 'The fact that *p*' taken as a definite description. Can you write that up for me?

2 *H*: Yes, of course, if you'll first let me analyse *p* into *Fa*. It's an extra assumption on the logical form of natural language – but harmless, I promise!

3 *A*: Ok. Can you write up the logical form of 'The fact that *Fa*'?

4 *H*: (*writes something*) ι*f*(**T**(*a*, *f*) ∧ **A**(*F*, *f*) ∧ **IN**(Φ*z*, *f*)).

5 *A*: Mmh. Fancy….How do you read that?

6 *H*: 'The unique fact *f*, such that it contains *a* as a **T**erm, F as an **A**ttribute, and is of the form Φ*z*.'

7 *A*: I see. But the formula is an abbreviation and the iota operator is eliminable, right? So now we take 'the fact that *Fa* is startling' with *S* for 'is startling', and write *S*ι*f*(**T**(*a*, *f*) ∧ **A**(*F*, *f*) ∧ **IN**(Φ*z*, *f*)). We can remove the iota operator like this

(1) ∃*f* (**T**(*a*, *f*) ∧ **A**(*F*, *f*) ∧ **IN**(Φ*x*, *f*) ∧ ∀*g* ((**T**(*a*, *g*) ∧ **A**(F, *g*) ∧ **IN**(Φx, *g*)) ↔ *f*=*g*) ∧ S*f*.

And I suppose it's okay by you if I remove the (zero-place) variable *f* in this formula and introduce explicitly a (one-place) predicate symbol standing for 'is a fact', like this (and let's take another font, say Boopee, for this new symbol, 𝔣):

(2) ∃*z*∀*y* 𝔣(*z*) ∧ (**T**(*a*, *z*) ∧ **A**(*F*, *z*) ∧ **IN**(Φ*x*, *z*) ∧ 𝔣(*y*) ∧ ((**T**(*a*, *y*) ∧ **A**(F, *y*) ∧ **IN**(Φx, *y*)) ↔ *z*=*y*) ∧ S*z*.

[6] The analyses offered by Künne and Schnieder in terms of appositive descriptions can be seen as improving on David's analysis but I show in Betti 2011a (chapter 4) that 'the fact that p' is not an appositive description because that clauses are not noun phrases, let alone singular terms. My argument gives adjunctive reasons to those already pointed out by Chierchia, Partee and Asher, and relies on the claim that that-clauses are not referential.

which we now read

(i) There is a fact such that it contains *a* as a term, *F* as an attribute, and instantiates Φ*x*;

(ii) There is at most one thing that is a fact such that it contains *a* as a term, *F* as an attribute, and instantiates Φ*x*;

(iii) Everything that is a fact such that it contains *a* as a term, *F* as an attribute, and instantiates Φ*x*, is startling.

And, as I understand you, 'term' here is a Russellian term, i.e. an individual, and *F* is a property.

8 *H*: Right.

Based on this dialogue, let's fix

Hochberg The fact that *Fa* is *G* =*df* There exists at most one thing that is a fact such that it contains *a* as a term, *F* as an attribute, and instantiates Φ*x*, and it is *G*.

Importantly, note that this analysis destroys the syntax of 'the fact that *Fa*' and has consequences for the semantics of this expression. In particular, the that-clause, 'that *Fa*' ('that *p*'), disappears. One might think that the analysis is for this reason self-defeating, since by offering it we are removing *prima facie* linguistic evidence that the expression 'the fact that *p*' *is* a genuine definite description. For usually, expressions of the form 'The F is (a) G' are analysed as a conjunction of the following claims:

(i) There is an *F*.
(ii) At most one thing is *F*.
(iii) Something that is *F* is *G* (or: Everything that is *F* is *G*.)[7]

And, indeed, according to analyses by Künne and Lowe, 'the fact that *Fa* (is startling)' should be analysed as a conjunction of:

[7] On description, see Ludlow 2009.

(i') there is a fact that *Fa*

(ii') at most one thing is a fact that *Fa*

(iii') everything that is a fact that *Fa* (is startling).

But this is unsatisfactory, because the expression 'is a fact that *p*' is nonsensical: so one must conclude that 'the fact that *p*' is not a definite description (Künne 2003: 10 n. 23, 255; see also Lowe 1998: 231).

Suppose we insist that this is not entirely correct. Suppose we say that the very idea behind definite descriptions is this: an expression of natural language is a definite description when it can be given an analysis of the kind that Hochberg gives. After all, Hochberg's analysis can be seen as including an existential claim, a uniqueness claim and, one could argue, a universal claim. Actually, we could say that, far from raising further complications, Hochberg's analysis seems conveniently to *remove* a problem, since it removes the expression 'that *p*', which, I maintain in Betti 2011a, is non-referential and responsible for much trouble. Besides, in general Hochberg's analysis seems to perform quite well, as it manages neatly to distinguish the following two expressions:

(1) The fact that Plato was a power-hungry political amateur (is startling)

(2) The fact that Plato most feared (is startling)

(1') The unique *x* such that *x* is a fact has *Plato* as term, has *being a power-hungry political amateur* as an attribute, and instantiates Φ*x* (is startling)

(2') The unique *x* such that *x* is a fact and Plato feared *x* the most (is startling)

Unfortunately, not all is well. To see why not, let us first grant that Hochberg's analysis indeed provides an analysis of 'the fact that *p*' as a definite description (though on pain of destroying the *prima facie* syntax of the expression 'the fact that *p*', something that the other analyses mentioned above do not do). The main problem is that Hochberg's analysis builds directly into the *analysans* theoretical considerations as to what facts are. I am not going to say that analyses of this kind should never be employed, or that they

are misguided; I say only that they failed to achieve the methodological ideals underlying the Argument from Nominal Reference.

