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Why Our Natural Languages Are Ideal Languages for Metaphysics

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5.1 The Language of Metaphysics

Much of the debate about the language of ontology seems to me to be about the wrong thing. This debate focuses on the question whether ontological debates should be carried out in a language that carves nature at the joints and that in particular contains a joint-carving quantifier. This issue is exemplified in particular in the dispute between Eli Hirsch and Ted Sider, and although this is an active and ongoing debate, it seems to me that there is another, much more central and important, issue connected to the language of ontology and of metaphysics. The central question is not about joints of nature and joint-carving quantifiers, but about the possibility of ambitious metaphysics as a project carried out by human beings. It concerns whether or not human natural languages and human thought are even minimally adequate to carry out metaphysics. Is it the case that the kind of languages that are in principle accessible to human beings are good enough to do metaphysics in an ambitious form? This question is the topic of the present chapter.

Almost everyone who is at least somewhat favorably inclined toward metaphysics agrees that metaphysics is in the fact-finding business. It tries to find out what reality is like, and thus what the facts are. Metaphysics is, of course, not concerned with all the facts, but only with a particular subclass of them. Which subclass is controversial, and rightly so. Is it very general facts, or the fundamental facts, or the structural facts, or normative facts about how reality ought to be described, something totally different, or a combination of the above? These are substantial questions connected to how one conceives of metaphysics, but whatever one says, one will hold that metaphysics has as its aim to find out about certain kinds of facts. We can call *the domain of metaphysics* those facts that are the target of metaphysical inquiry, whichever ones they might be. Or to put it differently, the domain of metaphysics is those questions of fact that are the ones

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¹ See Hirsch (2011) and Sider (2011).

metaphysics is supposed to settle. Everyone who holds that metaphysics is in the business of fact-finding can agree, although they will disagree with what these facts are more precisely. The question for us here is: what language is suitable for representing these facts? Let us call an ideal language for metaphysics any language, natural or artificial, that is able to represent all the facts in the domain of metaphysics. Ideal languages in this sense are ideal for metaphysics in that they can represent all the facts in the domain of metaphysics, but they are not necessarily ideal in other ways. English might be ideal for metaphysics, but non-ideal otherwise, since it has an excess of grammatical rules, and too many letters, and some other imperfections. We should not concern ourselves with those dimensions of perfection and how a language might be perfectly ideal; that is, ideal in every respect, including alphabet, grammar, and so on. What matters for us here is being ideal when it comes to representing all the facts in the domain of metaphysics. An ideal language in this sense can be improved in several ways, but not in the way that matters for us here. It can represent all the facts in the domain of metaphysics, and no language can represent more facts in the domain of metaphysics than that.

A language can be pretty good for metaphysics without being ideal. We can say that a language is *adequate for metaphysics* if it can represent a good enough part of the facts in the domain of metaphysics. An adequate language might not be ideal, but at least it would be a good start. Our question in the following will be whether we should think that the languages that are accessible to human beings are ideal or at least adequate for metaphysics. Are the languages we can speak adequate or even ideal for metaphysics? And to carry it over to the level of thought, are the thoughts we can think adequate or ideal for metaphysics? If the answer is yes to both, then we are in great shape to carry out metaphysics. Metaphysics would be possible for human beings at least when it comes to representing the facts, although we might still be limited in when it comes to knowing the facts. Our concern here is not epistemic, but representational. On the other hand, if it turns out that the languages we can speak are neither ideal nor adequate, then metaphysics seems to be beyond what human beings can hope to do. Not only will we not be in a position to know what the metaphysically relevant facts are, we will not even be in a position to represent them. Any limitation on what we can represent in thought or language is a limitation on what we can know, since to know that p one has to be able to represent that p and to think that p. If our languages are not ideal but adequate, then metaphysics is in decent shape, but limited. That might not be too bad, depending on how far from ideal our adequate languages might be. So, are our human languages adequate, or even ideal, for metaphysics?

