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Conciliatory Metaontology and the Vindication of Common Sense

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Any self-respecting ontologist worries on occasion, "are the disputes I engage in and spend my career thinking about verbal?" Conciliatory metaontologists answer in the affirmative, at least for many of the ontological disputes filling philosophy journals. Conciliators have recently gained some traction against their "fractious" opponents (e.g., Sider 2001, van Inwagen 2002), mainly through the work of Hilary Putnam and Eli Hirsch.[1] The verbalness of a dispute is certainly a reason to bring the dispute to a halt, and would seem, *prima facie*, to be a reason to take all the sides to be on equal footing as far as the facts are concerned. So, if we came to conclude that ontological disputes were one and all verbal, we might understandably conclude that ontology is silly, a waste of time. It therefore behooves ontologists to take a hard look at the best arguments for conciliatory conclusions. And that is the aim of this paper.

My focus will be Hirsch's recent work.[2] This work deserves scrutiny not only because it contains some of the most promising arguments to date for conciliatory conclusions but also because of an interesting further consequence drawn from them. One might expect that in a verbal dispute either all sides win or none do. Hirsch thinks otherwise: the winning side, if any, is the side that speaks the truth in *English*, and this will be the side that speaks "ordinary language." Conciliatory metaontology, in other words, is used to vindicate common sense. This claim would have surprised Carnap, and it may surprise many of us.

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In his (2005, 67), Hirsch articulates an argument strategy (hereafter termed *the Hirsch strategy*) that might be applied to a variety of disputes:

The Hirsch Strategy:

Step 1: show the dispute is verbal;

Step 2: show that the "common sense" side is the only side speaking English.

Step 3: conclude that the common sense side wins.[3]

Hirsch does not claim that his strategy can be used successfully on all ontological disputes. But he thinks it can be used to show the verbalness of prominent disputes in the ontology of physical objects, how they *persist* (e.g., do they endure or perdure? (2007b); do they have their parts essentially or not? (2007a)) and under what conditions some physical objects compose a further object, i.e., how to answer Peter van Inwagen's (1990) special composition problem, (Hirsch 2005). In this paper, to keep things manageable, I'm going to focus on a relatively neat and tidy dispute: the composition dispute.[4]

The plan for the paper is as follows. In §1, I focus on *Step 1*. I state Hirsch's criterion for verbalness and then consider in detail how it is used to argue that the composition dispute is verbal. In §2, I provide a two-part objection, which I take not merely to cast doubt on Hirsch's argument for verbalness but to provide positive reason to think the composition dispute is nonverbal, at least if Hirsch's own criterion for verbalness is correct. §3 considers whether what I've called the Hirsch strategy is even needed to vindicate common sense. I argue that the particular "linguistic" vindication of common sense that is central to Hirsch's project in all his recent papers requires the assumption of verbalness. §4 asks whether the English-speaking side wins a verbal dispute in any case. It asks, i.e., whether *Step 3* is forthcoming if *Steps* 1 and 2 are

secured. I argue that it is not. The final section of the paper, §5, contains some brief remarks on

a more modest sort of conciliation that is possible for nonverbal ontological disputes.

§1. The argument for verbalness

1.1 The Hirsch criterion

Hirsch's argument for verbalness appeals to the following criterion:

> *Hirsch Criterion:* a dispute is merely verbal iff the dispute is one in which the correct
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> norms of linguistic interpretation require every side to conclude that each of the other
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> sides speaks the truth in its own language.[5]

Using 'ought to conclude' to abbreviate 'are required by the correct norms of linguistic

interpretation to conclude', we can express the criterion thus: a dispute is verbal iff each side

ought to conclude that the opposing side speaks the truth in its own language. Reasonably

enough, Hirsch assumes that the *principle of charity* figures centrally in the correct norms of

linguistic interpretation. This is the principle, roughly, that "other things being equal, an

interpretation is plausible to the extent that its effect is to make many of the community's shared

assertions come out true or at least reasonable" (2005, 71). Charity, however, is not meted out

equally to all assertions. Some deserve more than others. Thus Hirsch proposes three subsidiary

norms of interpretation: charity to perception, to understanding, and to retraction. Charity to

perception is the presumption that perceptual reports, especially when widely accepted in the

community, are generally accurate. Charity to understanding is the presumption that typical

speakers of a language don't make very simple *a priori* or conceptually false assertions. And

charity to retraction is the presumption that "reasonable people are expected to improve the

accuracy of their judgments in the face of additional evidence" (2005, 74). So if a subject were

to retract a judgment about the behavior of falling bodies under the impact of new information, we should other things being equal presume that the original assertion was false.

This is the barest description of the Hirsch criterion. One might raise certain objections to it if it were put forth as an account of *what it is* for a dispute to be verbal.[6] But these objections, while interesting in their own right, seem irrelevant to the dialectic. All Hirsch strictly needs to secure *Step 1* is the assurance that when the criterion is used on the relevant ontological disputes its satisfaction (more precisely, the satisfaction of its right-hand-side) would suffice for the dispute to be verbal. And it is not easy to show that he lacks this assurance.[7]

Nevertheless, Hirsch thinks his criterion requires modification because of a point made by Tyler Burge (1979). Burge influentially argued that one's meaning is determined in part by the patterns of usage within one's linguistic community, at least so long as one's usage isn't too deviant.[8] So, for ontological disputes in which none of the sides' usage is deviant, their meanings will be the communal meanings, and so, absent ambiguity or context-shifts, they will not all be speaking truly. Hirsch seems to think that the disputes over persistence and composition fall into this category. Suppose he is right. Suppose, for example, that the perdurantists speak falsely using English. Is Hirsch's criterion satisfied for the perdurantist/endurantist dispute? Should the endurantists interpret the perdurantists as speaking truly in their own language? The endurantists can be as well-informed as one likes and so can be assumed not to rely on empirical mistakes in interpreting the perdurantists. So, assuming the correct norms of interpretation do not lead the endurantists to make mistakes about the perdurantists' meanings, the endurantists ought to take the perdurantists to be speaking English, and so to be *speaking falsely*. So it looks like Hirsch's criterion won't be satisfied! The endurantists ought *not* interpret the perdurantists as speaking the truth in their own language.

Hirsch insists we shouldn't take the Burge point to prove that there are no verbal disputes in which one side speaks deviantly. If you claim, "drinking glasses are cups" and I demur, our dispute is probably verbal, even though, in keeping with Burge's point, one of the sides is speaking truly and ought to interpret the other side as speaking falsely. For Hirsch (2005, 69), the Burge point merely shows that some further tinkering is necessary to fix his criterion.

The chosen tinkering is to reinterpret the phrase "in one's own language." If speaking the truth in one's own language isn't the same as *speaking truly* using the language one speaks, what is it? To answer this question Hirsch turns to hypothetical linguistic communities. The key idea is to assess the truth of side X's assertions not in the language side X actually speaks (the communal language) but in the language which would be spoken by an imagined linguistic community relative to which members of X, speaking as they in fact do, speak nondeviantly. To put it vividly: one hypothetically alters the Xs' surrounding community in minimal ways so as to make the Xs' actual patterns of speech nondeviant relative to that community; then one determines whether the sentences members of X assert are true in the language spoken by that hypothetical community (2005, 69-70).

So Hirsch responds to the Burge point by stipulating the following meaning for the phrase 'that side's own language' used in his criterion. Side X's own language, or X-English, is the language spoken by the X-community, i.e., the hypothetical community whose normal members, as Hirsch says, *talk like* side X. Hirsch (2005, 88) clearly thinks that the X-community will persistently speak like members of X both in the philosophy room and everywhere else. This is an assumption we will question later on (see §2.2), but in the meantime I will not challenge it.

