Introduction

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Questions as well as claims about states of affairs may be assigned, roughly, to one of the following three general headlines:

1. What kind of entity are states of affairs (if there are any)?
2. Are there such things as states of affairs?
3. If there are states of affairs, are there different kinds of them and, if so, what are these?

This introduction is structured along the lines of these basic questions. It shall outline some of the most important problems and positions connected with the notion of states of affairs. I shall not provide a separate sketch of the contents of the contributions to this volume, but rather address them in the course of this systematic outline, as they tackle the issues that are discussed here.

1. The nature of states of affairs

In this section, I shall first give a rough explication of the notion of a state of affairs, and then address a number of more specific questions: How are states of affairs related to propositions, events and states? Are states of affairs concrete, contingent, causally efficacious, spatio-temporal entities or are they abstract objects, or are they none of these? Are states of affairs given in perception? How are states of affairs related to tropes? What are the constituents of states of affairs and how are they connected? What are the identity conditions of states of affairs?

1.1 What is a state of affairs?

According to the standard conception of states of affairs, (atomic) states of affairs are complex entities, consisting of particulars, (universal) properties and relations, such that an atomic state of affairs is a particular's exempli-

fying a property (or one or more particulars' exemplifying a relation). Usually, philosophers refer to states of affairs by means of *that-clauses* (e.g., *that this rose is red*, *that Ann loves Bob*) or, alternatively, by means of locutions of the gerundial form "*x*'s having *F*-ness" or "*x*'s being *F*" (e.g., *the rose's having redness*, *the rose's being red*).[1] Often it is claimed that the relation between the constituents (particulars and universals) on the one hand and the whole complex (the state of affairs) is not a *mereological* one, i.e., particulars and universals are not supposed to be (mereological) *parts* of states of affairs. (See, for instance, Armstrong 1997; Hochberg, this volume.) Some, however, think that "the idea of a 'non-mereological' form of composition is at best unclear and at worst contradictory, so perhaps it is best to think of a state of affairs as made up literally of its elements." (Simons, this volume, 116)

Some (e.g., David Armstrong) use "state of affairs" interchangeably with "fact", others distinguish facts from states of affairs. The latter ones often distinguish between *obtaining and non-obtaining states of affairs* and use the term "fact" for obtaining states of affairs. According to this view, facts are a subclass of states of affairs. (See, for instance, Ludwig Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*; Meixner, this volume.)[2] Thus, for instance, if it is raining, the state of affairs that it is raining obtains, and thus it is a fact that it is raining. If it is not raining, the state of affairs that it is raining does not obtain and thus the state of affairs that it is raining is not a fact. Whether there are non-obtaining states of affairs is a matter of dispute even among realists with respect to states of affairs. (See section 3.1 below.)

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[1] However, some distinguish between that-clauses and gerundial phrases, claiming that only the former denote states of affairs, while the latter denote particular qualities, states or events. (See Mulligan, Simons & Smith 1984, §3.)

[2] Though the case of Wittgenstein is not entirely uncontested. Marian David claims that Wittgenstein did not distinguish obtaining from non-obtaining states of affairs and thus did not distinguish states of affairs from facts. But even David admits that "there are disconcerting statements in the *Tractatus*". (David, this volume, 177) The wording of the *Tractatus* must be *very* disconcerting indeed for an advocate of an interpretation like David's. Another complication is that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* repeatedly talks about facts not as *obtaining* states of affairs, but rather as *the obtaining of* states of affairs. If the latter way of talking were to be taken seriously, a fact would be a higher order state of affairs. But Wittgenstein is not completely unambiguous in this regard. (See Reicher 2002.)

States of affairs are often considered to be *constituents* (sometimes even the sole constituents) of *reality*. Wittgenstein, at the beginning of his *Tractatus*, famously noted that the world is the totality of facts, not of things. Armstrong followed Wittgenstein in this respect for a while (see Armstrong 1997), but recently he has abandoned this view. He now thinks that

> [t]he world is both. The three categories of particulars, universals and states of affairs seem to take in each other's washing. Universals are here the junior partner, because it seems wrong to think that the world is a complex of universals. It is a huge state of affairs, one instantiating a hugely complex structural universal (one that has just one instantiation) and equally it is a huge particular. (Armstrong, this volume, 43)

For Armstrong, the huge particular and the huge state of affairs are not two distinct entities but only one, because he takes the supervenience relation between states of affairs and their constituents to be *symmetrical* and symmetrical supervenience (as he understands it) yields identity (Armstrong 1997, 12).

1.2 States of affairs and propositions

As has been mentioned, philosophers often use that-clauses to refer to states of affairs. However, that-clauses are also used to refer to *propositions*, i.e., to what Frege called "thoughts", that is, the (objective, mind-independent) meanings (Fregean senses) of assertive sentences. Nevertheless, nowadays many philosophers clearly distinguish states of affairs from propositions. (See, for instance, Armstrong, this volume; Meixner, this volume; Olson 1987; Simons, this volume.)