The first problem with Hochberg's analysis is that it incorporates specific determinations about what facts are and, consequently, is not general enough. It works at most for *compositional* facts, for it incorporates identity conditions for those facts: from the same constituents in the same form (or structure or order) we'll always get the same fact. The facts one assumes by taking up this analysis have to be formally structured complex objects with minimally two constituents, one concrete (T) and one abstract (A). These characteristics correspond to three of the seven conditions I gave above for compositional facts. From this it can be seen that the objects whose apt definite description is the one given by Hochberg cannot be propositional facts. And there is more: Hochberg's analysis does not *as such* uniquely characterize facts so precisely as to exclude that the 'facts' in question are other things, namely integral wholes (substances) or mereological complexes (sums of tropes), because nothing can be derived from that analysis as to the kind of composition at issue, or as to the ontological status of the whole with respect to the parts ('constituents'): (*Hochberg*) could uniquely describe any of these three kinds of entities, facts, integral wholes or mereological complexes.[8] Now, since Hochberg is a friend of compositional facts, he likely does *not* mean by 'fact' either real wholes or mereological complexes. Yet this does not follow from (*Hochberg*) taken on its own. We could, of course, supplement the analysis in such a way as to ensure that the items purportedly picked out by the definite description are compositional facts and compositional facts only, by adding the other four characteristics or conditions I indicated in section 1 above, which would be needed to uniquely describe such facts. But one question would immediately arise: *what* would we really be doing? If we supplemented Hochberg's analysis with definitory metaphysical analyses of this kind, we would be using our *theoretical findings* to give an analysis of the expression 'the fact that *p*': but do we mean that this is how this expression, this ordinary language phrase, should be understood? Is this what *ordinary people* mean by it? Or is this what *philosophers who believe in compositional facts* want

[8] On the difference between facts, mereological complexes and integral wholes, see chapter 1 and 2 of Betti 2011a.

to be understood as meaning when *they* use the expression 'the fact that *p*'?[9] For one thing, this is surely not the analysis that would be given by philosophers who accept *propositional* facts.

This need for theoretical supplementation makes exceedingly clear that Hochberg's analysis is not *merely* linguistic. To be able to give the analysis Hochberg gives, and eventually to supplement it with the right identity conditions, we need to make a detailed determination of what we assume in our catalogue of the world *before* the analysis of the expression 'the fact that *p*' can even begin. This strategy is a strategy in which, contrary to the methodological ideals of language-based metaphysics, one does not *first* inspect language to see whether there is *prima facie* reference to whatever is called 'facts', and *then* decide what should be in the world on the basis of linguistic constraints; one does just the opposite. You first decide that compositional facts are in your catalogue of the world and then decide how you want to talk about them. This difference in strategies is methodologically very important. For if our strategy is the revisionary one of fixing the world and then finding ways to pick up whatever we have fixed, why then should we want to claim the following?

> Any philosophy of facts owes us an account of the form of such expressions as "the fact that Sam is sad" (Lowe 1998) (Mulligan & Correia 2008, section 1).

If instead our strategy is the descriptive one of looking at how natural language works in order to lay bare ontological implications, then Hochberg's analysis is simply no use, for it brings us too far from natural language. And we can't just say: 'Who cares about strategies? You wanted a definite description and you have it.' We can't approach the matter so lightly without getting into some deep methodological problems. For the point is this: why should we want to name facts, and name facts in any specific way? Why is this so important? And important to which enterprise? That enterprise can't be a descriptive one, for Hochberg's analysis cannot support any *prima facie* linguistic arguments for facts: who can possibly come to the analyses of *Hochberg* or *HochbergProp* just by staring at the expression 'the fact that *p*'? Reconsider:

[9] Cf. Varzi 2002, Varzi 2007.

Hochberg The fact that *Fa* is *G* =*df* There exists at most one thing that is a fact such that it contains *a* as a term, *F* as an attribute, and instantiates Φ*x*, and it is *G*.

The language employed in the right-hand side of both these analyses is not natural language, but a formal or semi-formal or at least regimented language. Natural language does not contain genuine variables. The semi-formal language on the right-hand side is one that *no one* uses (philosophers do, but that's not an argument, is it?). No one speaks, let alone *thinks* in that way.

To eliminate all doubts that in Hochberg's analysis the link between the *prima facie* syntax of 'the fact that p' is destroyed, consider the following. Once we pass from the original expression to Hochberg's analysis, we have no way to get back to the original phrase. Consider (read '⇒' as 'translate'/'is the translation of'):

natural language	*From …to*	*formal language*
(3) the fact that Bargle is choppy is startling	⇒	ι*f*(**T**(Bargle, *f*) ∧ **A**(Being choppy, *f*) ∧ IN(Φ*x*, *f*)) is startling

formal language	*From …to*	*natural language*
(4) ι*f*(**T**(Bargle, *f*) ∧ **A**(Being choppy, *f*) ∧ IN(Φ*x*, *f*)) is startling	⇒	the fact that Bargle is choppy is startling

Claim (4) cannot be correct, since nothing on the left-hand side tells us that we *must* re-translate 'ι*f*(**T**(Bargle, *f*) ∧ **A**(Being choppy, *f*) ∧ IN(Φ*x*, *f*)) is startling' by an expression that contains 'the fact that *Fa*', i.e. the expression in the left-hand side of (3). We may choose some other translation. If you insist that our translation must contain the

expression 'fact', because *f* appears on the right-hand side, then of course you should also reintegrate 'term', 'attribute' and 'instantiation'; the only thing that you can plausibly get is this:

(5) ι*f*(**T**(Bargle, *f*) ∧ **A**(Being choppy, *f*) ∧ IN(Φ*x*, *f*)) is startling ⇒ There exists at most one thing that is a fact such that it contains Bargle as a term, *Being choppy* as an attribute, and instantiates Φ*x*, and is startling.

But of course, as I've said, no one speaks like this. If we agree to these translations, then, it is clear that we are not merely showing something about natural language with the aid of formal language; we are *replacing* natural language by a formal language, operating by stipulation and theoretical decision. Once we pass in this way from natural language to an analysis in formal language, nothing can force us to return to natural language (or at least nothing forces us to go back to *exactly where we were*). The situation reminds us of Quine's original criterion of ontological commitment: the direction from natural language to formal language is fundamentally the only one that counts. Such unconcern for natural language is of course legitimate, but it is exactly on this point that Quine's own position and that of the defenders of the Quine-like argument from Nominal Reference part ways. It is not an option for the defenders of this argument just to deliver an analysis in formal, semi-formal, or regimented language, for this analysis has to be a means, not an end. What a philosopher of the Argument from Nominal Reference-mould wants, or at least should want, is a way to translate formulas back to natural language.

Let's now say, therefore, that any translation back to natural language is fine so long as it brings us back to a proper expression of natural language. But if so, then the following three options are all perfectly fine:

(3) ι*f*(**T**(Bargle, *f*) ∧ **A**(Being choppy, *f*) ∧ IN(Φ*x*, *f*)) is startling ⇒ Bargle's being choppy

(4) ι*f*(**T**(Bargle, *f*) ∧ **A**(Being choppy, *f*) ∧ IN(Φ*x*, *f*)) is startling ⇒ the fact that Bargle is choppy

(5) ι*f*(**T**(Bargle, *f*) ∧ **A**(Being choppy, *f*) ∧ IN(Φ*x*, *f*)) is startling ⇒ That Bargle is choppy

There seems to be no principled reasons why you would have to choose (4) over (3) or (5). But if there is no principled way to get (4), then our possession of a *prima facie* expression of natural language for facts in which the word 'fact' appears becomes irrelevant. If this is our conclusion, then linguistic arguments for facts based on a *prima facie* analysis themselves are irrelevant, and *a fortiori* so does the Argument from Nominal Reference. The only important element here is our possession of a successful *explication* in formal language. But this can only be interesting for a revisionary metaphysician.