With a basic understanding of Hirsch's criterion under our belts we turn to the argument that the composition dispute satisfies this criterion.[9]

§1.2. The argument that the composition dispute satisfies Hirsch's criterion

In the dispute over composition there are a number of sides including *Nihilism* (composition never takes place), *Universalism* (composition always takes place), *Organicism* (composition takes place when some things' collective activity constitutes a life), and what I will call *Commonsensism,* (composition takes place just enough to make sure there are living things, artifacts, and inanimate objects answering to most concrete count nouns in English which ordinary English speakers regularly apply in normal contexts). There are other sides, but these will suffice. We'll call the proponents of these sides the Ns, Us, Os, and Cs. To keep things as simple as possible we will idealize a bit by supposing that all sides assert the following sentences:

- Every physical object is ultimately composed of simples.

- Simples are point-sized, or at least extremely small.

We will make two further suppositions. We suppose first that the sides do not dispute the truth-value of any sentence that they all agree is only about simples and their interrelations. And we suppose second that all four sides assert:

- Where some xs compose a thing y, it is not the case that y is identical to the xs, and so composition is not identity.[10]

Actual Ns, Os, and Cs standardly do assert this.[11] The same is true also of many of leading Us (e.g., Lewis, Sider, Hudson, and Rea[12]). In any case, I doubt Hirsch would want to say that if the sides in the composition dispute denied the thesis that composition is identity their dispute would be substantive!

Given that the sides assert all these claims, we can determine much of what each will assert and deny. The Ns will assert 'there are simples, but no trees, rocks, or tables', etc. The Os will assert 'there are simples and trees, but no rocks or tables'. And so on.

Now we turn to the argument that Hirsch's criterion is satisfied by this dispute, i.e., that each side in the dispute ought to conclude that the other sides speak the truth in their respective languages. I will give a sketch of how the argument goes.

First, imagine that you are interpreting a community which talks like one of the sides in the dispute with a "smaller ontology" than yours.[13] For definiteness, imagine you are a C interpreting the O-community. When the members of the O-community see a table and are asked "is there a table here?" They answer "no, there isn't." Hirsch thinks you should find this strange. You should think: "if they meant what I mean by these words, they would be making an obviously false perceptual report."[14] To take them as meaning what you mean would be to violate *charity to perception.* Moreover, you will notice that members of the O-community are happy to assert 'there are some things arranged tablewise here', even though they deny 'there is a table here'. For Hirsch, this is further reason for you, as a C, not to take them to speak the language you speak. You should think: "if they are speaking my language, then they must somehow be blind to the *a priori* implication *if some things are arranged tablewise, they compose a table.* Postulating this blindness would violate *charity to understanding.*

What should you do, then? According to Hirsch, the sides with bigger ontologies, when interpreting communities speaking like the sides with smaller ontologies, should understand the quantifiers of the communities' languages to be *semantically restricted,* i.e., to be quantifiers that "because of the semantic rules implicit in a language, are restricted in their range in certain specific ways"(2005, 76). In particular, if you are a C interpreting the O-community, you ought

to understand 'something' in O-English to mean *something that is simple or living*.[15] In general, a side X with a bigger ontology than a side Y should interpret, or translate, an Y-community assertion 'there is an F' as 'there is a G that is F,' where 'G' is a predicate such that the Y-community accepts while side X denies 'everything is a G'. If you, as a C, follow this scheme, you will understand the members of the O-community, when faced with a table plainly in view, to be saying, correctly, that there is no simple or living table before them.[16]

For simplicity we have ignored any non-semantic quantifier restrictions which might be in place in the context of speech. But I suspect Hirsch would agree that, as a C, you ought to conclude that O-English allows contextual quantifier restriction. The reasons for concluding this are just the same as the reasons for drawing the same conclusion about English.[17] One might wonder, however, whether Hirsch might have been wrong in claiming that the Cs should take the quantifiers of O-English to be *semantically* restricted to simple-or-living things. Is there anything to be said for the Cs instead taking the O-community's quantifiers to be contextually rather than semantically restricted simple-or-living things?[18] I doubt it. If the restrictions are merely contextual, this fact should be grounded in the linguistic dispositions of members of the O-community. They should be disposed in sufficiently "picky" or "strict" contexts to assert the likes of 'well, of course, there is a table there – when I said there wasn't before I was just talking about the simple-or-living things there'. This is how it works in English. (Thus, if I assert 'this field is free of bumps' before we begin a soccer game, you might insist "Well, strictly speaking, it isn't. The bumps are just relatively small." I concede: "well, okay."). But recall that the members of the O-community, according to Hirsch, are *not* willing to make these concessions in such contexts. They do not just happen to be in contexts in which the restriction to simples and living things is appropriate; their language precludes them from "talking like" Cs, or Us, etc.

Given the way the O-community is characterized, the hypothesis of *semantic* rather than mere contextual quantifier restriction is to be preferred.[19]

Turn now to the case in which you accept a "smaller ontology" than another side in the composition dispute. How should you interpret the communities that talk like this other side? Imagine you are an O interpreting the C-community. When members of this community see some simples arranged tablewise they assert 'there is a table here'. Hirsch will tell you that this is a perceptual judgment they make. He will invite you to conclude that if these folks mean what you mean they're making an obviously false perceptual report. This violates *charity to perception.* And he will tell you that taking them to mean what you mean will also violate *charity to understanding,* for it will require postulating blindness to the *a priori* fact that simples that fail to constitute a life fail to compose anything

What would Hirsch have you do? Here he is not quite so clear. There are two possibilities suggested in his discussion and more fully developed in the work of other conciliators (particularly Dorr (2005)). One is for you to take the C-community to mean by 'something' a counterfactual notion of the form *something were doctrine D true and everything otherwise were as it actually is*, where 'D' picks out some appropriate table-friendly doctrine. Which doctrine? Examining the C-community's general linguistic habits, it seems the doctrine must be *Commonsensism.* For you, as an O, will conclude that, understandable mistakes aside, it's exactly when *Commonsensism*, together with the clear facts about simples, imply that there is an F, that the C-community is willing to assert 'there is an F'. Call this the *counterfactual* scheme of interpretation.[20]

A second interpretative possibility uses a *pluralizing* scheme. This scheme takes the C-community to be using an apparently singular language to express plural facts. What the

members of this community mean by 'there is a table here' is not *there is a table here,* but rather *there are some things arranged tablewise here*. After all, they say 'there is a table here' exactly when it's true that *there are some things arranged tablewise here*.

Os face a number of hard interpretative questions whichever of these schemes they use. Suppose they use the pluralizing scheme. Then they must ask whether the C-community always uses grammatically singular quantifiers and predicates to express plural quantification and plural properties. When members of the C-community assert 'there is a tree over there', the Os do not seem to be barred from interpreting them as saying simply that there is a tree over there. Is 'there is' ambiguous in C-English? The Os would have to ask why that would be, and whether the postulation of ambiguity is borne out by the linguistic dispositions of the C-community. Similar questions arise if the Os use the counterfactual scheme on the C-community. They must ask whether the members of this community always mean *something were Commonsensism true* by 'something', even when they say 'there is a tree here'. If not, are their quantifiers ambiguous?[21]

Questions also arise about the C-community's use of names. Perhaps, as Cian Dorr (2005, 245-6) suggests, the Os can take names they regard as empty (e.g., 'Mars') to express in C-English certain properties of properties (e.g., the property of being a property that would be instantiated by the fourth planet in the solar system *were Commonsensism true*). This interpretation will allow them to conclude, charitably, that 'Mars is a planet' is true in C-English. But then Os will have to ask themselves whether *all* names in C-English express properties of properties. And it will be hard for them to answer *yes* if they think that names in their own language don't express properties of properties. Suppose the Os think their name 'George Bush' has as its semantic value, not a property of properties, but the man himself – certainly a

defensible view. It will then be hard for the Os to resist drawing the same conclusion about 'George Bush' in the C-community, given the remarkable similarity between (or even the *identity* of) the Os' use of that name and the C-community's use.[22] But if this is what the Os conclude about 'George Bush', 'Hillary Clinton', etc., then they'll have to see names in O-English, oddly, as capable of having very different kinds of semantic value, unlike names in their own language. Nor will it be obvious how this difference is reflected in its linguistic dispositions of the community.[23]

These and other[24] difficulties notwithstanding, Hirsch can reassure the Os that, whether they use the *counterfactual* interpretation or the *pluralizing* one, they do at least respect the crucial requirements of charity to perception and to understanding.