One common idea is that propositions, but not states of affairs, are *truthbearers*, that is, are either true or false, while states of affairs, but not propositions, are *truthmakers*, i.e., entities that make propositions (and other truthbearers, if such there be) true. (See, for instance, Armstrong, this volume.)[3] Another widespread view is that propositions are more "fine-

[3] For the nature of propositions and the relation between states of affairs and propositions see also David, this volume, especially section 1.

grained" than states of affairs. For instance, it is argued that the state of affairs that Jack is older than Mack is the same state of affairs as the state of affairs that Mack is younger than Jack, but that the *proposition* that Jack is older than Mack is distinct from the proposition that Mack is younger than Jack. (See, for instance, Meixner, this volume, and Meixner 2004, 111–113.) Moreover, those who distinguish states of affairs from propositions usually assume that propositions are abstract entities, whereas the status of states of affairs is less clear in this respect. (I shall come back to this issue in section 1.5 below.) Related to this is the often held view that states of affairs but not propositions are constituents of reality.

However, the distinction between states of affairs and propositions is not and has not always been universally accepted among philosophers. Alexius Meinong's so-called *objectives* [*Objektive*], for instance, seem to combine characteristics of states of affairs and of propositions. On the one hand, objectives are characterized as the *being (or being-so) of something*, as something which can either obtain or not obtain, and as something which involves, in a special way, particular objects. (See Ameseder 1904; Meinong 1977.) All these characterizations fit well with today's standard conception of states of affairs. On the other hand, however, Meinong's *objectives* can be true or false. (See Meinong 1977, 93–95.) Bertrand Russell (e.g. in his 1903), Gottlob Frege (see his 1988) and Roderick M. Chisholm (in his 1976 and his 1981) did not distinguish states of affairs and propositions either. Russell used the term "proposition" for entities that are bearers of truth and falsity and can be the objects of propositional attitudes and yet (in case of singular propositions) are complexes consisting of (possibly) concrete objects and universals. Thus, Russellian propositions may have concrete objects as constituents. For instance, the Russellian proposition that Ann loves Bob is a complex consisting of Ann, Bob and the loving relation.[4] Recently, Alberto Voltolini dispenses with the distinction between states of affairs and propositions. (See Voltolini 2006, Ch. 6.)

There are several considerations and assumptions that may suggest the identification of states of affairs and propositions. For one thing, a *referential theory of meaning* (i.e., the view that the meaning of a locution is the

[4] For a detailed discussion of Russellian propositions and their relation to states of affairs see David, this volume, especially sections 1 and 6.

object that the locution denotes, in other words, the view that there is no difference between sense and reference) naturally suggests that states of affairs and propositions are one and the same thing. For, according to this theory of meaning, the obtaining state of affairs that it is raining is both the meaning/sense and the truthmaker of the sentence "It is raining". Since, according to this theory of meaning, there is no distinction between sense and reference, there is no need for the assumption of an additional category. However, the referential theory of meaning is itself highly dubious, and so it is hardly a good reason for the identification of propositions and states of affairs. (For states of affairs as meanings see also section 2.1.4 below.)

Another motive for this identification may be the assumption that there are *non-obtaining* states of affairs. For, as has been said above, the notion of a state of affairs is rather closely connected with the notion of a constituent of reality, but non-obtaining states of affairs can hardly be considered to be constituents of reality. Moreover, it is plausible to assume that non-obtaining states of affairs are just as abstract as propositions, and non-obtaining states of affairs are not truthmakers. Thus, the distinction between non-obtaining states of affairs and propositions is at least much more elusive than the distinction between facts and propositions, and this might tempt some to disregard the distinction between states of affairs and propositions altogether. The assumption of non-obtaining states of affairs is, however, itself a disputed matter. (See section 3.1 below.)

Nevertheless, even those who draw a clear distinction between states of affairs and propositions usually assume that there are close relations between these two kinds of entities. Uwe Meixner, for instance, characterizes this relation by means of the following principle:

> P1 The proposition *that A* is true if, and only if, the state of affairs *that A* obtains. (Meixner, this volume, 53)

Thus, states of affairs make propositions true. On the other hand, propositions are sometimes said to *represent* states of affairs. For Meixner,

> P6 A proposition *p* is true if, and only if, some state of affairs that is represented by *p* obtains. (Meixner, this volume, 59)

1.3 States of affairs and events

Roderick Chisholm (in his 1976) identified not only states of affairs with propositions but also *events* with propositions and states of affairs. More exactly, Chisholm held that "there is no need to assume that, *in addition* to states of affairs, there are such things as propositions and events." (Chisholm 1976, 115) Chisholm's states of affairs, however, resemble propositions, as the term "proposition" was introduced above. As he points out, they are "abstract entities which exist necessarily and which are such that some but not all of them occur, take place or obtain." (Ibid., 114)[5]

Many others, however, distinguish states of affairs from events. Armstrong holds that there is "a big overlap" between states of affairs and events, but he hesitates to identify them with each other, for "events are rather naturally associated with *change*. To bring events closer to states of affairs one must recognize monotonous events, cases of persistence, where a particular does not change, or does not change in some particular way." (Armstrong, this volume, 44) Similarly, Peter Simons points out that events have to be distinguished from "standing conditions". For instance, "flipping the light switch causes the light to go on, but only if the circuit is intact, the bulb is not defective, the electricity grid is delivering power, and bills are paid." (Simons, this volume, 115) All these standing conditions may be rendered as facts (that the circuit is intact, that the bulb is not defective etc.). Simons considers events as a particular kind of tropes. (See ibid., section 5.1.) For Meixner, "events are, basically, temporally ordered sequences of states of affairs." (Meixner, this volume, 58)