One might want to observe that in principle it does not follow directly from what I said – contrary to what I seem to have just suggested – that Hochberg's analysis is completely useless for propositional facts. As it stands, it is useless; but surely one can adjust the analysis to include the identity conditions for propositional facts? Yes, one can. We can indeed adjust Hochberg in such a way that the right-hand side of the analysis gives you propositional facts, something like this:

HochbergProp The fact that *Fa* is *G* =*df* There exists at most one thing that is a fact such that it corresponds to the unique proposition [*Fa*] such that [*a*] occurs in [*Fa*] as a subject-concept, [*F*] as a predicate-concept, and [*Fa*] is of the form Φ*x*, and it is *G*.[10]

Now we have a Hochbergian definite description that fits propositional facts. As was the case in the Hochbergian analysis for compositional facts, this Hochbergian analysis for propositional facts includes the identity conditions for propositional facts given above: to each proposition, its corresponding fact (and vice versa); same proposition, same fact.

But now a problem similar to the one we saw above immediately arises. As was the case with its compositional counterpart above, *HochbergProp*'s analysis assumes a world of propositional facts from the start. You do not *first* inspect language to see

[10] This reformulation is done in terms of Bolzanian propositions, but an alternative could easily be given for Aristotelian ones (i.e. sentences equipped with meaning). Also, I am aware that what I write here depends on the analysis of 'the proposition that *Fa*' which I am using: the unique thing such that [a] occurs in [Fa] as a subject-concept, [F] as a predicate-concept and [Fa] is of the form Φx. Note that I am not advocating this analysis of 'the proposition that *p*', but merely extending to propositions the analysis that Hochberg is giving here for facts on the basis of the identity-conditions for propositional facts outlined above.

whether there is *prima facie* reference to facts and then decide what should be in the world; you do just the opposite: you first decide to accept propositional facts, then decide how you want to talk about them. We are now building identity conditions for propositional facts into our analysis.

So it seems to me that a descriptive metaphysician should reject this analysis as ill-conceived. And even if you say that it is perfectly fine for a descriptive metaphysician, there's still a problem, namely this. As I have argued elsewhere, the identity conditions built in *HochbergProp* lead to the conclusion that propositional facts are just true propositions: all propositional facts collapse into true propositions. This I demonstrate in chapter 5 of Betti 2011a, where I reject six attempts to show that propositional facts (as characterized in section 1 above) are distinct from (true) propositions. In other words: the expression 'propositional facts as distinct from true propositions' expresses, to speak with Bolzano, an *empty idea*.

So a descriptive metaphysician gains nothing anyway by insisting that 'the fact that *p*' is a singular term whose form is fixed by *HochbergProp*. There is simply no *definite* reference to propositional facts (i.e. reference to facts via singular terms).[11] All right, one can say, but how about *indefinite* reference to such facts? The predicate 'is a fact' appears of course, also in the analysis of the form of sentences like 'some facts are important' as $\exists x(Fx \wedge Ix)$ and thus *also* imply $\exists x Fx$. Isn't the predicate 'is as fact' genuinely used as a predicate in these sentences, in which indefinite reference to facts is made? I say that this is not the case. The issue turns again on whether we can make any sense of expressions *in natural language* such as 'something is a fact' (*without* assuming that that-clauses are singular terms). But we can't. For which expressions would do?[12] Besides, *indefinite* reference to facts comes down to (truthful) applications of 'is a fact' to something. But, again, if this something is supposed to be a propositional fact, then, as long as it is not convincingly shown that propositional facts must be accepted alongside propositions (among others by rejecting the six arguments in Betti 2011a,

[11] This seems quick, of course, but as I indicated at the beginning of section 2, I offer an extensive critical discussion of this point in Betti 2011a, chapters 3 and 4.

[12] On this point, see Betti 2011a, chapter 3, where I argue from language data (and not using the metaphysical argument based on the collapse of propositional facts into true propositions) that 'is a fact' is not a genuine predicate applying to the objects falling under 'something' in 'something is a fact'.

chapter 4), *that* something can only be a true proposition. In fact, it is an illusion that we can ever manage to show that in natural language we have genuine quantification over facts. I come back to this in the next section.

Suppose we come back to *Hochberg*, the *compositional* version: then we *could* either maintain that definite descriptions are singularly referential and function as singular names, or accept the quantification analysis. Either way would do, for the way we name facts, again, does not seem to count: we need to show that compositional facts are there or not, by arguing for them directly, not from their linguistic description. I come back to this in section 4.[13]

3. 'Facts' does not mean philosophers' facts

I say that we do not have genuine quantification over either compositional or propositional facts in natural language, and that it's illusion to think that we do. In fact, the methodology of ordinary language philosophy as espoused by defenders of the Argument from Nominal Reference, which maintains that evidence concerning the nature of facts can be gathered by inspecting the various everyday uses of certain expressions in ordinary language, is question-begging. Although such an approach presents itself as being based squarely upon empirical data, in fact a number of highly technical theoretical assumptions are built into it from the very start.