The key to Hirsch's argument, we can now see, is a pair of premises: first, the sides *cannot* charitably interpret the other sides' communities to be speaking the same language they speak, and second, they *can* provide interpretation schemes which enable them charitably to interpret those communities as speaking other languages. For disputes in which the various sides assert the same basic perceptual sentences (e.g., disputes about abstract objects or about moral value), it is harder to defend this pair of premises, because one cannot invoke the powerful principle of charity to perception. And when there is no obvious charitable interpretation scheme, as seems to be the case for nominalists interpreting Platonists, this too weakens the case for the second of the pair of premises, because it can seem that the only way to understand the community's speech is to take it to be speaking the language one is speaking. But in the composition dispute the pair of premises is defensible, or so Hirsch would claim. The sides do not assert the same basic perceptual sentences, and each side has a charitable interpretation scheme to use on the other sides' communities.

§2. An objection

In this section, I give a two-part objection to the above account of the verbalness of the composition dispute. We will build up to the objection slowly.

§2.1. Expressibility worries

I'll begin by noting a curious feature of the interpretation schemes Hirsch recommends. Suppose once again that you are a C interpreting the O-community. You notice that when the members of this community, standing in front of a table with a cat sitting on it, are asked "is there a table here?" they answer "no." Hirsch advises you to interpret them as meaning *there is no simple or living table here.* Well and good. If asked, "fine, but is the thing the cat is sitting on a table?" they reply, "there is nothing the cat is sitting on." Now you start to wonder: how *can* they express the plain facts using their language? How can they say that *there is a table here* or *the thing the cat is sitting on is a table* or *that thing is a table*?

You may remind yourself that they can predicate *tablehood*. 'Bush is table' in their language predicates *tablehood* of Bush. Of course, that predication is false. They can also predicate *tablehood* generally, but only to ranges of things that do not include tables. This is what 'there is a table here' does in their language. You wonder, though, how do they predicate *tablehood* of particular tables, and how do they predicate *tablehood* generally of ranges of things that include tables, so as to make these predications true? If their language precludes them from doing this, it is expressively deficient.

The problem is not a problem about fineness of grain. The situation is not like that in which you, as a speaker using 'H$_2$0' and 'water', claim not to be able to see how a community using only 'H$_2$0' can predicate the property *being water.* If O-English allowed predication of

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being a thing shaped in such and such ways and suitable for such and such (tablish) uses to

tables, that would be good enough. But if you heed Hirsch's advice in interpreting the O-

community, you'll have to conclude that O-English doesn't even come close to doing this. Here

is why. As we have seen, Hirsch argues that charity requires that Cs interpret the O-community

as speaking a language whose quantifiers are restricted, by semantic rule, to simple-or-living

things. Obviously, no table or other nonliving composite falls within the restriction. But now

take any property P (e.g., tablehood) which in fact applies only to nonliving composites. You

must conclude that O-English does not allow the use of quantifiers to predicate P of a range of

things some of which have P.

The very same arguments Hirsch gives for concluding that you should take the

quantifiers of O-English to be semantically restricted to simple-or-living things provide an

equally powerful case for concluding that all the referential devices of O-English, singular as

well as general reference, are subject to the same restriction. You can't take 'Mt. Hood' in O-

English to refer to Mt. Hood, because the O-community, even with "eyes wide open,"

confidently claims, "there are no mountains, and so no such thing as Mt. Hood." And no matter

what the context, demonstratives in O-English can never refer to a table, a mountain, or any

nonliving composite. The O-community looks at Mt. Hood and if told, "That's a mountain,"

replies, "there's no mountain there." So, it seems that if you follow Hirsch's argument through

you'll conclude that O-English simply doesn't allow one to refer to a great many highly visible

objects. And if one cannot refer to them, one cannot predicate of them any of the vast range of

properties which they possess. This is a severe expressive limitation.[25]

It might be thought that this argument is too quick. The O-community does assert

apparently plural sentences when in the presence of tables. They say 'there are some things

arranged tablewise here'. Does plural quantification enable the O-community to attribute *tablehood,* or any properties at all, to tables? Your answer must be *no*. Following Hirsch's advice, you understand the above sentence as meaning that there are some simple-or-living things arranged tablewise here. Now, recall that you deny that composition is identity. You think that if some xs compose y then those xs are *not* identical to y. You of course grant that simples arranged tablewise compose a table, but for that very reason you think that simples arranged tablewise are not identical to the table they compose and certainly not identical to *other* tables. Thus, you think what the O-English plural quantifier 'there are some things' ranges over – *pluralities of simple-or-living things* – are not identical to any table or tables. So you will conclude that pluralizing sentences do not allow the speakers of O-English to predicate any properties *at all* to non-living composites, let alone properties they possess. The most the sentences make possible is the predication of properties tables don't possess to non-tables.[26]

The O-community also asserts the likes of 'were Commonsensism true and everything otherwise were as it actually is, the thing that the cat is sitting on is a table'. Working out the interpretation of this sentence using the quantifier-restricting scheme makes it plain that this sentence does not enable the O-community to express what needs expressing. It is not a predication of anything, let alone *tablehood,* to a table, but at best a predication of *being such that it would be instantiated were Commonsensism true* to a property that doesn't apply to tables, viz. *being the unique cat on the table.*

The upshot: Cs who follow Hirsch's charity argument to its logical conclusion must hold that O-English is expressively deficient. I have been presuming, in effect, that if two languages L1 and L2 are alike except that L1 enables the predication of a broad range of properties to a broad range of objects which have those properties while L2 enables the predication of no

properties whatever to the same broad range of objects, then L2 is expressively deficient relative to L1. Hirsch seems to equate expressive equivalence to *a priori* equivalence of truth-conditions, or equivalently, to *a priori* equivalence of the corresponding unstructured facts (2005, p. 77; 2002a, p. 68). But this is not all there is to expressiveness. The Cs do admit that the sentences 'there are some things arranged tablewise here' and 'there is a table here' are metaphysically equivalent, and (let's suppose) they think that this equivalence can be shown *a priori*. But they think that tables *aren't* the simples that compose them. And they think that no arrangement-property of simples is a property of composites – and so being arranged tablewise *isn't* being a table. Call them 'facts', 'states of affairs', 'situations' or whatever you choose (I call them facts), the Cs will think that there are distinct elements of the world corresponding to the two statements 'there are some things arranged tablewise here' and 'there is a table here'. Maybe this is a mistake, but it is what a C ontologist will think.[27]

I believe we could argue, similarly, that the sides with the smaller ontologies, if they use the Hirsch interpretation schemes, will have to see communities talking like the sides with the larger ontologies as speaking languages which do not allow the expression of certain *negative* facts. The Os will think that C-English does not allow its users to express *there is no table here,* and the Cs will think that U-English does not allow the expression of *there is no incar here,* etc.[28] I will not go through the argument. It is unnecessary in any case. Our result about the sides using the larger ontologies is enough by itself for us to raise difficult questions for Hirsch.