Considering this question brings up the thought that maybe we are not even close. The worry here is that metaphysics hopes to be ambitious: it aims to find out about reality as a whole, not merely to settle some local question of fact.





Metaphysics concerns what reality is like in general and overall. But why should we think that our human minds are adequate to represent any fact that obtains? Why should we think that our minds are good enough to represent all of reality? Our minds evolved in a very particular environment and we can grant that they are very good at representing the facts that we are commonly faced with. But reality might be very different in some of its parts than what we are accustomed to. And the kinds of representations that might be required to represent these other facts might be of a very different kind than what is accessible to us. We might be limited in a way that is irrelevant for ordinary life, and even for much of science, but highly relevant for metaphysics. Let us call the Dark Vision the worrisome possibility that our minds are limited in what they can represent in thought or language in such a way that ambitious metaphysics is not a reasonable project for creatures like us. The Dark Vision presents the possibility that reality in part is completely different from what we can represent, and completely alien to our way of thinking and speaking. And if so, then ambitious metaphysics would seem to be doomed for us, at least doomed in the sense of achieving its ultimate goal. Do we have to accept the Dark Vision as a legitimate possibility, or do we have any reasons to rule it out? And if we had to accept it, what would it show about the metaphysical theories we come up with? Would it put a shadow over all of them, and give rise to the worry that those theories are at best theories about reality as far as we can represent it, but possibly not about reality as a whole?

Let us call an ineffable fact a fact that we human beings cannot, in principle, represent in thought or language. The Dark Vision is closely tied to the question whether or not there are ineffable facts. In particular, it relates to the question whether any of the facts in the domain of metaphysics are ineffable. To illustrate the issue with an example: if metaphysics concerns at least in part the fundamental facts, as it does on one not unpopular conception of it, then there is the worry that even though we can easily represent facts like facts of objects having properties, we might not be able to represent the facts that give rise to such facts. We might be able to represent certain derivative facts, but possibly the fundamental facts are completely alien to our minds. Furthermore, if there are any ineffable facts at all, then this might suggest that our attempts at ambitious metaphysics, the kind that tries to come up with a metaphysics of all of reality, is bound to be limited. How can we hope to come up with a metaphysical story of all of reality when some parts of reality are beyond our minds in that we cannot even represent those facts? Shouldn't these facts also play a role in the metaphysics, and how could they if we can't even entertain them in thought?

Ineffable facts can be divided up into two kinds, which correspond to two ways in which our thinking might be inadequate. To illustrate, let us consider how a simple subject-predicate representation can fail to be good enough to represent a certain fact. First, it could be that the fact is the fact of an object having a property, but for some reason we are unable to represent the object or the property.





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Second, it could be that a certain fact requires a representation of a different kind than a subject-predicate presentation. We could fail to be able to fill in the content of a kind of representation we have available, as when we are unable to represent an object or a property, or we might be unable to have a certain form or structure of representation available at all, as when we need a different kind of representing a fact than the kinds we have available. Facts of the former kind we can call content ineffable, and facts of the latter kind we can call structurally ineffable. Structurally ineffable facts are intuitively more alien to our minds than contentineffable ones. The content-ineffable ones are at least of the same kind as the kinds of facts we can represent. They are facts of an object having a property, or some other kind that we can represent, even though we can't represent that particular object or property. Structurally ineffable facts are facts of a completely different kind than the facts we can represent. And structurally ineffable ones are what is truly worrisome and behind a certain way of thinking of the Dark Vision. Some parts of reality might be completely alien to our minds and languages, in the sense that the kinds of representation available to us are insufficient to even represent these kinds of facts. And if we can't even represent facts of this kind, how can we hope to have a complete general story of what reality is like? In particular, if some of these structurally ineffable facts are in the domain of metaphysics, then metaphysics can hope for partial success here or there, but its ambitions will have to be limited by that alone.