The Argument from Nominal Reference relies, however implicitly, on Quine's criterion of ontological commitment. Criteria such as these are motivated by the recognition that language may deceive us, and that therefore we need to show how the expression 'facts' can refer to facts successfully, in a truly transparent way. The argument does not go through. Suppose now that the argument *did* go through: that would mean that we have argued in an effective way that 'fact(s)' *must* be taken at face value as referring to (a/the) fact(s), and that therefore we may accept that there are such things as facts. Suppose indeed that someone came up with rebuttals of all possible

[13] I have assumed so far that among metaphysicians accepting facts, descriptive ones would have to choose *HochbergProp* and revisionary ones *Hochberg*. This is because, as I said at the beginning, the first tend to accept propositional facts and the second compositional ones. The reason for the latter claim is among other things that propositional facts cannot be convincingly said to play any metaphysical role. It seems fundamental to revisionary thinking that any category of entities would have to play some role to be metaphysically legitimate. I come back to this in section 4.

counterarguments (including those in my book) I raised against that argument as to definite and indefinite reference. In that case, it would become crucial for me to show that premise (3) in the argument for nominal reference is false, i.e. to show that quantification over facts in natural language is ineliminable. Or, alternatively, suppose we just forget the Quine-like criteria, and try to argue for the idea that 'fact(s)'-language should just be taken at face value without passing for any translation in first-order logic. After all, there have been philosophers – ordinary language philosophers – that rely on the mere use of certain words in natural language (often just English) to assume that the things named by such words exist. For doesn't it seem true in an embarrassingly trivial way that 'facts' is a natural language expression referring to facts? Suppose we indeed agree that 'facts' refers to facts. Now, what would *this* mean? What are we claiming? That *there are objects that we name 'facts'*; yet this does not approach even the shadow of a theory of facts. What, metaphysically speaking, are the objects we call 'facts'? A theory of such objects would need, like any metaphysical theory, to be explicit about whether, for instance, facts are entities in their own right, i.e. objects not reducible to something else – events, true propositions or whatever – perhaps by appealing to some theory of facts that has already been proposed. So we come back to the need to give identity conditions for facts, which in turn depends on a characterization of what *sort of thing* facts are. For, obviously, if 'facts' can be taken to refer to objects that are actually something *other than* the objects I have characterized as such, then linguistic arguments can do very little to support the claim that we must assume in our ontology facts as I have characterized them above. We can still agree on another meaning of the word, and still perhaps raise interesting questions, such as whether what we mean by 'facts' is apt to account for fact-talk in natural language or not – with the proviso that we agree, I would say, that being apt to account for fact-talk in natural language is a role that *must* be played by some entity. However, the conclusion I come to as far as linguistic arguments for facts are concerned is that when facts are construed in terms of the two main theories I highlighted, there is no convincing argument that language carries 'natural' reference to such *philosophers*' facts. The best option in this respect would be to treat 'fact' as meaning *grounded statement that we hold as true* (and I am remaining deliberately vague on what this might really mean).

The problem with usual ordinary language methodology that insists that the expression 'facts' refers to philosophers' facts (in the sense I fixed in section 1 above) is this: *unless* that methodology is accompanied by restrictions – restrictions that a philosophical community is prepared to share as methodologically acceptable – it will bring about a potentially useless proliferation of entities, and a conception of metaphysics as a discipline relative only to certain natural languages; again, often just to English. I am not sympathetic with a methodological position of this kind, but really have no good reason to argue that it is bad in itself, so to say – our assessment should depend entirely on what we want the methodology to do. But *any* methodological position must be applied consistently, and in the case of ordinary language philosophy I do not see how we can avoid resorting scrupulously to the wealth of empirical linguistic research available today – and in such a way that the results of such research are accepted no matter what.[14] We can't tolerate surreptitious and question-begging deviations in philosophical method – that is, we can't change the methodology by a kind of sleight of hand in the midst of an investigation. If we start from language and its functions, we cannot make exceptions on the basis of our philosophical preferences, and let those preferences guide how to interpret linguistic data, *unless* of course we accept that we are simply seeking a linguistic way to make our philosophical choices perspicuous. But that's another story. It is not acceptable to use our own philosophical convictions to deviate from certain data *just in order to argue* for those very same convictions a moment later. For if one adheres to the methodology of ordinary language philosophy, it becomes a daunting task to decide, without begging the question, which words we have to take as referential, and which are synonymous and co-referential, or *both* synonymous and co-referential but merely different in their sound or in their pragmatic roles.

An example of this attitude is what we might call the Awkward Ring Rule:

[14] This is no easy solution of course. For it is not clear what philosophers should derive from linguistic analyses by professional linguists, especially when rival and mutually excluding accounts are available. Just to mention an example, according to Joan Bresnan, among linguists "there is very little agreement about what the category of sentential complements such as that-clauses actually is, and why that is", Joan Bresnan, "The fall of COMP?" message to the LINGUISTLIST list on Oct 1, 1996.

(Awkward Ring Rule) Phrases denoting the same objects must be interchangeable in all contexts while yielding the same linguistic effects.[15]

This rule has unpalatable consequences: its defenders must either accept these, or do away with the rule altogether. I think the best option is to ban rules of this kind from a good methodology in metaphysics. The way certain expressions and turns of phrase sound cannot be used to argue on matters such as reference and existence. Why should we give any credence to a methodology that relies on how English phrases sound to *us*, not even to linguists or refined literates, but to philosophers of all people, fed disproportionately as we are on *technical* talk about propositions, facts, events, and what have you? Why should we think that the mere use of the word 'fact' commits us to an ontology of 'some sort of' facts (as distinct from other true propositions)? What could count as convincing evidence for this? And what if, in trying to select which good-sounding turns of phrases play a role in reference and existence, we find out that some expressions sound good to us, but awkward to others – how can we decide who is right?

One option would be to incorporate corpus analysis into our methodology (i.e. quantitative and qualitative analysis of actual, and representative language data-sets) along with historical data about language. For instance, if one could show that 'fact(s)' in an English sentence carries without exception the meaning of 'fact(s)' relevant to some of our discussions, and that this has always been the case, then one might have a point; perhaps small, but a point. (For, to be sure, this would not be enough, since one would have to offer a cross-linguistic analysis, but we shall leave this aside.) Once again, I am not pleading for this position at all: I am just stressing its implications as much as I can to show just how illusory this methodology is.

Suppose we apply this method to facts. As pointed out by Olson, who follows the etymological information in the Oxford English Dictionary, originally a 'fact' was a 'deed'

[15] The Awkward Ring Rule is inspired by this: "The things that are true are propositions, and they cannot sensibly be said to be the case. The things that are the case (or that obtain) are states of affairs, and they cannot sensibly said to be true. *So* the predicates 'is the case' and 'is true' have not even overlapping extensions"(Künne 2003: 257, my emphasis). Note however that Wolfgang Künne does not adhere *unrestrictedly* to a rule of this kind (see ibid.: 11 fn 25). I discuss the Awkward Ring Rule in chapter 4 of Betti 2011a.

or ‘action’, ‘more often than not criminal’ (Olson 1987: 10). Olson reports six meanings of ‘fact’, of which the second comes closest to the one we want:

(1) occurrences *in general*, as well as actions; hence
(2) what *is the case*, whether an occurrence or not; hence
(3) what is *known* to be the case; hence
(4) what is known by *observation*, rather than inference; hence
(5) the actual *data of experience*, as opposed to what we infer: and, developing out of one or more of the above senses,
(6) actually existing *things*, such as persons and institutions, apparently to contrast them with fictions (a use the dictionary characterizes as ‘strained’) (Olson 1987: 10)

Olson rightly observes that none of these ‘commits the user to facts as entities in their own right’ (Olson 1987: 10). Indeed, it would be most difficult to argue successfully that the ‘facts’ referred to in ‘not all the relevant facts have been considered’ (Fine’s example) *must be* either compositional facts as characterized above, or propositional facts (*as distinct from true propositions*). Consider the following:

> Juror #8: Here’s what I think happened: the old man heard the fight between the boy and his father a few hours earlier. Then, when he’s lying in his bed he heard a body hit the floor in the boy’s apartment, heard the woman scream from across the street, got to his front door as fast as he could, heard somebody racing down the stairs and assumed it was the boy.
>
> Juror #10: Now, look – we’re all grown-ups in here. We heard the facts, didn’t we?