1.4 States of affairs and states

Is there a difference between states of affairs and states, or is talking about states of affairs just a cumbersome way of talking about states? Sometimes, the terms "state" and "state of affairs" are indeed used interchangeably. (See Oaklander, this volume; Smith 2002.) But "state" is also used in a different sense in ontology (which is actually closer to the standard mean-

[5] In his later theory of categories, however, Chisholm conceived of events as a subspecies of contingent states, contingent states being concrete occurrences and thus clearly distinguished from propositions. (See Chisholm 1996.)

ing of the English word "state"), namely for a specific condition of one or more particulars, as in "mental states" or as in "loving is an emotive affective state" (see Simons, this volume, 122), or a situation one or more particulars are in. According to this use, states "are in the same ontological phylum as events and processes, the phylum of *occurrents*. States last for a time, have temporal parts, and 'concern' objects." (Ibid., 125)[6]

1.5 Are states of affairs concrete, contingent, causally efficacious, spatio-temporal entities or are they abstract objects?

The distinction between concrete entities on the one hand and abstract entities on the other is one of the most basic distinctions in ontology. To which of these categories do states of affairs belong? Are they, in their totality, concrete (i.e., spatially extended and locatable, perceivable, causally efficacious and contingent) or abstract (i.e., not spatially extended, not locatable, not perceivable, not causally efficacious and necessary) objects? Or are some of them abstract and others concrete? The pertinent intuitions may pull into different directions. On the one hand, it seems that at least some states of affairs are causally efficacious. Isn't it plausible to claim that the fact that there was little precipitation during the last 12 months is the cause for the fact that the ground-water level is low? If this were correct, at least some states of affairs would be concrete entities (given the almost universally accepted assumption that abstract objects can't be causally efficacious). On the other hand, it may be doubted that states of affairs are spatially locatable. If an entity is spatially locatable, there must be a sensible answer to the question "Where is it?" However, consider, for instance, the state of affairs that Graz is located south of Vienna. Where is this state of affairs? Does it occupy the same space as Graz and Vienna? Or does it occupy some space between Graz and Vienna? If the latter, which space exactly? It is doubtful whether there is a sensible answer to these questions.

In the light of such considerations, it is not surprising that there is no unanimity among states of affairs realists as regards the question of whether states of affairs are abstract or concrete.

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[6] For a similar conception of states, in contrast to states of affairs, see Textor, this volume. Cf. also Chisholm 1996.

According to Armstrong, states of affairs are concrete, contingent and causally efficacious objects. In that sense, Armstrong's states of affairs are not abstract. Furthermore, Armstrong argues that states of affairs must be contingent, since they have no other constituents than particulars and universals, and for Armstrong, both particulars and universals are contingent beings (because he rejects the assumption that there may be uninstantiated universals). On the other hand, Armstrong hesitates to claim that states of affairs are spatio-temporal objects: "States of affairs are certainly not entities that are found in space-time as objects are found in a box. It would be nearer to the truth, I think, to say that the assemblage of states of affairs *constitutes* space-time." (This volume, 40)

Meixner thinks that *at least some* states of affairs are concrete entities, e.g., the state of affairs that the moon revolves round the earth, the state of affairs that ice is lighter than water, and also the complex state of affairs called "the world". (See Meixner, this volume, section 2; cf. also Tegtmeier 1992, §16.) For Herbert Hochberg, by contrast, states of affairs in general are not spatio-temporal entities. (See Hochberg, this volume, section 4.)

It is obviously difficult to settle the question of the ontological "home" of states of affairs. This difficulty is even one of the possible motivations for the rejection of states of affairs. (See section 2.2.1 below.)

1.6 Can one perceive states of affairs?

The question whether one can perceive states of affairs is, naturally, closely connected to the question whether states of affairs are abstract or concrete objects. Nevertheless, the former question deserves attention for yet another reason: It concerns the very nature of perception and its relation to judgement.

The matter is disputed both among ontologists and among epistemologists. "Particularists" argue that we can perceive only particular things but not facts. "Factualists" claim "that the content of perception is propositional and that in the successful case we see the fact that things are thus-and-so." (Textor, this volume, 130)[7]

[7] Another proponent of Factualism is Erwin Tegtmeier. (See his 1992, §16.)

According to Particularism, propositional perceptual reports like "I see that the tomato is red" report *judgements* based on perceptions rather than perceptions themselves. One argument for this view draws on cases where the perceiver mistrusts her senses. If the perceiver does not *believe* that there is a red tomato in her visual field, she will not describe her experience by saying "I see that the tomato is red" but she may still say "I see a red tomato". Thus, *seeing that* seems to imply *believing that*, and a natural way to explain this is to say that *seeing that* is a form of judgement rather than perception.