In the following, I will focus on structural ineffability. It is the most worrisome kind, and it is also in a sense the easier one to discuss. To properly discuss content ineffability, one needs to look more closely at the notion of what is in principle expressible by human beings. This notion is not easy to make clearer, although I believe it can be spelled out in more detail.² Doing so, however, will require almost as much space as I have here overall, and so it is best to leave it aside for now and focus on structural ineffability instead. Any fact that is structurally ineffable is in principle unrepresentable by us, in the sense that no matter what we do, no matter how long we live, our minds just aren't suitable to represent them. Our main question about the adequacy of human minds and languages for metaphysics thus turns into these: are there any structurally ineffable facts? And if so, are any in the domain of metaphysics?

In the rest of this chapter I would like to present an argument that answers this question. I will argue that there are no structurally ineffable facts at all, and thus that there are none in the domain of metaphysics. This might seem like a tough task, since to answer the question it would seem that one needs to know two things and put them together properly. First, one needs to know which facts can be represented in our thought or language, and second, one needs to know which





² I have done my best in Hofweber (2017).

facts obtain. Once one has both figured out, one can then answer the question by comparing the two. But that strategy is obviously hopeless. We won't be able to first figure out what reality is like and which facts obtain just so we can answer the question whether we can represent all of them. Instead I will argue from considerations about our language alone that we can see that structural ineffability can never obtain. By looking at our language alone, we can see that our language is able to represent all the facts, at least when it comes to their structure.³ Furthermore, this argument can be extended to the conclusion that our language is able to represent all the facts full stop, not just with regards to their structure but also with regards to their content. However, this stronger claim requires some details that I have developed elsewhere but won't be able to discuss in this chapter. I will point to the relevant texts where appropriate, but even focusing on structure alone should be significant. That the structure of the facts matches the kinds of thoughts or kinds of languages we can have is not trivial, and that we can show this from considerations about our languages and thoughts alone, without looking at the facts, must seem hopeless. Nonetheless, just this is the case, or so I hope to argue in the following.

5.2 Talk about Facts

Before we return to our discussion of the language of metaphysics, we will need to consider how we talk about facts. I hope to make clear in section 5.3 that this is central for our main concern. The issues in this section are simply about our own natural language, and many of the questions raised here are simply empirical questions about this language—questions about what we do when we do certain things with certain phrases in our speech. As such empirical questions, they are complex and involved, and I can't hope to resolve any substantial issues about language in this chapter. Instead I hope to highlight that a certain debate about natural languages, one I will outline shortly, is closely tied to our main question of the adequacy of human natural languages for metaphysics. I will state below which side in this debate I have defended in some detail elsewhere. Furthermore, I will have to sideline some issues that give rise to further complexities. Here, first and foremost, I would like to sideline the issue whether or not all human languages are the same in the regard to be discussed shortly. The view defended here does not depend on all human languages being the same, but the situation gets easier if they are. I will therefore focus on talk about facts in the language in which I write: English. Thus in the following I will argue that largely empirical





³ For a different argument that structural ineffability is impossible, see Filcheva (2020).

facts about English allow us to resolve the issue about the adequacy of human languages for metaphysics.⁴

Most directly we talk about facts with the use of that-clauses or phrases like 'the fact that p':

- (1) a. That p is surprising.
 - b. The fact that p is surprising.