Thus, we can make an interesting observation. Any side using the quantifier-restricting scheme will have to take the language of the sides with the smaller ontologies to be expressively deficient. The deficiency is in no way recherché. The facts which can't be expressed, in the opinion of the interpreting sides, will be plain-Jane perceptually available facts. Their

inexpressibility is therefore very puzzling. So puzzling, I think, that one might begin to doubt whether Hirsch's recommended interpretation scheme really is charitable. For, presumably, part of the principle of charity is *charity to expressibility.* If a fact is plainly observable by simple perception, there is a strong defeasible presumption that people very much like oneself in their perceptual and conceptual abilities shouldn't be precluded from expressing that fact by their native language. Hirsch is effectively recommending that we sacrifice charity to expressibility to preserve charity to perception and charity to understanding. All this is to say that Hirsch's argument is questionable on the very sort of grounds he appeals to.[29]

A side note. Sacrificing charity to expressibility leads to another problem.[30] Let me explain. First, note that for each Hirsch-recommended interpretation scheme there is a corresponding translation scheme which pairs sentences asserted by side X in the composition dispute with sentences asserted by side Y. Thus, we can speak of the translation scheme the Cs use on the Os, and vice versa. As noted, the Cs will think that O-English is expressively deficient because it does not allow predications of any properties to nonliving composites. Now, consider the Cs' attitude toward Os' translations of their (the Cs') assertions. The Cs assert 'there are tables'. Whatever the O-translation is, the Cs will reasonably regard it as inadequate on the grounds that O-English washes out all information about nonliving composites – information which is expressed in their assertion. Similarly, the Os will think C-translations of their distinctive claims – e.g., 'there are no tables' – are inadequate, because the Os think that C-English precludes, by dint of semantic rule, the expression of a large body of negative information. Thus, if the sides follow Hirsch's advice, then they can be quite confident that they will not be able to resolve their dispute in a conciliatory resolution. They might quit arguing, but they cannot reasonably make the claim, distinctive of a conciliatory resolution: "I understand

you, and you understand me; I see that what you were saying is true; and you see that what I was saying is true." No side can make this speech because no side thinks any other side understands what it is saying. This is an unfortunate result.[31] I don't insist that all verbal disputes must be susceptible to conciliatory resolutions. Perhaps there are verbal disputes in which there is simply no way for the sides to construct adequate translation schemes to use on the other sides.[32] I say the result is unfortunate because the following situation would seem difficult for Hirsch or anyone else to explain: (i) the sides of the composition dispute ought to use certain translation schemes on the other sides (the ones Hirsch recommends); but (ii), using the schemes they ought to use, each side must conclude that all of the other sides' translation schemes are inadequate.

Returning to the main point. When the sides in the composition dispute consider how to interpret the other sides' community, they face a conflict of charity. Charity to expressibility strongly pulls in one direction, whereas other subsidiary principles of charity pull in another direction. I think it is simply unclear what to say about how the sides should interpret the other sides' corresponding communities.

§2.2. *Characterizing the "corresponding communities"*

Given our conclusions in the previous section, perhaps we should take a closer look at the role the communities were supposed to play in Hirsch's argument for verbalness. Hirsch's reason for invoking the imaginary communities was to sidestep the Burge point. We were told that the members of these communities "talk like" the corresponding actual ontologists. The members of an X-community must "talk like" actual Xs in whatever ways are necessary to make the Xs' speech non-deviant relative to that of the X-community. Hirsch assumes that this means taking the communities to speak, across contexts, reflexively without deliberation or doubt, in

the way actual philosophers speak only when in the philosophy room in the company of those who agree with them. To have a label let us say that such an X-community is a community of *unphilosophical X-counterparts*. Members of the O-community never assert 'there's a beautiful mountain in view'. Of course, actual Os do this when they visit the Rockies.

Is this the right way to think of the communities? The communities, again, are introduced as devices minimally necessary to circumvent the Burge point. Hirsch needs to ensure that the actual Xs speak non-deviantly relative to the X-community, nothing more. But if the X-community is a community of unphilosophical X-counterparts, then actual Xs, who *are* philosophical, still speak deviantly relative to them. If the O-community consists of unphilosophical O-counterparts then in their ordinary life they simply take a look and say 'there's no table there, of course'. Actual Os don't do this. When reminded of philosophy, they say, 'ok, right, strictly speaking, there is no table there, just things arranged tablewise – and I can give you an argument for why you would accept something so seemingly ridiculous!' Actual Os hold the "revisionary" beliefs about perceptible items, when they do hold them, on the basis of philosophical theory in full awareness of the strangeness of these views from the point of view of common sense and ordinary usage. It is not as if they form a noninferential perceptual belief that there is no table there. Actual Os find philosophy hard and challenging. The O-community finds all the answers to be utterly obvious and trivial.

Taking the O-community, as Hirsch does, to consist of unphilosophical O-counterparts will not do. It doesn't avoid the Burge point. How should the O-community be understood? We have to be careful how we think of the relevant deviations. The Os' total set of linguistic dispositions across contexts – both in and out of the philosophy room – is not particularly deviant. It is not terribly hard to get an average guy from Brooklyn, in the right context, to

express attraction for the O-statements. (Ordinary guys from Brooklyn can and sometimes do become Organicists, often upon initial exposure to van Inwagen's *Material Beings*.)

Rather, the deviation Hirsch is talking about must be that between the way Os talk when they think about philosophy and when they (and others) don't. But Burge's point didn't concern this sort of deviation. The person, Bert, who says sincerely 'arthritis can occur in the thigh', is prepared to assert this and other related nonstandard claims about arthritis across contexts, whether he is in the doctor's office or talking with philosophers about meaning. Bert's total set of linguistic dispositions with respect to 'arthritis' exhibits a consistency across contexts but deviates from the total set of such dispositions among the relevant experts. Thus, we could imaginatively make Bert's dispositions non-deviant by embedding him in a community that has the same dispositions. Given that this is the situation for Bert, Burge is able to give his well-known diagnosis: Bert has a faulty grasp of the concept of arthritis. It would be rather peculiar to say, by analogy, that actual Os, when in the seminar room, have a faulty grasp of the relevant concepts (existence, parthood) but regain a good grasp upon leaving it. These reflections suggest that the Burge point simply isn't relevant.

I don't want to insist on the irrelevance of the Burge point. But I do insist that if it is relevant then it should be accommodated by imagining the O-community, when not in the philosophy room, to speak the way actual Os speak in the philosophy room. Call this sort of community a community of *persistent philosophers*. (Perhaps such a community is not possible. I put this worry aside.) Let us ask whether Cs can interpret the O-community of persistent philosophers charitably by taking them to speak English.

I think the answer is *yes*. When the members of the O-community look at a table, they remind themselves of the relevant philosophical issues, and so assert 'there is no table here'.

Must we Cs see this as a perceptual mistake, if we take the community to speak English? No. We can see the O-community as making an error about an object that is perceptually available, but the error is due to the intrusion of faulty philosophical principles not perception. Moreover, the faulty principles themselves are not on reflection obviously absurd – we Cs are sometimes tempted to accept them. The principles are not such that anyone with the relevant concepts must reject them on pain of incoherence. Far from it. They have real appeal, once one examines their implications for philosophical problems. The Cs do not violate *charity to understanding,* then, in taking the O-community of persistent philosophers to be speaking English. They would of course be interpreting the O-community to be speaking falsely, but the presumption that language-users speak truly can be overridden if the attributed mistake can be viewed as reasonable, and if the denial of the mistake is less plausible in light of other charity considerations, including *charity to expressibility*.[33][34]

One might worry that we are begging the question against Hirsch by suggesting that the Cs should conclude that Organicist principles have real appeal given their implications for philosophical problems. Not so. We would be begging the question if we were assuming that there are substantive philosophical problems which the Organicist principles go some distance toward solving. But we are assuming only that the Cs should conclude this. The Cs are ontologists. They take the composition question seriously, rightly or wrongly. When they apply charity considerations to the other sides' communities, they are right to bear in mind implications for what they think are substantive philosophical issues.[35]

§2.3. Statement of the objection

Now I am ready to state my objection. In section §2.1, I argued, in effect, that if we assume, as Hirsch does, that the community corresponding to a side X consists of unphilosophical X-counterparts, then it is at best unclear whether Hirsch's criterion for verbal disputes is satisfied. On the one hand, if the sides take the other sides' communities to be speaking the same language that they do, they indeed appear to violate charity to perception, understanding, and retraction. On the other hand, if the sides follow Hirsch's advice, they will violate charity to expressibility. Thus, there is a conflict of charity. It is just not clear what to make of the strange communities.