These lines are taken from Sidney Lumet’s *Twelve Angry Men* (1957), a movie where the word ‘fact(s)’ occurs in a highly realistic way. What are the ‘facts’ that Juror #10 says he and the rest of the jury have heard? Did he hear facts in any of the forms we’ve considered? (compositional, propositional, or even hybrids of the two?) Well, first of all he heard spoken sentences, just as the old man claims to have heard a body hit the

floor: he heard sounds of a certain kind. Now, one can very well object that 'hearing the facts' means more than just literally, physiologically hearing spoken sentences; it means that the latter have been understood *as meaningfully stating something*. But if something *that is stated* is to be identified as a fact, then 'fact' here can mean anything from (2) to (5) above.[16] The technical take on *what is stated* among philosophers usually is that what is stated by a sentence is a proposition. Let's accept this. If we now agree for the sake of argument that Juror #10 heard sentences stating *what is the case,* i.e. facts in the sense of (2), then these can't be facts in any other sense than true propositions. To claim the contrary we must be able to argue convincingly that hearing sentences stating what is the case *is* hearing facts, rather than hearing (the content of) sentences, i.e. *propositions which are (assumed to be) true*. But on what basis can we argue that grasping what is stated to be the case, or just grasping *what is stated*, is grasping what is *denoted* by sentences (supposedly, facts) rather than what is *expressed* by them (supposedly, propositions)? Such a basis can be provided only by a *theory* that can account for the data in the best manner. But if we want to account in a coherent manner for the way 'facts' occurs in *Twelve Angry Men*, then 'fact(s)' must stand for whatever can be stated as well as for whatever can be *doubted*. The whole point of the movie is that as long as the jury has a reasonable doubt, no one can be declared guilty. It's quite hard to say when and how the philosopher's facts would enter the picture here. If we have to follow the view on that-clauses of Vendler (1967) and others, whose views are considered authoritative by whoever wishes to defend the thesis that factive that-clauses refer to facts while non-factive that-clauses refer to propositions, then propositions can be doubted, but not facts, for 'doubt' is non-factive. Note that by saying this I do not mean to say that this enables us to conclude that the 'facts' of ordinary people are (true) propositions. We can at most, perhaps, conclude with Olson that 'even a philosopher may use the word 'fact' without talking about facts' (Olson 1987: 10). Even if we were to grant that 'fact(s)' occurred in ordinary language exclusively in the meaning *ad* (2) above (and this is not the case), this *alone* would not be evidence that any of the philosopher's facts are meant specifically. It's not clear what

[16] Notice that saying that 'facts can be stated' (Vendler 1967: 144) or that they 'can properly be stated' (Clark 1976: 262) is compatible with all positions on facts, even those according to which facts cannot be named or cannot be the object of singular reference and those in which facts are just truthmakers of propositions (Clark 1975: 7 *and ff*).

connection the word 'fact' in the expression 'That's a fact' has to the metaphysical notions of fact, namely those which see facts as entities at the level of reference. This is the reason why Armstrong chose the phrase 'state of affairs' for his technical notion of fact instead of the word 'fact':

> the word 'fact' is too much a term of ordinary speech. In particular, contemporary use ties it too closely to the notions of statement and proposition. (Armstrong 1997: 19)

The idea might be that the expression 'that's a fact' is used just to endorse (or to assert the truth of) a given statement or proposition. (Armstrong 1989: 6). If one is to believe the way people talk, there seems to be ample evidence that people often mean by 'facts' just what philosophers would call 'propositions' (held to be true).

Some examples might show how tricky it is to conclude from observations about natural language to metaphysical matters. Wolfgang Künne gives the following substitutions as evidence that facts are not true propositions (though not the best evidence):

(1a) True propositions are true
(1b) *Facts are true

(2a) The Pythagorean Theorem is true
(2b) *The Pythagorean Theorem is a fact

(3a) The victory of the Labour Party is a fact
(3b) *The victory of the Labour Party is a true proposition (Künne 2003: 10)

Künne observes that certain forms of speech are improper if 'fact' and 'true proposition' are substituted for one another. If facts are nothing but true propositions, he says, why is it that (1a) is trivial while (1b) has an awkward ring, (2a) makes sense while (2b) does not, and (3a) is significant while (3b) is nonsense? In reply one can say that the American corpus (http://www.americancorpus.org/), just to take an extensive corpus easily

accessible, gives no results for expressions of the form of either (1) or (2) ('true proposition' in subject or object position): 'true proposition' *never* occurs except in the sense of 'proposal'. 'True fact' returns thirty-two results, all in the relevant meaning (*not* in the sense of 'true' as in 'true friend'), both in fiction and news.[17] Should we conclude that facts are indeed propositions? No, we should not. But an ordinary language philosopher should conclude exactly that: for, by the same token, the reason why (2) is awkward might be that 'propositions are true' is awkward. (But really, should we accept this conclusion as methodologically sound?) Moreover, 'false facts' may sound oxymoronic to philosophers, but, far from being based on empirical data, this can only be a case of *stipulation*; for to those in judicial settings – judges and courts – 'false facts' does not seem oxymoronic at all:

> Thus, the word 'facts' is used in a narrow, lawyerly way; it includes those matters disputed in litigation other than legal principles and procedures, a distinction seen in such oft-used phrases as 'issue of fact,' 'question of law,' and 'mixed question of law and fact.' […] As described by those terms, a fact is not necessarily '[s]omething that has really occurred or is actually the case' […] but rather what a judge, for purposes of resolving a case, will accept as such – or will accept as something that a reasonable legislator could accept as such. Thus, in the lawyer's realm, the notion of 'alleged fact' or even 'false fact' is not unintelligible. (15) (Stewart 2008: 318).[18]

And are these examples confined to legal talk? No. Here's an example from a philosopher, Whewell:

> Art. I. Facts must be true. (*Novum organon renovatum*, 1858: ix).