That-clauses appear in many other contexts as well, and they do not always stand for facts, but the following question arises for them and our cases equally: when we use a that-clause, are we thereby attempting to refer to a thing or entity? Are we trying to pick out a thing with a that-clause, just as we try to do when we use a proper name? In other words, are that-clauses, and fact-terms more generally, referential expressions? An expression can be referential in two ways: first, it could aim to refer to something, whether or not it succeeds; second, it could succeed in referring to something. Only the former concerns language alone, and only in the sense of attempted reference do we ask here whether that-clauses and fact-terms refer. This question is actively debated in the philosophy of language and in semantics.⁵ Some reasons speak for them being referential, and some speak against it. What speaks against it is that they are clauses, and on the face of it clauses are very different than names. They complement or modify something, but don't pick out a thing like a name. What's more, fact-terms don't seem to have the same features as names; in particular, they can't be substituted for each other even if they refer to the same thing. There seems to be an important difference in truth conditions between fearing that one's mother will find out and fearing the fact that one's mother will find out, even if it is a fact that one's mother will find out. The former is fear concerning one's mother; the latter is fact-phobia, fear of a fact itself.6 So, maybe fact-terms are not referential. But there are also good reasons to think that they are. First and foremost is that they give rise to valid quantifier inferences that seem to settle the issue right away. (2) immediately implies that

(2) Something is surprising.

and if that is so, then it would seem that that thing which is surprising is just the thing that 'that p' was referring to. And if so, then that-clauses must be referential after all

But is this quantifier inference really a decisive reason for fact-terms being referential? Quantification in natural language might not always be used in just this





⁴ For more on this issue, see Hofweber (2006).

⁵ See Bach (1997), King (2002), Moltmann (2003), Hofweber (2016b), and many others.

⁶ See the references in footnote 5 for more on this 'substitution problem'.

way in which it concerns a domain of objects or entities. One alternative view could go as follows. Quantifiers are semantically underspecified. They are used with different readings on different occasions. One reading is just the one discussed above. When we use a quantified sentence like

(3) Something is F.

we claim that the domain of things or entities contains at least one thing which is F. Let us call this the *domain-conditions reading* of the quantifier. But it is plausible that quantification in natural language is also used on a different reading. In this reading various inferences are trivial, as the inference from

(4) I need an assistant.

to

(5) I need something.

On this reading quantifiers are used for their *inferential role*. They are used in such a way that the inference from 'F(t)' to 'Something is F' is always and trivially valid. Now, whether quantifiers really have these two readings is simply a question about our own language. Maybe they do, maybe they don't, but this is an issue just about our own language. Suppose, then, that they do have these readings, as I believe they do.⁷ We can note first that these two readings must differ in truth conditions. If the inference from (4) to (5) is valid, but if there is no assistant in the domain that I need, then the two readings come apart in truth conditions, and thus they make different contributions to the truth conditions. But what then are the truth conditions of the inferential-role reading of the quantifier?

Those truth conditions need to be such that they give rise to the inferential role. And that role is that for any instance in our language F(t), it implies that something is F. There are different truth conditions that would give rise to this inferential role, but there is one that is the simplest one: the quantified sentence 'something is F' needs to be truth-conditionally equivalent to the disjunction over all the instances that imply it. If there are only three instances, then if 'something is F' is truth-conditionally equivalent to 'either F(a) or F(b) or F(c)', then it will have just the inferential role for which we want it. In our case there are infinitely many instances, but that doesn't change the main point. To have the inferential role of being implied by any instance in our language, the simplest truth conditions that give it this inferential role are to be equivalent to the disjunction of all





⁷ I argued for this in much more detail in chapter 3 of Hofweber (2016b).

the instances that are supposed to imply it: all the instances in our language. Thus if the quantified statement is truth-conditionally equivalent to the infinite disjunction over all the instances in our language, then it will have the inferential role for which we want it. And what's more, those are the simplest and optimal truth conditions that give it this inferential role. And for universal quantifiers it is correspondingly the conjunction over all the instances. That gives it the inferential role of implying each instance.