In section §2.2, though, I argued that given the role the corresponding communities play, they should be understood not as unphilosophical X-counterparts but as persistent philosophers. Understood in that way, I argued that the sides do not violate charity to perception, understanding, etc. in any serious way by taking the other sides' communities, like themselves, to be speaking English, whereas they commit a serious violation of charity to expressibility by following Hirsch's conciliatory recommendations. Now, the sides presumably know that if the other sides' communities speak English, then at most one of the sides can be speaking the truth in its side's language (absent ambiguity or appropriate difference in context of speech). Thus, I concluded that Hirsch's own criterion for verbal disputes, if correct, can be used to show that the composition dispute is nonverbal.

So, in short, the objection is this. First, *if* we understand the sides' communities in Hirsch's preferred way (as unphilosophical X-counterparts), his argument for verbalness is problematic, since it ignores a certain important conflict of charity. Second, we shouldn't understand the communities in this way, and once we understand the communities properly we can see that Hirsch's own criterion provides good reason for thinking the dispute is nonverbal.

Let me finally note that although my objection focuses on the composition dispute, it seems likely to carry over to the other disputes Hirsch claims are verbal, in particular perdurantism vs. endurantism and Lockeanism vs. Butlerianism. In these disputes, if the sides use Hirsch's recommended interpretation schemes, they will find that charity to expressibility poses a serious obstacle to taking the other sides to speak the truth in the languages of their sides, an obstacle so serious that when the other corresponding communities are understood properly, the sides ought to take those communities as speaking falsely in English rather than truly in some other language.

§3. Does Hirsch need a premise about verbalness to vindicate common sense ontology?[36]

Perhaps I've missed the forest for the trees. Yes, in recent work, Hirsch has argued for the verbalness of various ontological disputes including the composition dispute, and, yes, perhaps my objections undermine those arguments. And, yes, he has employed what I've called *the Hirsch strategy*, the first step of which is *show the dispute is verbal.* But perhaps he doesn't need to argue in this way to show that the commonsense side wins.

Indeed, in his slightly less recent papers (e.g., 2002a, 2002b, 2004), Hirsch seems not to employ any premises about verbalness. For example, he gives the following "argument from charity" in (2002b, 108), where 'O' is some relevant disputed ontological sentence:

1. Typical fluent speakers of the language (i.e., of English) assert (or assent to) the sentence 'O'.

2. Therefore, there is the charitable presumption that, on the correct interpretation of 'O', speakers have good reason to assert 'O', so that 'O' is not *a priori* necessarily false.

3. There is nothing to defeat this presumption.

4. Therefore, 'O' is not *a priori* necessarily false.

5. Therefore, it's possible that O

[6. Therefore, it's actually the case that O.]³⁷

This argument contains no mention of verbal disputes. And it contains no use of charity *by the various sides* on hypothetical communities that talk like the other sides but only a use of charity *by us* to English-speakers.

In the same paper, Hirsch suggests a second "slightly different" formulation of his argument from charity, which we might call the *Shmenglish* argument.[38] He first tries to get us to agree, regardless of our ontological positions, that there is a possible language – call it Shmenglish – in which commonsense ontological sentences are true. Then he argues:

1. In Shmenglish, ontological sentence 'O' is true.

2. On the most reasonably charitable interpretation of the dominant language in North America, this language is Shmenglish; that is to say, English is Shmenglish

3. Therefore (we conclude in English): O.

(Hirsch might have added "4. Therefore: not-R," where 'R' is a sentence revisionists assert and so which is incompatible with 'O'.) The main advantage of this argument over the "argument from charity" is that 'O' needn't be a sentence ordinary folk regularly assert; it can state an ontological theory, e.g., "composition is not universal" or "there are nonliving composites."

So, we have two argument schemes from Hirsch, or two formulations of the same argument scheme, which appear to vindicate common sense without any premises about verbal disputes. Why can't Hirsch forget about conciliatory metaontology, then?

Let's start by supposing that Hirsch concedes that the disputes are nonverbal. Then all but at most one of the sides is making a mistake, and a mistake of fact and not, like Bert in Burge's arthritis case, a mistake of language. So who is making the mistakes and who not? The revisionary sides do marshal impressive arguments, deriving from plausible general principles. Do the common sense sides have good refutations of the revisionists? Do they have good arguments for *their* claims? This is not so clear. Of course, there remains the Moorean alternative, which is to say that, even if it is unclear where and how the revisionary sides go wrong, they nonetheless overestimate the plausibility of the principles they appeal to and underestimate the plausibility – the *certainty* – of ordinary claims they take themselves to undermine. This epistemic mistake about relative plausibility leads them to make the mistake about the ontological facts.

Hirsch hopes to avoid this sort of delicate balancing act. If the disputes at issue are verbal, then all sides can be interpreted as making at most mistakes of language. To vindicate common sense, he would then not need to find an error in the revisionist's principles or in their reasoning, nor would he need to resort to Moorean table-thumping. It is a fundamental theme in Hirsch's work that neither of those options is needed.[39]

Of course, Hirsch might simply leave open whether the disputes are verbal. But then the success of his argument will be hostage to the question of verbalness. His opponent could object that the dispute isn't verbal, and that for this reason Hirsch needs to identify and explain how the revisionary sides could make the factual mistakes he claims they make.

§4. Supposing the composition dispute *is* verbal, what follows?

Recall the Hirsch strategy: *Step 1: show the dispute is verbal; Step 2: show that the common sense side is the only side speaking English; and Step 3: conclude the common sense side wins.* In previous sections, I've argued that Hirsch fails to secure *Step 1* for the composition dispute. But suppose I am wrong. What would his prospects be for securing *Steps 2* and *3*?

I will focus *on Step 3*.[40] Assume *Steps 1* and *2* are in place. It follows that Commonsensism is true in English. Does it follow that the Cs win?

Consider an example. Let P-English be a version of English in which the quantifiers are semantically restricted to non-planets.[41] Speakers of P-English assert 'There are no planets'. Suppose Ursula, a speaker of the language Hirsch would call U-English, encounters Paul, a speaker of P-English. Ursula asserts 'there are planets'. Now this dispute would seem to satisfy Hirsch's criterion for a verbal dispute. Ursula, after a while, will see that Paul is speaking the truth in his funny language. And Paul – supposing he can think about planets – will see that Ursula speaks the truth in her (also funny) language. So, Hirsch will presumably count this dispute as verbal, and I'd be inclined to agree. But I say that Ursula wins. Why? Because in asserting her disputed sentence Ursula expresses a fact which Paul's language precludes him from expressing. Ursula wins because she reveals an expressive limitation of Paul's language in relation to hers.

Now suppose the composition dispute is verbal and that English is C-English. Do the other sides automatically lose? They do, of course, lose if it is part of their stated position that they are speaking English. But the questions in dispute are in the material mode rather than the formal. Hirsch seems to think that, once the verbalness of the dispute is established, there is nothing left for the parties to debate other than who is speaking English. However, this is too

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quick. The verbalness of a dispute in which one side speaks English is no assurance that English is the expressive equal of the languages on the revisionary sides.