[17] These results come from a search I made in November 2008. The same search on September 7, 2011 gave one result for 'true proposition' in the philosophical sense (Künne's) from an academic paper and thirty-four results for 'true fact' mostly in non-academic sources (except for one academic source).

[18] This example is from a judicial clerk: "A negative value judgment is actionable if it charges or imputes a false fact, such as dishonor, to the plaintiff (Cohen 1991: 688).

And here's an example from a distinguished present-day political philosopher, Peter Augustine Lawler:

> One clue to answering these questions is to note Jimmy's factual error: Carole King never had a hit with 'Amazing Grace.' And to call attention to that *false fact* about Carole King, Stillman actually has Jimmy mention it twice, the first time as a rather lame digression. (Lawler 2002: 94, my emphasis)

But could this be just technical talk after all, far removed from what normal people say and do? No. Here's an America high-school teacher, Emily Kissner, talking of facts and opinions. Can a fact be false? Yes.

> A fact is a statement that can be proven true or false.[19]

In the light of this, it is unreasonable to insist that ordinary language use, or at least ordinary language use *alone*, commits us to either compositional or propositional facts as characterized by their defenders. Both the historical record and data on present usage offer evidence to the contrary.

Let me stress that I do not give these examples in order to claim that facts can (in fact) be false against those who hold the opposite view. The point is not to heap up evidence for either position by playing with Google, but rather to make clear that we will be unable to defend or attack either position – unable, for instance, to claim that 'false fact' is a wrong use or an exception to the right use – unless we make *theoretical assumptions* that tell us *why* this or that use is an exception or deviation from the use we think it is right.

4. Facts as semantic values

[19] Originally found in this presentation http://www.slideshare.net/elkissn/understanding-fact-and-opinion; now available at http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Understanding-Fact-and-Opinion

Maybe you agree on the critical points I put forward in the last section against the descriptive methodology of ordinary language philosophy. But I am not sure that you agree with the following claims as well, or to what extent. To me, all I have said so far means that there is no 'natural' reference to facts. And it means that the only sensible position on reference to facts is one according to which facts are taken to be the *semantic value* of certain expressions *by stipulation* (with the proviso we can convincingly argue by means other than linguistic ones that facts exist.) Here below I will try to make my point clearer.

In chapters 3 and 4 of Betti 2011a I establish that the only facts that that-clauses can refer to - if they refer at all - are propositional facts. I discuss the following claims as to the reference of that-clauses to such facts: *Fact Reference*, and its refinement, which I call *Fact Reference*$_{Power!}$:

Fact Reference — whereas some (kinds of) that-clauses (are singular terms) *refer(ring) to propositions*, some (kinds of) that-clauses (are singular terms) *refer(ring) to facts*.

Fact Reference$_{Power!}$ — factive that-clauses *refer to facts* while non-factive that-clauses *refer to propositions*.[20]

I show in chapter 4 of Betti 2011a that these claims are false. There I perform what we might call a *reduction* of propositional facts to something else, i.e. true propositions. Accordingly, what certain that-clauses refer to is at most what 'true proposition' refers to, and this item is at most a Bolzanian proposition (notice that this is not the same as saying that any of these words can be exchanged in all contexts).[21] This leads to *Reference*:

[20] Where factivity is fixed as follows:
Factivity: language exhibits a phenomenon called factivity; this phenomenon is linked to the implication or presupposition of truth of certain embedded clauses.

[21] I show in Betti 2011a that it is not only legitimate to say that factive clauses refer to true propositions (or, if you prefer, that it's perfectly legitimate to take propositional facts as true propositions) – it is in fact a better option (if we assume that that-clauses are singular terms.). The linguistic results that allegedly lead to Fact Reference, including those from celebrated work at the crossroads of linguistics and philosophy such as that of Vendler's (cf. his 1967,

Reference All that-clauses refer to propositions. Non-factive that-clauses *refer to propositions* while factive that-clauses *refer to true propositions*.

This claim, I say, *could* be endorsed, but only under the assumption that that-clauses are singular terms, i.e. they carry definite reference to some specific entity. I show that this assumption is false in chapter 3, where I perform an *elimination* of propositional facts: that-clauses – and so the expression 'the fact that p' – do not refer at all; *a fortiori*, they do not refer to facts. *Fact Reference*, *Fact Reference*$_{Power!}$ and *Reference* are false because that-clauses are not singular terms. The only way to show that that-clauses refer to propositions or facts is to assume this conclusion from the very beginning. And this, of course, is a *petitio principii*. This leaves only the following option:

Semantic Value At least some (kinds of) that-clauses have facts as their *semantic value*.

Semantic Value is a technical claim which is different from *Fact Reference*, *Fact Reference*$_{Power!}$ and *Reference* in some important ways. Whereas the latter make sense against a descriptive background, *Semantic Value* makes sense against a revisionary background. Descriptive metaphysicians seem to think that claims such as *Fact Reference* follow from purely linguistic results (this is however false and question-begging). We investigate the way in which certain expressions function in language (that-clauses in this case) – so goes the descriptive reasoning – because this reveals

1972) do not require facts at all. If factive clauses refer to true propositions, the difficulties of some positions (Vendler's) with the opacity of knowledge claims disappear, and the non-factive use of 'know' loses all mystery. If factive clauses refer to true propositions, for instance, there is no need for the enormous apparatus that some (Peterson) assume in order to patch up Vendler's position. My argument goes like this: I show that if we accept that some that-clauses refer to propositional facts while others refer to propositions (*Fact Reference*$_{Power!}$), then propositional facts collapse into true propositions. Coming up with a difference in grain between propositional facts and true propositions as a way to block the collapse begs the question, for in doing so we assume what we want to prove, namely that propositional facts and propositions are two different categories of items. In addition to being question-begging, dependent on the theories in which it is put forward, the argument may also be *ad hoc*, namely insofar as we come up with a difference for the sole purpose of solving the problem, i.e. blocking the collapse.

something interesting and valuable about the world (in this case, facts), and this is how we come to fix claims such as *Fact Reference*. By contrast, *Semantic Value* does not suppose this descriptive way of reasoning at all. *Semantic Value* just says that certain elements of language (certain that-clauses) are taken to be paired off with items that are not in language (facts). This pairing off has an important stipulative aspect. A revisionary metaphysician who accepts *Semantic Value* does not think that that claim is set up by inspecting language alone: she does not think that language (that-clauses) tells us anything about the nature of the non-linguistic items involved (facts), nor that linguistic considerations alone give us by themselves any good reason to accept non-linguistic items in the catalogue of the world. As I have mentioned in the previous sections, for a revisionary metaphysician the nature of facts and the reasons why we should accept them have to be argued for by other means, independently of linguistic considerations.