Nevertheless, some state of affairs realists believe that we can perceive states of affairs. Armstrong, for instance, even though he is reluctant to claim that states of affairs are spatio-temporal objects, believes that we can *perceive* them, even more, "that they are the true objects of perception". (Armstrong, this volume, 40) Similarly, Meixner states that it is impossible to perceive a particular thing without perceiving states of affairs in which the particular is "embedded". (See Meixner, this volume, section 7.)

By contrast, Mark Textor, whose contribution to this volume is wholly dedicated to the question whether particulars or states of affairs are given in perception, defends Particularism.

1.7 States of affairs and tropes

As has been said above, according to the standard conception, states of affairs have *universals* as constituents. Those who have nominalist leanings but nevertheless see some reasons to assume states of affairs might wish to ask whether one couldn't conceive of states of affairs as complexes of *tropes* (i.e., particular qualities or relations) or, alternatively, as complexes of substances and tropes. Thus, the state of affairs that this rose is red, for instance, would be a compound entity consisting of this particular rose and the particular redness of this rose (rather than a composite entity consisting of this particular rose, the universal redness and the exemplification relation). However, such a nominalist conception of states of affairs strongly suggests an ontological reduction of states of affairs to particulars because of the following consideration: Assume particulars are bundles of tropes. Thus, this particular rose is a bundle of tropes, including, of course, the rose's particular redness. Therefore, there cannot be an entity that is dis-

tinct from this rose which consists of this rose *and* the rose's particular redness – for the simple reason that the rose's particular redness is already *a constituent of* the particular rose. One doesn't get an additional entity by adding something to a particular that is already contained in the particular – for the simple reason that one cannot add something to a thing that the thing already contains. An analogous consideration holds if one assumes that a particular is a compound entity consisting of tropes and a substance (a "bare" or "thin" particular). Still, the complex entity consisting of the substance and tropes seems to be nothing else than the ordinary, familiar "thick" particular.

Simons is a proponent of such a reductionism, Meixner is an opponent of it. As Meixner sees it, a particular trope exists if, and only if, a certain state of affairs obtains. It remains unclear, however, whether states of affairs in general also depend on tropes (i.e., whether every state of affairs needs a trope in order to obtain). Meixner is undecided about this question, but he seems to be inclined to answer it to the negative. (Meixner, this volume, section 3)

1.8 The connector problem

Let's assume that the standard conception of states of affairs is correct, i.e., that (atomic) states of affairs consist of particulars, (universal) properties and relations (instead of tropes and substances). Yet, obviously, the existence of, say, the particular Socrates and the property of wisdom does not entail that it is a fact that Socrates is wise. If it is a fact that Socrates is wise, then there must be some intimate connection between Socrates and the property of wisdom. The standard account of this connection runs as follows: If it is a fact that Socrates is wise, then Socrates *exemplifies* wisdom. The relation of exemplification connects Socrates and the universal *wisdom* to a unified whole.

A famous objection to this account, known as *Bradley's regress*, runs as follows: If, in the state of affairs that Socrates is wise, the relation of exemplification connects Socrates to wisdom, the fact that Socrates is wise consists actually not only of Socrates and wisdom but of Socrates, wisdom and the relation of exemplification. The relation of exemplification, however, obviously can connect Socrates and wisdom only if it itself is connected to

Socrates on the one hand and to wisdom on the other. But what connects the relation of exemplification to Socrates and to wisdom? Obviously, one needs further relations for this job. And so on.[8]

Bradley's argument sheds light on a problem that might be called "the connector problem": A state of affairs must be a unified whole instead of a mere sum of diverse entities; but what holds its diverse constituents together? This problem is the topic of Erwin Tegtmeier's contribution to this volume.

Tegtmeier discusses several possible solutions. The first one is the well-known move to reject the presupposition, implicit in Bradley's argument, that a connector needs something else to connect itself to the things it is supposed to connect. In this respect, Tegtmeier argues, connectors are a special kind of thing: "When glue connects two pieces it can do so, of course, only by connecting itself to those pieces. Hence, Bradley's regress can be rejected immediately with reference to the categorial or subcategorial difference between relational and non-relational entities." (Tegtmeier, this volume, 73; see also Olson 1987, 33.)

Tegtmeier, however, proposes another solution. He argues that, once one has accepted facts in one's ontology, there is no need for the further assumption of a connector. His argument starts with a consideration of a problem posed by Gustav Bergmann: Suppose that there are red and round spots in the world and that there are also oval spots and blue spots in the world, but no *oval blue* spots. Obviously, in this case, the relation between red and round is different from the relation between oval and blue. The problem is how to pinpoint the "ontological ground" for this difference. Bergmann's solution is to introduce connectors. Tegtmeier objects that this is to multiply entities without necessity, for it is the facts themselves that ground the connection of their constituents: "If a fact is able and appropriate to ground any phenomenon, then certainly it should do so for the togetherness of its constituents." (Tegtmeier, this volume, 76; cf. also Tegtmeier 1992, §19.)

Tegtmeier emphasizes that his account does not amount to the view that facts are connectors. Rather, a fact is a complex entity over and above its constituents and the "togetherness" of the constituents of a fact consists

[8] For a discussion of Bradley's regress see Olson 1987, Ch. 3, especially 45–51.

just in their being the constituents of one and the same complex. (Tegtmeier, this volume, section 7; cf. Armstrong 1997, 118; Hochberg 1999, 476.)