A Universalist might make the following speech to Hirsch: "You advised me to take my opponents, including the side speaking English, to be speaking a language that whose referential devices are semantically restricted to a certain subset of what there is. I took your advice, and so I concluded that my opponents speak the truth in their languages. But I still claim that *I* win the composition dispute, because when I state my position in the dispute, I capture facts that the other sides can't capture."

The main point needn't be put into the mouth of a revisionary ontologist. In order to secure the conclusion that the English-speaking side wins, Hirsch needs to give us good reason to think that English is not expressively deficient in relation to the languages of the other sides. He has not done this.

There are other ways in which the revisionist side might fare better than a common sense side, even if the dispute is verbal. The language of the revisionist side might associate key ontological expressions with more eligible or natural properties (if that distinction can be made out) or associate them with more theoretically useful properties.[42] There seem to be a number of ways in one side can have a leg up on another side even if the dispute is verbal. Thus, in order to derive the conclusion that the commonsense side wins from the premise that the relevant dispute is verbal, Hirsch needs to show that none of these ways are available for the revisionary sides.

Perhaps it is not particularly helpful to speak of winning a verbal dispute. But we can still compare the ways the sides' speak – the associated languages – with respect to various factors. Even if the composition is dispute is verbal, some revisionary side, e.g., universalism, might be associated with a better language. If so, there will be reasons for the parties of the

dispute to speak the way Universalists speak when doing ontology. If certain facts can only be captured by speaking that way, or if nature's joints are better carved that way, or if the ontological notions one would employ are more theoretically useful, then far from dismissing the Universalist's claims, we should talk start talking like her for purposes of describing and understanding reality.

§5. Limited Conciliation

Even if the composition dispute is not verbal, I want to suggest that the sides can arrive at a kind of limited conciliation through charitable interpretation of one another. This suggestion further bolsters my claim that each side can charitably interpret the other side to be speaking English.

First, each side ought to conclude that, while the other side has false beliefs about composition and about what exists, a great many of the (false) sentences they assert are still "factual."[43] The intuitive idea here is that each side will claim that there are real facts which *all but ground* the other side's assertions, and that these facts fail to ground the assertions only because the other side's ontological position is false. We can make a first stab at defining factuality as follows: a sentence S is factual relative to an ontological position A iff S has a *factuality-maker* relative to A, that is, iff there are real facts which, given A, would ground S's truth. If there is a unique minimal condition satisfaction of which is sufficient for the existence of a factuality-maker for S relative to A, this condition could be thought of as *the factuality condition* for S relative to A. The quantifier-restricting and the pluralizing schemes discussed above might therefore be thought of as specifying factuality conditions rather than truth conditions or meanings. The Os will grant that 'there are tables' is factual relative to

Commonsensism, because the factuality condition specified by 'there are some things arranged tablewise' obtains. The Cs can return the favor, granting that 'there are no tables' is factual relative to Organicism, because the factuality condition specified by 'there are no simple-or-living things arranged tablewise' obtains. Thus, by seeing the other sides as making factual claims (relative to their positions), the sides in the composition dispute can see the other sides' claims as rooted in fact, and not merely forming a consistent theory which fails to make contact with reality.[44]

Second, each side in the composition dispute ought to regard the other as "capturing," in a certain expanded sense, a wide range of facts. The relevant sense of "capturing" a target fact is not that of accepting it, but rather accepting *either* it *or* some fact(s) which ground(s) it. Thus, the Cs can see the Os as capturing not only facts about simples and living things but also facts about the existence and character of tables, mountains, and other non-living composites. This is because Cs will see the latter facts as grounded by facts that the Os accept. Thus, e.g., while the Os reject the fact *that there are tables,* they accept a ground for it, namely the fact specified by 'there are things arranged tablewise', and thus they capture the grounded fact in the expanded sense. Similarly, the Os can see the Cs as capturing not only positive facts about living things and simples but negative facts about the non-existence of tables, mountains, etc. The Os claim, for example, that there are no tables. They can see the Cs as capturing this (purported) fact, even though the Cs deny it, insofar as they can see the Cs as accepting a ground for it, viz. the fact specified by 'that there are no simples arranged tablewise whose activity also constitutes a life'.

This notion of limited conciliation requires further elaboration and refinement.[45] But even given this brief discussion, we can already see that it gives metaontological conciliators some of what they have sought. In a dispute for which this sort of conciliation is possible, each

side will see the other sides' claims, though false, as, (i) rooted in fact rather than merely philosophical fancy, and (ii), achieving a sort of factual coverage insofar they recognize the grounds for grounded facts if not the grounded facts themselves. This might be as much ontological conciliation as we can reasonably expect, even if it not as much as we might have hoped for, nor as much as Hirsch and other conciliators have argued for.[46] [47]

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[1] The relevant works by Putnam and Hirsch are listed in the bibliography. Other conciliatory metaontologists include Ackerman (2000), Cortens (2002), and Searle (1969).

[2] In particular, I focus mainly on Hirsch 2005 but also on his 2007a and 2007b.

[3] This strategy also seems implicit in his 2007a. After noting that the debate between Lockeans and Butlerians seems verbal, Hirsch writes:

Then it seems that all that these philosophers can be disagreeing about is whether the language we speak is in fact the first imagined language (Lockean English) or the second

(Butlerian English). (p. 2 of manuscript)

He of course claims that we speak the first language, and therefore that the Lockean wins the dispute.

[4] In none of the papers in which the Hirsch strategy is clearly at work is Hirsch focused exclusively or squarely on the composition dispute. In Hirsch (2005) he is occupied with a very general dispute over "physical object ontology" in which the sides take positions on a number of questions including not only the special composition question but questions about temporal mereology as well as identity conditions over time. Thus, in his 2005, the main sides discussed are the D(avid) L(ewis) side, the R(oderick) C(hisholm) side, and the E(li) H(irsch) side. In Hirsch (2007b), he is concerned with the endurance/perdurance dispute and in Hirsch 2007a, he is concerned with the dispute between Locke and Butler over mereological essentialism.

I have chosen to focus on the composition dispute because it is a dispute over *one* question (unlike the DL/RC/EH dispute), which is easily formulated (arguably unlike the question whether endurantism or perdurantism, or neither, is true), and which is the subject of continuing controversy (unlike the debate over mereological essentialism). That said, I think my objections to *Step 1* for the composition dispute can be revised to apply to *Step 1* for any of these disputes.

[5] This formulation closely corresponds to a formulation in Hirsch 2007b:

I would therefore define a verbal dispute as follows: It is a dispute in which, given the correct view of linguistic interpretation, each party will

agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language.

as well as one in Hirsch 2007a:

The disagreement between mereological essentialists, four-dimensionalists, and defenders of common sense is, on my view, merely verbal –

merely a matter of language – in the following sense: Each side can charitably interpret each other side's position in terms of a language in which

all of the other side's assertions come out true.

And it is presupposed in crucial passages of Hirsch 2005. For example:

Hence, four-dimensionalists ought to conclude that, on the most plausibly charitable interpretation of RC-English, all of Chisholm's disputed

assertions are true in that language (77).

[6] Peter Markie raises the following objection. What one ought to conclude about whether someone speaks the truth

depends on one's available evidence about how that person speaks, and one's evidence could be extremely slender

or downright misleading. The fact that I ought to conclude, based on misleading evidence, that you speak the truth

in your language, and that you ought to conclude the same of me, based on your misleading evidence, does not

establish that our dispute is verbal.