I will in the following call the domain-conditions reading of the quantifier also the *external reading*, since it requires something language-external: a domain of things. I will call the inferential-role reading the *internal reading*, since it is language-internal: it relates sentences within the language to another one with the language. Using this terminology, we can thus sum up that on this view of quantification, quantifiers are semantically underspecified and they have an internal and external reading. And these are congenially paired with the views that that-clauses are or are not referential. If that-clauses are not referential, then we would really mess things up if we used quantifiers over facts in the external reading. And if that-clauses are referential, then the external reading of the quantifier would be a perfect match for that. If we aim to pick out things in a domain of entities with that-clauses, then naturally we should quantify over that domain when we quantify over facts. And if that-clauses are not referential, then it would be confused to quantify over facts by quantifying over a domain of entities. There are thus two kinds of views about what we do when we talk about facts:

- (6) Externalism: Fact-terms are referential, and quantifiers over facts are generally used on their external, domain-conditions, reading.
- (7) **Internalism**: Fact-terms are not referential, and quantifiers over facts are generally used on their internal, inferential, reading.

Which one of those is correct is central for our main question, or so I hope to argue in section 5.3.

To be sure, the above was merely an outline of a view of quantification in natural language. The proper story is a lot more complicated, since the above outline neglects contextual contributions to content and truth conditions, and it is only outlined for the simplest cases of quantifiers. But this story can be spelled out more properly, and I have done my best to do so in chapters 3 and 9 of Hofweber (2016b). Furthermore, these complications that I skip here actually matter for our issue here, but they are too involved to properly discuss now. We can avoid these issues by focusing on structural ineffability instead of full ineffability, and I will return to this issue later on. For now, let's put this aside and consider only the simplified proposal. Here, too, we should say that this is a question about our own language; it is an issue that concerns what we do when we quantify and use quantifiers. As such, it is a largely empirical issue that is reasonably up for debate. But





let's consider what would happen if internalism turns out to be correct as the proper view of what we do when we talk about facts.

5.3 Internalism and the Language of Metaphysics

Whether internalism or externalism or some other view is correct for talk about facts is an empirical question about our own language and what we do with it. We won't be able to settle it here, of course, but suppose that internalism is indeed correct, and suppose that internal quantifiers indeed have the simplest truth conditions as outlined above. This is not a far-fetched assumption; I believe that it is correct, and I have argued for it in detail in Hofweber (2016b). Whether or not these arguments are in the end correct is again beyond what we can settle here, but let us suppose for the moment that internalism is correct. What would follow from it for our main concern about the language of metaphysics?

If internalism is true, then our present natural language is an ideal language for metaphysics. No fact is or could be structurally ineffable for it. This simply follows from the truth conditions of quantified statements that range over facts. To see this, consider the sentence

(8) Every fact is structurally effable.

Assuming internalism is true, this sentence is truth-conditionally equivalent to

(9) \wedge if it is a fact that p then that p is structurally effable.

But each of those conjuncts is true. Each conjunct is an instance where 'p' is replaced with a sentence in our own language. And for each such instance, the fact that p is structurally effable by us. Thus the big conjunction is true and therefore (8) is true.

We can thus see that if internalism is true, then there are no structurally effable facts. Since structural ineffability is ruled out, we can say that our thought and reality are in *structural harmony*. The totality of facts and what thoughts or sentences are available to us are in harmony in that any structure that is to be found in the facts is also to be found in our representations of the facts. We focused on structure here, in good part so that we can simplify along a number of ways. The semantics of quantification given was too simple in certain ways, and the notion of the ineffable was not properly spelled out. However, both of those limitations can be overcome, and I have done my part in doing so in, for example, Hofweber (2017) and Hofweber (2016b). Once we do not make these simplifications, we can see that we get an even stronger sense of harmony, which we can call *complete harmony*. Complete harmony holds when any fact that obtains is representable by





a sentence in our language or a thought available to us, assuming some idealization, in particular with regards to length of sentence and complexity of thought. Either structural or complete harmony gives rise to a certain position about the language of metaphysics. Our human languages are structurally ideal if structural harmony obtains, and they are simply ideal if complete harmony obtains. If complete harmony obtains, then all facts can be represented in our languages. Thus all facts in the domain of metaphysics can be represented by our languages. No other language can do better in principle when it comes to representing the facts. We have already got them all. Other languages can be an improvement on our present natural languages in that they represent the facts more simply or more elegantly or in some other way, but they can't improve our present language in representing more facts. We can already represent all of them.