1.9 Identity conditions of states of affairs

Is the state of affairs that Ann is taller than Bob identical with the state of affairs that Bob is smaller than Ann? Or are the sentences "Ann is taller than Bob" and "Bob is smaller than Ann" just two descriptions of one and the same state of affairs? There is, again, no agreement on this question among states of affairs realists.

According to Armstrong's "states of affairs essentialism", every constituent of a state of affairs is essential to the state of affairs, i.e., if one constituent is altered, the result is a distinct state of affairs. States of affairs essentialism entails that the state of affairs that Ann is taller than Bob must be distinct from the state of affairs that Bob is smaller than Ann, given that the relation of *being taller than* is distinct from the relation of *being smaller than*. Armstrong, however, does not share the latter assumption. He thinks that there are not two relations (*being taller than* and its converse, i.e., *being smaller than*), but only one. To this, Hochberg objects:

> To follow Armstrong and Russell and say that only one relation exists raises an obvious question: "Which one?" We cannot simply choose; nor can we just declare that only one exists. Is it not clear that "precedes" is a different relation from "succeeds"? […] On the other hand, if one acknowledges both a relation and its converse, one recognizes two atomic facts that appear to be logically equivalent. (Hochberg 1999, 481)

In his 1997, Armstrong states that *a's standing in R to b supervenes upon b's standing in R' to a*, and vice versa, given that R' is the converse relation to R. This means, according to Armstrong, that there is "no increase of being" involved here, i.e., that *a's standing in R to b* and *b's standing in R' to a* are *one* state of affairs, not two. Armstrong thinks that he can afford the ontological lavishness of states of affairs essentialism because the supervenience relation provides him with a 50% discount. However, it is doubtful whether this is really the case. As Hochberg notes, "[the notion of su-

pervenience] is unfortunate in that it seems to guile many who use it into thinking that they then enjoy the luxury of taking something to be acknowledged and employed in a metaphysical schema while involving no 'addition' to 'being'." (Hochberg, this volume, 108)[9]

Another interesting issue concerning states of affairs identity is raised by Peter Simons: It seems that a certain particular *a* may instantiate a universal *F*-ness at a time t_1, cease to instantiate *F*-ness at a time t_2 and again instantiate *F*-ness at a time t_3. Thus, it seems that one and the same state of affairs (namely *that a is F*) exists both at t_1 and at t_3 but does not exist in between. Or should one rather say that the state of affairs that exists at t_1 is numerically distinct from the one that exists at t_3? (Simons, this volume, section 4.2)

2. Are there states of affairs?

As with all metaphysical "Are there ...?" questions, there is no simple and short way to answer the question whether there are such things as states of affairs, i.e., there are no knockdown arguments against either possible answer. The debate is about carefully weighing up the pros and cons of an ontological commitment to these entities. On one side of the scales one puts its explanatory value, i.e., the functions that states of affairs are able to fulfil in a viable theory. The weight of these considerations, of course, depends, among other things, on whether the functions that states of affairs are supposed to fulfil could be fulfilled by other entities (which are perhaps assumed for independent reasons) as well. On the other side of the scales one puts the theoretical costs of this ontological commitment, i.e., problems, difficulties and *prima facie* counterintuitive consequences that arise out of it. Of course, the weight of these considerations may be decreased to the extent that one finds plausible solutions for the problems and difficul-

[9] For a criticism of Armstrong's use of the notion of supervenience in order to get an "ontological free lunch" see also Hochberg 1999, in particular pp. 490f. Another opponent of states of affairs essentialism is Uwe Meixner. For him, "the state of affairs that Jack is older than Mack is certainly the same state of affairs as the state of affairs that Mack is younger than Jack." (Meixner, this volume, 54; see also Meixner 2004, Ch. VII, section 3.)

ties and to the extent one finds ways to change one's intuitions about consequences which at first sight seem hard to accept. I shall first consider some arguments in favour of states of affairs and then some arguments against them.

2.1 Arguments in favour of states of affairs

The most important arguments in favour of states of affairs are *the truthmaker argument*, *the argument from intentionality*, *the argument from the particular-property relation*, *the meaning argument* and *the causality argument*.

2.1.1 The truthmaker argument

According to a widely accepted view, if states of affairs are needed at all, then they are needed as truthmakers for propositions. As Peter Simons puts it:

> The principal role of states of affairs is as truthmakers for propositions (or whatever are your favourite truth-bearers). It is not merely that (as in versions of the correspondence theory of truth)
>
> > the proposition that *p* is true if and only if the state of affairs that *p* exists
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> but rather
>
> > the proposition that *p* is true *because* the state of affairs that *p* exists. (Simons, this volume, 112)[10]

Simons, however, claims that in fact states of affairs are *not* needed as truthmakers. In some cases, he argues, the truthmakers are just ordinary

[10] The idea that states of affairs are needed as truthmakers goes back (at least) to Franz Brentano (see Brentano 1974a). The later Brentano gave up this theory, but his disciple Anton Marty stuck to it, despite Brentano's determined criticism. (See Brentano 1974b. For the history of states of affairs in Austrian philosophy see also Smith 1994.)

particulars, as in the case of singular existence sentences. Thus, the truthmaker of the sentence "Ann exists" is Ann herself; no further truthmaker is needed here.[11] More importantly, however, Simons proposes to assume *tropes*, and he argues that tropes can fulfil the function of truthmakers in most (though not in all) cases. For instance, the truthmaker of "Ann loves Bob" is a loving trope that occurs in Ann and has Bob as its object. (Simons, this volume, section 5.1 and 5.2; see also Mulligan, Simons & Smith 1984 for a theory of truthmakers without states of affairs.)