[7] In the ontological disputes at issue, the disputing sides possess such a comprehensive and coherent body of

evidence about how the other sides speak so as to make it very improbable that the canons of correct interpretation,

given their body of evidence, will lead them astray in interpretation. Hirsch himself emphasizes this point by

making clear that he is assuming that the ontological disputes in question have reached a stage at which "all is said

and done" (2005, 80).

[8] Burge (1979, 91) remarks that the person who sincerely utters the likes of 'Orangutans are fruit drinks' should not

be said to mean *orangutan* by 'orangutan'. His usage is too peculiar.

[9] Hirsch's view of linguistic interpretation is broadly Davidsonian. It is therefore worth noting that Davidson

himself may well provide a way for him to dodge the Burge point. Jackman (1998) helpfully distinguishes between

kinds of individualist theses. On the one hand, there is the thesis that what one means by one's words is independent

of how others in one's community use those words. On this (radical) view, facts about how others use their words

are simply irrelevant to one's meaning. Examples from Putnam and Burge seem to refute this view. On the other

hand, there is the thesis that facts about one's words' meanings are "ultimately grounded in facts about oneself." This second sort of individualism is consistent with the denial of the first. Jackman understands Davidson to affirm the second sort of individualism but not the first. Here is Davidson:

Under usual circumstances a speaker knows he is most apt to be understood if he speaks as his listeners would, and so intends to speak as he thinks they would. He will then fail in one of his intentions if he does not speak as others do. This simple fact helps explain, I think, why many philosophers have tied the meaning of a speaker's utterance to what others mean by the same words .... On my account, this tie is neither essential nor direct; it comes into play only when the speaker intends to be interpreted as (certain) others would be. When this intention is absent, the correct understanding of a speaker is unaffected by usage beyond the intended reach of his voice. (Davidson 1992, 261)

Davidson is claiming that one's meaning may depend on others' usage but only in virtue of facts about oneself, viz. one's intentions to speak as others do. In the absence of such intentions others' usage is irrelevant.

If Davidson's position is defensible then Hirsch can circumvent the Burge point. So long as the sides in a dispute lack the necessary other-directed intentions in making the claims they do, charitable interpretation of those claims need not take into account others' uses of the relevant words.

[10] Let me explain a bit about my choice of terminology. Composition as identity in the strong form (see Sider (2007)) that I have in mind can be stated so: for any xs and any y, the xs compose y iff y is identical to the xs. There is room in logical space for denying composition-as-identity so understood without accepting the claim I highlight in the text, i.e., that for any xs and any y, it's not the case that y is identical to the xs. However, once we bear in mind our tacit assumption that the 'y' is restricted to physical objects (as opposed to sets, set-like sums, or masses of stuff), the two claims seem to stand or fall together.

[11] Arguably they are committed to asserting it. For general considerations of plausibility provide reason to think that composition as identity is true only if universalism is true. Suppose composition is identity. Now consider the claim of universalism: for any xs, there is a y which they compose. Given composition as identity, this amounts to the claim that for any xs, there is a y with which the xs are identical. It is hard to see how there could be a thing with which, say, the *ws* are identical but no thing with which the *zs* are identical. For one thing, what could possibly explain this difference between the *ws* and the *zs*? More decisively, if some things can be one thing, and this is genuine identity, the very relation which holds between a thing and itself, then this relation should have all the characteristic features of identity. Just as for any thing x there is something y with which it is identical, so for any xs

there should be some y with which the xs are identical, and so by composition as identity there should be some y the xs compose. Thus, we arrive at universalism.

[12] Of course, Lewis and Sider do think that composition is importantly analogous to identity. But I am using 'composition as identity' to pick out the strong thesis that to compose a thing just is to be identical to that thing.

[13] The four sides are orderable with respect to face-value ontological commitment. The Us appear to accept more objects than the Cs, the Cs more than the Os, the Os more than the Ns.

[14] Like Hirsch, I ignore possible worries about speaker vs. semantic meaning.

[15] This is an instance of what Hirsch calls quantifier variance. There are distinct meanings for quantifiers in different languages.

[16] I presume that Hirsch advises the sides with larger ontologies to interpret the other sides' communities as speaking languages whose quantifiers, in all contexts, are subject to a *domain* restriction to the common entities. All talk of quantifier restrictions in what follows should be understood as talk of quantifier domain restriction. Thanks to Berit Brogaard here.

[17] Thus, Dad might say to the family, "Okay, everyone is here. Let's sit down and eat." What he says is true in O-English because his quantifier 'everyone' is restricted to all members of his family.

[18] This idea comes from an anonymous referee.

[19] When Hirsch (2002b 111-2) claims that the Lewis-style Universalist cannot reasonably see ordinary English speakers as restricting their quantifiers, I take it that he has in mind contextual rather than semantic quantifier restriction.

[20] Two side comments here. First, there are variants on the counterfactual approach. One might employ indicative conditionals rather than counterfactuals. Thus, for example, Hirsch (2007b) uses the locution 'assuming D is true, then p' (e.g., 'assuming Commonsensism is true, then there is a table here'). Not much will hang on these differences. The key idea behind what I have called the counterfactual approach is that the side with the apparently smaller ontology will interpret other sides as making certain conditional claims: *if (or were, or assuming, or given that) doctrine D is (were) true, then p is (would be) true….* Second, there are reasons for taking 'actually' in these counterfactual interpretations to fix rigidly on the world of evaluation (i.e., worlds considered as counterfactual) rather than the world of utterance (i.e., worlds considered as actual). But I put these matters aside.

[21] A referee points out that the postulation of ambiguity doesn't fit well with standard tests for ambiguity. The Cs are prepared to assert 'there is an F and a G over there' whenever they assert both 'there is an F over there' and 'there is a G over there', even when F is 'tree' and G is 'cat'.

[22] Justin McBrayer noted that the idea that use determines meaning sits poorly with claiming that the Cs and the Os associate differently meanings with names of living things, e.g., 'George Bush'.

[23] One might object that even if the Os see some of their names as having objects as semantic values they can't see all of their names as having such semantic values, because they have plenty of what they regard as empty names: 'Big Ben', 'Mt. Hood', etc. However, the Os clearly treat these differently than other names. The worry is that the Cs don't seem to treat 'Bush' and 'Mt. Hood' differently.

[24] Another very challenging interpretative task faces the sides with smaller ontologies – how should one make sense of the other sides' plural claims about the objects that one rejects? See Uzquiano (2004).

[25] Might Hirsch have advised the sides with larger ontologies to see the other sides as using semantically restricted *predicates* rather than quantifiers? Thus, the domain of the quantifiers of O-English would be treated as unrestricted (semantically) while each primitive predicate *F* would be understood as meaning *simple-or-living F*. (Hirsch seems to have this sort of interpretation in mind in note 47 of his 2005.) However, we can see that this interpretation leads to the same concerns about expressive deficiency. Cs could see O-English as making it possible to refer to nonliving composites but only at the cost of being unable to predicate of them properties that they possess.

[26] If, per the previous note, Cs understood O-English to contain a semantic restriction on predicates rather than quantifiers, there would be a corresponding problem: although O-English would allow singular and plural reference to nonliving composites, it wouldn't allow the predication of properties these entities have. The properties predicated would all require that the things which have them be simple-or-living.

[27] Hirsch is aware of a tension between his conciliatory position and certain conceptions of facts. He writes:

…I am inclined to agree with Putnam that, once we've accepted quantifier variance, there is no point in trying to hold onto language-shaped facts that are in the world independent of language. However, we can retain the notion of an unstructured fact. (2002, 59)

There is no need for me to contest this point. All I have been arguing is that the Cs will reasonably believe that there is a large range of structured facts that O-English can't express. Or if you prefer to do without the word 'fact', my point can be stated this way: the Cs will reasonably believe that is a large range of things the properties of which

cannot be predicated of them in O-English. Why shouldn't the Cs regard this as an expressive deficiency in O-English?