This argument must seem puzzling, to say the least. We were able to argue that our natural language is ideal, or at least structurally ideal, by relying only on considerations about our own language. No assumptions were made about which sentences are true or false; the argument simply proceeded from a view about what we do when we talk about facts, and thus a view about what we aim to do when we talk this way, without assuming that our aims are met. We never made any assumptions about what reality in general is like. But how could it be that one could argue for the adequacy of our own language to represent all of reality by looking only at our language, and not otherwise at reality at all? No such argument should be possible, since the issue is about the match between two things language and reality—and one can't determine that by looking at just one of these two things: language. What's more, the argument seems to be the kind of an argument that we have reason to believe is never a good argument. It seems to aim to draw metaphysical conclusions about reality from merely how we aim to represent reality. And this seems to be impossible, since metaphysics concerns reality, not what we aim to do with reality. It is one thing to aim to represent reality in a particular way, and another thing for those representations to be accurate. Only the latter allows for conclusions about what reality is like. There seems to be a gap, which we can call the language-metaphysics gap, that needs to be bridged for the above argument to get off the ground, and it seems that this gap can't be bridged.8 And thus the above argument must go wrong somewhere.

Although in general one can't draw conclusions from how we represent the world to how the world is, there are exceptions, and this is one of them. To see this, let us consider what conclusions we can draw merely from the fact that that-clauses and fact-terms are non-referential. On the internalist view they are not just non-referential in that they aim to refer but fail, but rather in the sense that





⁸ Heather Dyke calls drawing conclusions about the world from how we talk about the world 'the representational fallacy' in Dyke (2008), something she rejects. As will become clear, I do not agree that this is indeed always a mistake.

they do something different altogether than referring. The former is not a claim about language alone, but about language and the world. The latter, however, is about language alone. It is merely about what we do or don't do when we use certain parts of language. But if our fact-terms are non-referential in this sense, then it follows that facts do not exist. It follows that the domain of things or the collection of all that exists does not contain any facts. If fact-terms are non-referential, then nothing in the domain of things is the fact that snow is white. The reason simply is that if internalism is true and fact-terms are non-referential, then I just used the term 'the fact that snow is white' in this non-referential way in the last sentence. That term was not in the business of referring to anything, and so whatever things there may be, none of them were referred to with the fact-term I just used. So none of the things in the domain are the fact that snow is white. And similarly for all other facts. So, there are no facts in the domain, and there is no ontology of facts. And we could see this merely by thinking about our language and what we do when we talk about facts. Since the non-existence of facts is a metaphysical claim, we did bridge the language-metaphysics gap. We were able to draw a metaphysical conclusion. And once the gap has been bridged, there can be further consequences from what we were able to conclude more directly. And similarly here. Although the non-existence of facts is at first only a rather negative conclusion, it has a number of positive consequences, only some of which are directly at issue in this chapter.

Even if it is possible to draw conclusions about reality from considerations about our own language, it might be argued that this is only a shallow victory, and the true metaphysical issues remain. One thought that motivates this reaction is that if internalism is indeed true for our talk about facts, then we made a mistake in thinking of reality as the totality of facts. The totality of facts is too closely tied to us and our talk about reality. We thus need to talk about something else instead. Maybe not facts, but truths, or maybe something totally different altogether. Although this sounds good at first, it quickly goes nowhere. First, switching from facts to truths won't change the overall situation. Not only are facts closely connected to truths, in the sense that for every fact there is a corresponding truth, and the other way round, but also the arguments in favor of internalism about talk about facts carry over to arguments in favor of internalism about talk about truths. If we shift away from facts, it would need to be something rather different. Some substitute for them, but something not of the kind that we generally talk about with a that-clause. We need to move away from facts to facts*, or whatever that substitute for facts might be called. But such a shift in focus and target of inquiry also shifts us away from reality. Reality is the totality of facts, not the totality of facts*, or so is our concept of reality. We will then need to direct our attention not to reality, but to reality*. But how could we ever rationally move away from facts, truth, and reality, and instead make facts*, truth*, and reality* our target of inquiry? Inquiry aims at the truth and the facts. To truly follow this