Some think that attempts to find other things than states of affairs as truthmakers are to be found already in Abelard. According to Herbert Hochberg, Abelard does not assume the existence of states of affairs as truthmakers of propositions. Rather,

> one can construe Abelard's view of relational predications to fit with taking the *status* of a particular substance to be the substance itself, *as represented* in a certain way. [I]t is Abelard, and not a state of affairs involving Abelard's instantiating a relation (*loving*), jointly with Heloise, or a relational quality (*loving Heloise*), that is the truth-maker or ground of truth for the assertion that Abelard loves Heloise, as it is Abelard that makes the assertion that he is walking true. (Hochberg, this volume, 92f.)

Neither Simons nor Hochberg (in his discussion of Abelard) address the question of what the truthmakers for negative existence sentences could be (if not states of affairs). What is, for instance, the truthmaker of "There are no unicorns"? Doesn't one need at least for negative existence sentences states of affairs as truthmakers? Or is Simons right in claiming that not all true propositions require truthmakers, negative existence sentences being a case in point?

Hochberg, in contrast to Simons, does not intend to reduce states of affairs to particulars. Rather, he (approvingly) refers to Russell's construal of particulars as *bundles of compresent universal qualities* (see Russell 1940), and he suggests that in the final analysis these "bundles" turn out to be *facts of compresence*. According to this account, a particular, say, Socrates,

[11] The same point is made by Olson; see his 1987, iv.

is identical to the state of affairs that wisdom, humanity, snubnosedness etc. (plus, perhaps, an individuating *haecceitas*) stand in the *compresence* relation. These facts are not reducible to their components. (Hochberg, this volume, 107f.)

2.1.2 The argument from intentionality

Uwe Meixner believes that states of affairs are not needed as truthmakers – and even if they were, this would hold only for obtaining states of affairs (facts), not for non-obtaining states of affairs. For Meixner, the reason to assume that there are states of affairs is that they "are the intentional objects of various intentional attitudes." (Meixner, this volume, 61)[12]

Meixner argues that we cannot "extract" states of affairs "from the web of intentionality", because it is impossible to know a thing without knowing a lot of facts about it. According to Meixner, it is impossible to know the moon, for instance, without knowing that it revolves around the earth etc. Moreover, as mentioned above, Meixner argues that it is impossible to *perceive* a particular thing without perceiving it as being embedded in states of affairs – and at least some of these states of affairs are non-obtaining ones, e.g., when one sees that the moon is a round disk. (See Meixner, this volume, section 7.) Thus, for Meixner not only obtaining but also non-obtaining states of affairs may be the objects of intentional attitudes, such that each intentional attitude has an object: If an intentional attitude is veridical, its object is a fact, if it is non-veridical, its object is a non-obtaining state of affairs.

In sharp contrast to this, Simons argues that a non-veridical intentional attitude has *no object* at all, but only a *content*. If John *erroneously* believes that Mary loves him, then his belief does not have an object, but only a content, "which we may take to be not the state of affairs but the *proposition* that Mary loves him." (Simons, this volume, 114) Furthermore, Simons argues, there is neither a need to assume states of affairs as objects of *true* beliefs. (Ibid., section 5.2)

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[12] For a similar view see Tegtmeier 1992, 158. To conceive of states of affairs as objects of intentional attitudes (notably judgements) is an approach that goes back (at least) to Alexius Meinong and his disciples (see Ameseder 1904), perhaps even farther, namely to the Middle Ages (see Hochberg, this volume).

2.1.3 The argument from the particular-property relation

David Armstrong argues that "once one accepts the objective reality of *properties* and *relations* (as not all metaphysicians do, of course), then it is inevitable that one accepts states of affairs of some sort." (Armstrong, this volume, 39) He thinks that this holds, whether one conceives of properties and relations as *universals* (as he does) or as *tropes*, and also whether one conceives of particulars as bundles of properties (as the later Russell does) or as substances having properties (as he himself does). (See Russell 1948; Armstrong 1989.) If substances instantiate properties, "then the instantiations of universals, whether monadic or polyadic, are states of affairs." (Armstrong, this volume, 39) If a particular is a bundle of properties, there must be some sort of connection between the properties that belong to a particular; and in postulating such a connection, Armstrong suggests, one again ends up with a particular sort of state of affairs. Similar considerations hold if one accepts tropes rather than universals.

Is the assumption of states of affairs really *inevitable* (given that one accepts the existence of universals)? Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that there are universals (properties and relations), which are instantiated in particulars. Can't we just say, then: If the particular *a* instantiates the property *P*, then there exists a particular that has the property *P*, *and that's it*. Similarly, can't we just say: If a particular *a* is a bundle of properties P_1–P_n, then there must be some special connection between P_1–P_n, and thus, there are the properties P_1–P_n which are related in a certain way; and that's it. Is it really inconsistent to acknowledge that there is a particular *a* that has *P* without acknowledging that there is *a's having P*?