To understand better the difference between *Reference* and *Semantic Value* a passage from Yablo is particularly valuable:

> Now in asking, "Are they referential?" I mean not, "Are there Montague grammarians or other formal semanticists who have cooked up super-duper semantical values for them, say, functions from worlds to functions from worlds and *n*-tuples of objects to truth-values?" […] The answer to that is going to be *yes* almost no matter what part of speech you're talking about – connectives, prepositions, and apostrophes 's' not excluded. I mean: Are they referential in the way that singular terms are, so that someone […] could reasonably be said to be *talking about* its referent, or purporting to talk about its purported referent? (Yablo 1996: 260).

Claims such as *Fact Reference* suppose a natural link between everyday language and the world, the paradigmatic kind of which is *naming*, i.e. the kind of reference of singular terms. *Semantic Value* does not suppose any natural link of this kind. As is clear from the quote, semantic values need not be anything even remotely similar to common items of our experience (though they can be). The semantic values of expressions are

chosen, and can be whatever one likes – they can be mathematical surrogates such as set theoretical entities, but also entities such as facts.

As I said, in order to endorse *Semantic Value* we need to show by some non-linguistic means that facts exist. For we can *stipulate* that facts are the semantic value of certain that-clauses and of expressions such as 'the fact that *p*' and just 'fact' only if we are able to argue convincingly that facts exist. Or to put it more responsibly: we can do so only if we are able to argue convincingly that there is a reason to include them in the catalogue of the world, which, as mentioned, comes down to showing that they are the best candidates to play certain metaphysical roles. If we can't argue convincingly that facts exist, then they simply can't be the semantic value of any expression.

In principle, *Semantic Value* is open not only to defenders of compositional facts, but also to defenders of propositional facts. In practice, however, the latter option is not viable. For in order to allow propositional facts in the catalogue of the world, we would have to show that we need those facts to play certain roles. But propositional facts do no job except that of being the referent of certain linguistic items – of that-clauses, among others. If that – i.e. serving as referent of certain linguistic items – is the only philosophical problem propositional facts are needed to solve, then we should dismiss them as soon as we discover that we don't need them (this is actually what Fact Reference$_{Power!}$ *itself* entails). If we want to resort to any ontological difference between propositional facts and propositions to show that we need the former alongside the latter we must theorize it directly, and in any case independently of linguistic claims such as Fact Reference$_{Power!}$ If we intend to use Fact Reference$_{Power!}$ to *establish* that there are two different categories of items, but by relying on that claim we end up with only one, then we should accept this as a result of the theorizations involved in Fact Reference$_{Power!}$. If we want to block the collapse of propositional facts into true propositions, we can escape the accusation of begging the question only so long as we do not use our own linguistic theorizations as a serious tool for doing ontology, and can instead argue by other means. For principles like Fact Reference$_{Power!}$ are tools for displaying our ontological choices, not for making them.[22] We must come up with

[22] Cf. Varzi 2002: section 3, and end of section 1: "Let us just say that depending on what we think there is we attach a meaning to what we say. Let us theorize explicitly about what there is

independent evidence – evidence independent of language – for whatever interesting property we ascribe to propositional facts but not to true propositions, and *vice versa.* Obviously we can say all sorts of creative things about propositional facts. Even easier is just to say what other philosophers have already said about what such facts are and about how they are supposed to differ from propositions. Of course this should be done, but having *merely* done this gives us ill-founded reasons to insist that facts should be included in our ontology alongside true propositions. There is no reason to accept propositional facts.

Things like facts and propositions are *theoretical posits* justified by the metaphysical roles they play: this is why giving lists of characteristics that facts have and propositions don't – without arguing for those roles – is a definitory exercise, and won't be useful in metaphysics so long as no independent arguments are given for assuming (e.g.) propositional facts alongside true propositions in our ontology. And this is also why *Semantic Value* is the only option for the semantics of 'fact'.

So, for instance, whoever wishes to maintain that there are no facts but only true propositions needs just to show that nothing is lacking from our ontological inventory if we do not have facts alongside true propositions, i.e. to show that all salient roles allegedly played by facts can be played as well by true propositions. Which, again, does not mean that the *words* 'fact' and 'true proposition' play the same role: that would be a lethal category mismatch, on par with saying that the word 'mouse' eats cheese.[23] Again, I am not saying that it *is* correct that true propositions can take up all the salient roles played by facts; if by 'all the salient roles' we mean every role played by facts in all possible theories of facts. Then of course the claim is trivially false. Nor am I saying that the *philosophical notion* of fact is the same as the *philosophical notion* of proposition.

So the best position with respect to the naming of true propositions, as to the naming of facts, is simply that there is no such naming: at most we can say that true

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rather than attribute our views to the language that we speak, and hence to the speakers who share our language. What would entitle us to do that?" cf. also Varzi 2007.

[23] "'Mouse' is a syllable. Now a mouse eats its cheese; therefore, a syllable eats cheese." Suppose now that I cannot solve this problem; see what peril hangs over my head as a result of such ignorance! What a scrape I shall be in! Without doubt I must beware, or someday I shall be catching syllables in a mousetrap, or, if I grow careless, a book may devour my cheese!" Seneca, *Epist. XLVIII*, Vol. 1.

propositions are the semantic values of certain (namely, factive) that-clauses (which are no singular terms for them).

You may wonder: how can I say that there is no naming of facts (or propositions), that that-clauses are not singular terms? In chapter 3 of Betti 2011a I show that that-clauses are not singular terms by means of the following argument:

(I) Necessary conditions for an expression *x* to be a singular term (that is, an expression [purporting to] pick[ing] out exactly one object) are

(A1) *x* is substitutable by a co-referential singular term *salva veritate* & *congruitate*;

(A2) *x* is able to replace an individual variable in an open sentence in a first-order logical theory (i.e., a variable that can be bound by a nominal quantifier);

(A3) *x* is substitutable by a kind-restricted natural language particular quantifier;

(A4) *x* is able to function as structural subject of natural language sentences (NP is Spec, IP).

(II) That-clauses aren't

(A1) substitutable as A1 says,

(A2) replaceable as A2 says,

(A3) substitutable as A3 says,

(A4) able to function as A4 says.