[28] 'Incar' is Hirsch's invention (1976, 361f). Incars, if there are such things, are things which, though in many ways like cars, come into existence when a car enters a garage and go out of existence when it leaves the garage.

[29] In fact, there are further related problems I have not so far mentioned. If you are a C interpreting the O-community, and you notice that the O-community can't express facts about tables in their language, you would at least expect these expressive limitations in some cases to *bother* them. So, you would expect them to be disposed to react to a question such as "But you do admit there is a table there, don't you, and not just simples arranged in certain ways?" with frustration. For – so you will think – they surely *recognize* there is a table there! Yet they don't react with any frustration. They simply answer "No – no table there."

[30] I thank an anonymous referee for helpful suggestions on the material in this paragraph and the next. The suggestions saved me from several errors.

[31] Compare the cup/glass dispute. Here we can resolve our dispute in a conciliatory fashion. We can, after a short while, make the relevant speech. I cannot perhaps give a perfect translation of your 'drinking glasses are cups' but I can give a translation that you will regard as not neglecting any crucial information, e.g., 'drinking glasses are vessels designed for drinking' (2005, 70). And the same goes for your translation of my 'drinking glasses aren't cups' (e.g., you might translate this as 'drinking glasses aren't drinking vessels with handles').

[32] A referee gives the following example. Suppose two tribes use 'game' in slightly different ways, but both use it in such a way that the word 'game' is indefinable in their language (as Wittgenstein argued). Suppose then that the tribes encountered one another and began to argue about whether a certain activity was a "game." Wouldn't their dispute be verbal, despite the fact that there is no adequate translation from one language to the other? .

[33] The same argument applies to the Os interpreting the C-community. The Os can acknowledge that perceptual experience gives one prima facie reason to think there are tables, mountains, and so on. And so they can see the prima facie plausibility of the C-community's assertions even if the C-community is speaking the same language they are. The Os just think that the balance of reasons, in light of philosophical problems, decides the matter against these assertions. Thus, I think Hirsch moves too quickly when he claims that revisionary ontologists "imply that typical speakers of (English) make many a priori false ontological judgments for no good reason." Taking 'for no good reason' out, this is perfectly acceptable but carries insufficient weight in charity judgments. Leaving it in, the

claim is highly questionable, in my view false. I agree with Hirsch that it would be bizarre if an O claimed that ordinary folk believe there are tables but have no prima facie reason for doing so.

[34] Notice that in the cup/drinking glass dispute each side would have a hard time making sense of the other side's mistakes.

[35] I am not saying that when the sides in a dispute think their dispute is nonverbal it automatically is nonverbal. The question is always whether it is more charitable all things considered to attribute the error to the relevant community than to see its members as speaking the truth in another language. The more comprehensible the error is the less implausible it is to attribute it. I don't say this is the only factor. My claim, about the O/C dispute is that, when other charity factors are brought to bear, including especially charity to expressibility, it is more charitable to attribute the error than to take the community to be speaking the truth in another language.

[36] I thank an anonymous referee for raising the questions that motivated my inclusion of this section.

[37] The brackets in 6 indicate that 6 follows from 5 given some other assumptions about 'O' which won't be important for us here.

[38] This argument can be found in numerous works (e.g., see 2002a and 2004.)

[39] Thus, Hirsch writes:

Looking back at those heroes of common sense we can draw a rough distinction, I think, between two general approaches. The first approach, typified by Moore, comes out of basic epistemology. A simple point that Moore made in a number of his papers is that our common sense convictions have more epistemic weight than any fancy philosophical arguments…

The second approach, which one is likely to associated with the name "ordinary language philosophy," comes out of linguistic rather than epistemological considerations. In arguing against revisionary ontology in the present paper I'm going to develop a version of the second approach. (2002b, 104)

[40] Doubts could be raised about *Step 2* even given *Step 1*. *Step 1*, in the presence of Hirsch's criterion, gives us a number of different languages, N-English, O-English, C-English, U-English. Now, it is not obvious that C-English is English. It depends on how the speakers of the relevant hypothetical community (who talk like the Cs) are understood. Hirsch (2005, 88-9) considers these issues in some detail.

[41] This example is inspired by one of Dorr's (2005).

[42] Consider the dispute over causation. Suppose it turns out that a certain complex account captures the satisfaction-conditions for the English 'causes'. Must the other sides concede defeat? I think not. Another side might argue that

its favored notion, *causation**, even if not expressed by 'causes' in English, better serves the same theoretical and practical purposes *causation* serves, e.g., by removing relativity to human norms (see Beebee 2004). Or consider Joshua Knobe's (forthcoming) claim that *intentional action* exhibits a praise/blame asymmetry (roughly, if φing is clearly wrong then knowing that by doing what you're doing you φ is enough for intentionally φing; whereas this is not the case if φing is merely good (but not obligatory)). If Knobe is right about *intentional action* it doesn't follow that the other side loses. Perhaps there is more theoretical and practical utility in a morally neutral notion which is otherwise like that of intentional action. Similarly, we would need to ask whether there is reason to think that, supposing the disputes over composition and persistence are verbal, the relevant *existence* and *composition* notions employed by the sides in the composition dispute are of equal utility and importance. If *existence** or *composition** scores higher than *existence* or *composition*, on these measures, a case could be made that the side employing these notions wins a more important dispute than the dispute over who is speaking English. (Perhaps this last thought embodies an error because of the special status of *existence* and *composition*, but that has to be shown rather than assumed.)

[43] Sider (1999) thus speaks of sentences as 'quasi-true', Merricks (2001) of sentences as 'as good as true'. See McGrath (2005).

[44] One might wonder why we couldn't appeal to factuality in characterizing translation schemes for the sides in the composition dispute. Why couldn't we say that the translation the Os' use on the Cs for S – i.e., $T_O(S)$ – is 'S has a factuality-maker relative to Organicese'? and similarly for the Cs' to use on the Os? But the problems with expressibility come up here, too. Both sides, if they use these schemes, will see the other side's language as expressively deficient relative to their own.

[45] For further discussion and development of the notion of factuality, see McGrath (2005). Interesting questions arise concerning whether sides with larger ontologies can see sides with smaller ones as capturing singular facts about objects they deny. Can the Cs see the Os as capturing singular facts about tables? The Cs will think they can, it seems, only if they think that all singular facts about tables are grounded. This is a delicate matter. It is not obvious that anything could ground a singular fact of the form *y is F,* where *Fness* is a basic property (i.e., a property the instantiation of which by an object isn't grounded in facts about that object). For any y, the fact *y exists* might be like this. But could facts about the parts or constituents of y – facts of the form *the xs are arranged so* – ground the fact *y exists*? This is far from clear. If not, it looks like the Cs will have to take the Os as not capturing

any singular facts about tables. They can capture, however, facts that do duty for these. If, for each table, there is a property that applies only to that table and whose instantiation the Os accept, then the Os can perhaps be said in a still-further-extended sense to capture singular facts about tables. Another possibility is to relativize grounding to what I have elsewhere called constitution principles (McGrath (2005)).

[46] When we turn to the endurance/perdurance dispute, the prospects for this sort of limited conciliation look worse. The sides seem to disagree about basic reality and not only putatively grounded reality. However, I suspect that we could define a still more limited notion of conciliation: replace the notion of grounding in the accounts given of *factuality* and *capturing a fact* given above with the notion of metaphysical entailment. See again my (2005).

[47] I thank Berit Brogaard, Cian Dorr, Brian Kierland, Peter Markie, Justin McBrayer, Trenton Merricks, Ted Poston, and especially Eli Hirsch and two anonymous referees for helpful comments which improved this paper.

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