2.1.4 States of affairs as meanings

Some argue that states of affairs are what Frege calls the *reference* (*Bedeutung*) of sentences – in contrast to Fregean *senses* (although for Frege himself, of course, the references of sentences are not states of affairs but truth values).[13] This role of states of affairs becomes particularly significant

[13] For the role of states of affairs as references see also Simons, this volume, section 2.3.

within theories of meaning which, in general, identify meaning with reference (as does Russell in 1904, see his 1976). If one accepts this identification, it seems that the assumption of states of affairs becomes almost unavoidable. For it is, first of all, beyond doubt that there are meaningful sentences. Secondly, (leaving aside the rather peculiar Fregean view on that matter) what should be the meaning/reference of, say, the sentence "Ann loves Bob" if not the state of affairs *that Ann loves Bob*? Clearly, it will not do to say that the meaning/reference of this sentence is just the sum of the meanings/references of its constituents (i.e., Ann, Bob and the relation of loving). For if this were the case, then the sentence "Bob loves Ann" would have the same meaning as "Ann loves Bob", which is evidently not the case.

Obviously, this argument in favour of states of affairs rests on strong and dubious assumptions. One may, first of all, in general question the identification of meaning and reference. Didn't Frege teach us that a linguistic expression may be meaningful (in the usual sense of the word) even if it has no reference? Secondly, one may (*pace* Frege) question the assumption that sentences have any reference at all. Why shouldn't there be certain kinds of linguistic expressions that have Fregean sense only (without reference)?

2.1.5 States of affairs as terms of causal relations

Some argue that states of affairs are needed in order to explain causal relations. There are at least some causal relations, the argument runs, whose *relata* can be neither particulars nor events but states of affairs only. (See Armstrong 1997, 14.3.)

Simons, as an opponent of states of affairs, proposes *states* as the terms of causal relations for those cases where events and processes will not do, i.e., for those cases where the terms of the causal relation are something *static* instead of something *dynamic*. (Simons, this volume, section 5.4) Simons anticipates the objection that states are nothing but states of affairs, although states of affairs *construed as particulars*. Simons admits that, so construed, "some states of affairs, under a certain conception, might be acceptable", although he expresses "a residue of doubt about states as *bona fide* entities in our ontology". (Ibid., 125)

2.2 Arguments against the assumption of states of affairs

Simons is the only author of this volume who explicitly rejects the assumption of states of affairs. He raises two kinds of objections. On the one hand, he argues that the various jobs states of affairs are supposed to do (as truthmakers, intentional objects of propositional attitudes, meanings, terms of causal relations) "are either not required or can be better done by other things"; on the other hand, he claims that "there are a number of ontological difficulties with states of affairs as they are in themselves, which render them less than attractive denizens of the ontological menagerie." (Simons, this volume, 116)

The first sort of objections has already been mentioned at various places in section 2.1 above (see 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.4, 2.1.5). Thus, in the present section, the focus will be on objections of the second sort, notably on *the oddity objection*, *the regress objection* and *the no universals objection*.

2.2.1 The oddity objection

States of affairs are typically considered to be "transcategorial wholes", i.e., entities that are composed of something abstract and universal *and* something concrete and particular. Thus, the state of affairs that Ann loves Bob is composed of the relation of loving (i.e., an abstract universal) and two concrete particulars (Ann and Bob). This ontological hybridism of states of affairs makes it difficult to decide whether they themselves are abstract entities or concrete particulars. On the one hand, it seems odd to say that entities that contain concrete particulars as constituents are themselves abstract objects. On the other hand, the claim that states of affairs are themselves concrete particulars gives rise to questions like "Where is the state of affairs that Edinburgh is north of London; where is the state of affairs that Churchill lived longer than Caesar?" (see Simons, this volume, section 3.1), which seem to have no well-justified answer.

Simons raises this objection, but he himself observes that mere oddity, taken in isolation, provides not a strong reason to reject states of affairs. However, the oddity argument may gain more weight in combination with other considerations.

2.2.2 The regress objection

Another starting point for an objection against states of affairs is Bradley's regress (see section 1.8 above). How much weight this objection has depends to a large degree on whether there are plausible solutions for the regress problem to hand.

Simons considers various proposals that have been made to avoid this regress. He holds most of them either to be not intelligible or inconsistent or infested with serious metaphysical problems. (Simons, this volume, section 3.2) However, even if his assessment were true, this would, of course, not rule out that a satisfying solution will be found in the future. Therefore, taken in isolation, this argument is not much stronger than the oddity objection.

Interestingly, however, Kenneth Olson (who, incidentally, does not hold Bradley's regress to be vicious) considers Bradley's regress argument not as an argument *against* states of affairs, but, to the contrary, as the strongest available argument *in favour of* states of affairs (at least for *obtaining* states of affairs, i.e., facts). (See Olson 1987, vi and Ch. 3.)