(III) Hence, that-clauses aren't singular terms.

The details of the argument do not matter here. What is interesting is that I offer this argument inside a *reductio*, and that I myself find it, outside that *reductio*, actually most puzzling. There is something really strange going on in it: namely that the characterization *ad* A1-A4 is logico-linguistic, but successful reference cannot be a logico-linguistic matter: it's about the world. To see better what I am aiming at, consider this. The argument above is sound. But what if it were not? What if, in step 2, A1-A4 were, indeed, satisfied by that-clauses, so that the latter would turn out to be singular terms? Would 'that Bargle is choppier than Argle' be an expression referring to a fact,

then? Well no, not even if A1-A4 were necessary and *sufficient* conditions to be singular terms. Why is that? Because, again, we won't able successfully to refer to something unless that something is *there*. For how can we refer to something if it's not there? Russell's theory of definite descriptions (which left us with a very limited set of singular terms), and Quine's criterion of ontological commitment (which left us with none) and the latter's ideas on the inscrutability of reference, all make a strong case against the *prima facie* aspects of natural language in favour of the idea that in order to take a rabbit from a hat we must first put it there. Of course this does not mean that taking rabbits from hats is not a respectable activity, but we should not fool ourselves in thinking that we did not put the rabbit there ourselves. It seems we must have the world in place before we can say anything about how we talk about it. If this is correct, then how can A1-A4 be remotely plausible? These claims just say that we can get to know whether an expression of natural language successfully picks out an object by inspecting either the translatability of that expression in a specific formal language, or the result of substitution of that expression with another expression of the same natural language, or its syntactic role as structural subject of sentence. Isn't this strange? Honestly, I think it is, and the only sensible question to be asked here would be: are there facts (or propositions) which can play the role of referents of that-clauses (if we deem that role necessary), or are there not? If there are facts, then that-clauses (or any other expression we might think suitable, such as 'the fact that *p*' in Hochberg's account) can hope to pick them out; if there aren't, such hopes are vain. If this is correct, most of the discussion on linguistic arguments – taken as an effort to establish that propositional facts exist alongside propositions – is futile and hopelessly question-begging. If *no* notion of fact as an item at the level of reference is metaphysically acceptable (and I say it is not), then the effort to take our fact-talk at face value in some way is metaphysically worthless. Do you agree?

Some philosophers would be unwilling to drop a first-order account of that-clauses (the one mentioned in A2 above) unless they are given some alternative way to treat them formally. (I myself don't see any good ground for reasoning in this way, but it is quite widespread; I do not know whether you accept this view.) Such an alternative (*mutatis mutandis*) is given in Rosefeldt 2008. I have nothing to add here to what

Rosenfeldt has proposed,[24] but what I find important to observe is that such an alternative amounts to no more than an acceptance of what I have called *Semantic Value*. This means that to accept Rosenfeldt's alternative to the semantics of that-clauses means to accept that the Quine-like criterion – the Argument from Nominal Reference – holds, again, *by stipulation*. What this means is that we abandon any natural language-driven analysis and just *decide* to model that-clauses formally in a first-order formal language (for instance in the way Parsons 1993 does). It is important to note that this means in fact renouncing reference to facts (and actually *both* definite and indefinite reference) based on natural language-based evidence. This is closer to Quine's original criterion: we can just decide (under some metaphysical constraints) what to put in our domain of quantification. Let's say, for instance, that you take your variables to range over propositions. This you can do, but only with the proviso that you can show *with other arguments* that we *must* assume propositions *because* there is nothing in your ontology that's more able than propositions to play certain roles that must be played in any case (I leave open here what those roles could be). When you have done this, you can stipulate that propositions are what that-clauses 'refer to', in the sense that propositions are the stipulated semantic values of that-clauses; you can stipulate this, and nothing more.

5. Conclusion

In the preceding I have supposed a rather clear opposition between descriptive and revisionary strategies. But the position that you, Kevin, seem to favour is a position which seems to lie in the middle of these: you accept compositional facts, but still think it important, even necessary, to give an analysis of how we name them in natural language. So the question is: would something like *Semantic Value* work for you? Or would you want something stronger? If so, why?

Let's consider a scenario involving compositional facts and *Semantic Value*, complicated by considerations from the history of facts (a complication that you might like). As is well known, some philosophers are convinced, following Armstrong, that we need facts to play the truthmaker role. So let's accept that this is the reason why we

[24] Cf. Rosefeldt 2008: 309.

must accept compositional facts. We now can stipulate that 'fact' in natural language, at least in some uses, applies to these facts. We can now hold that facts as metaphysical posits have always been present in philosopher's theorizations – it just happens that the development of English is such that, at present, ordinary language includes a certain use of 'facts' that can be harmonised with it. One problem with this is that it is false: facts were introduced into philosophers' theorizations only very recently (I show this in Betti 2011b). But this problem can be solved by saying that ordinary language includes, at present, a certain use of 'facts' that can be harmonised with facts as they have emerged recently in philosophers' theorizations (and which Armstrong calls 'states of affairs'). Would you put things like this? Is this 'harmonising' something you could agree to? Or would you want something stronger?

I don't think we need anything stronger. I should also say that in light of less costly and more elegant alternatives, it seems wrong to insist that we need facts to play truthmakers (I argue this in Betti 2011a, chapter two.) But if we could show that we do need facts as truthmakers, we could design a language that does justice to our theory and thus contains a genuine predicate 'is a fact' which would apply truly to certain specific objects by stipulation. Note that this does not need to be a formal language: by this designed language I mean just a language including technical terms apt to express our philosophical theorisations. The language in which this paper is written is not so far from a technical language of this kind. Facts are best regarded as the semantic value of certain expressions by stipulation: this is the sole acceptable methodological option as to the commitment of ordinary language to facts. In this case, we would take 'that *p* is a fact' to be true in a regimented language that matched an ontology of facts. One could take 'the fact that *p*' to be analysed as Hochberg proposes, but in fact *any* other analysis, or any other naming ('naming' intended here as weakly as possible) would do: why not '*A*'s being *b*'? What makes Hochberg's analysis *better*? When the link between natural and regimented or formal language is broken (and it can be argued that it is in fact *always* broken), then any choice would do: it's a stipulation, we just need to agree on what entities we are going to assume and how to talk about them. We just maintain that the semantic value of 'that *p*' (in some cases) and of 'the fact that *p*' are facts when *we* speak, no matter what natural language implies.

What do you think?

Love,

Arianna

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