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line of thought to its natural end, we would have to abandon inquiry for inquiry*, which aims at the truth*. But could it ever be rational for us, given our present starting point, to abandon inquiry in favor of inquiry*, and to give up the aim of truth in favor of the aim of truth*? I believe no such transition could be rational, and I have argued for this in more detail in Hofweber (2020) as well as Hofweber (2019). Instead of giving it all up, we should instead accept that reality is that totality of facts, but the facts are not independent of our talk about the facts. Internalism, if it is indeed correct, does not suggest that inquiry should have a completely different target, or should be replaced altogether, but instead it shows something about what reality is like. The target is and remains the truth, and reality is the totality of facts, but the facts are tied to us and our minds and language. This might sound like idealism, and I think it is. Internalism leads to idealism, but how precisely and in what sense of idealism is not really the topic for the present chapter. I have done my best to work out these connections in Hofweber (2019) and Hofweber (2022), and the details require quite a bit more than what we can do here. Internalism has substantial metaphysical consequences, and most pressing for now, it has consequences for determining what language is perfectly matched to reality. It shows that our human natural languages are ideal languages for metaphysics, which is the consequence that is the focus of this chapter.

5.4 Conclusion

Whether our human natural languages are ideal or even adequate languages for metaphysics is a substantial question, tied to the question whether or not there are any ineffable facts. I have argued above that if internalism is true for our own talk about facts, then ineffable facts are ruled out. This argument was only given in outline, with many of the details missing. To spell it out more fully, we need to look at quantification in natural language more carefully and what the truth conditions of the inferential-role reading of quantifiers are, as well as whether thatclauses and fact-terms indeed are non-referring expressions. I have tried to do all this in Hofweber (2016b), which contains a detailed defense of internalism for talk about facts, as well as a few other things. On this proper formulation of internalism it indeed follows that there are no ineffable facts. And that in turn implies that our language can represent all the facts, and thus all the facts in the domain of metaphysics, whatever that domain might be. Thus our language is not only adequate for metaphysics, but ideal. It can't be improved in a way that matters for us now: representing facts in principle. And thus there is no representational limitation on ambitious metaphysics. We are in a perfect position to represent all the facts, and whatever obstacles we face in metaphysics, representing the facts is not one of them. As I suggested above, I hold that this internalist picture not only supports that there are no ineffable facts and that our minds and reality are in



perfect harmony in this regard, but also a closely connected form of idealism. How that is supposed to go is another story. But our main lesson for the language of ontology and the language of metaphysics is this: if internalism is true, then there is a close connection between what we can in principle represent and which facts can in principle obtain. If this connection obtains, then there is no limit to the ambitions of metaphysics as carried out by us from a possible representational limitation of our thoughts and languages. But if externalism is true, then there is no such guarantee of our representational tools being adequate to carry out metaphysics. If the facts are independent of our representations, then there is no guarantee that the language required to represent all of them or just the ones most relevant for metaphysics is a language we humans can speak. In fact, we should expect to be limited in this regard, and thus take more caution in metaphysics. If externalism is true, then a form of intellectual humility is appropriate in metaphysics, as argued for in Hofweber (2016a). But if internalism is true, then metaphysics does not face any representational obstacles to its ambitions, in part because of a connection between the totality of facts and our languages. Ambitious metaphysics stands or falls with idealism, or so this argument suggests.

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