2.2.3 The no universals objection

This is what Simons calls a "derivative" objection against states of affairs:

> Any doubt or disputability that attaches to the notion of a universal automatically carries over to states of affairs, or rather, to the traditional conception of states of affairs as compounds of universals and particulars. If universals don't exist, neither do states of affairs. If universals are ontologically superfluous or unparsimonious, so are states of affairs. (Simons, this volume, 119f.)

Again, the argument has by itself not much weight (except for dogmatic nominalists). First of all, alternatives to states of affairs (tropes, for instance) are disputed as well. Secondly, as Simons himself notes (in the context of the oddity objection): "One man's *modus ponens* is another man's *modus tollens*." (This volume, 117) Anti-realists with respect to states of affairs may argue: Universals are superfluous and thus should be

rejected. The existence of states of affairs entails the existence of universals. Therefore, states of affairs should be rejected. States of affairs realists may turn this argument on its head: States of affairs are not superfluous and thus should be accepted. The existence of states of affairs entails the existence of universals. Therefore, universals are not superfluous and thus should be accepted.

To sum up, objections against states of affairs that draw upon difficulties and disputed presuppositions do hardly provide, by themselves, sufficient reasons to reject states of affairs. They may, however, gain weight when they are combined with alternative accounts of those data that states of affairs are used to account for.

3. Varieties of states of affairs

If there are states of affairs, what kinds of them are there? In the present section, it shall be presupposed throughout (just for the sake of writing economy) that there are states of affairs. Given this presupposition, there are a variety of more specific questions to be asked: Is there a difference between states of affairs on the one hand and facts on the other? Are there states of affairs that are not facts? Are there *merely possible* (non-actual, non-obtaining) or even impossible states of affairs? Are there *molecular* (i.e., negative, conjunctive, disjunctive etc.) states of affairs? Are there *modal* states of affairs, i.e., states of affairs of the form that it is possible (impossible) that *p* or that it is necessary (not necessary) that *p*? Are there *existence states of affairs*, i.e., states of affairs of the form *that a exists* (or *that a does not exist*) or *that things that are F exist/not exist*? If yes, what are the constituents of these states of affairs? Is there a property of existence that is a constituent of these states of affairs? Are there *future tense* and *past tense states of affairs*, i.e., states of affairs of the form *that it will be the case that p* or *that it has been the case that p*?

3.1 States of affairs and facts

Is there a difference between states of affairs and facts? Those who think that there is such a difference usually distinguish between obtaining and

non-obtaining states of affairs, where the former but not the latter are called "facts". (See section 1.1 above.) Therefore, it seems legitimate to shift from the question whether there is a difference between states of affairs and facts to the question whether there are non-obtaining states of affairs in addition to obtaining ones.

Whether one is inclined to accept that there are non-obtaining states of affairs may depend to some degree on one's agreement or disagreement with Meinongian ontologies and/or possible world realism. If one is sympathetic to the commitment to all sorts of *non-existent* objects and/or *non-actual* worlds, it seems only consistent to accept also *non-obtaining* states of affairs. Thus, it is not particularly surprising that Meinong's *objectives* can be either obtaining or non-obtaining. It should be noted, however, that non-obtaining states of affairs are not necessarily conceived of as non-existent. According to Roderick Chisholm, non-obtaining states of affairs exist just as obtaining ones do. (See Chisholm 1976.)

However, a philosopher's overall metaphysical convictions are probably not the most important factor for the acceptance or rejection of non-obtaining states of affairs. The more important issue seems to be which *functions* states of affairs in general are supposed to fulfil. If states of affairs are conceived of exclusively as truthmakers, there is no need for non-obtaining states of affairs, for only obtaining states of affairs make propositions true. If, however, states of affairs are in addition (or even primarily) conceived of as objects of intentional attitudes, then the assumption of non-obtaining states of affairs in addition to obtaining ones seems natural. Consider the judgement that the sun revolves around the earth. Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that judgements in general have states of affairs as objects. What, then, is the object of this judgement? Since it is not true that the sun revolves around the earth, it is not possible that this judgement's object is the *obtaining* state of affairs *that the sun revolves around the earth*, for there is no such state of affairs. In the light of these considerations, it suggests itself (though this is not the only possible solution) to assume that the object of this judgement is the *non-obtaining* state of affairs that the sun revolves around the earth. Indeed, this is Uwe Meixner's line of reasoning (see Meixner, this volume, section 7). Meixner is a fervent proponent of the state of affairs/fact distinction – in contrast to, e.g., David Armstrong and Peter Simons.

3.2 Molecular states of affairs

Given that there is the state of affairs *that the earth revolves around the sun* and the state of affairs *that 2 plus 2 equals 4*, is there also the conjunctive state of affairs *that the earth revolves around the sun and 2 plus 2 equals 4*? Is there the disjunctive state of affairs *that the earth revolves around the sun or 2 plus 2 equals 4*? Is there the subjunctive state of affairs *that, if the earth revolves around the sun, 2 plus 2 equals 4*? Is there the negative state of affairs *that it is not the case that the sun revolves around the earth* (a state of affairs that would *obtain* if it existed)? Is there the universal state of affairs *that all cows are mammals* (in addition to the atomic states of affairs *that Fiona is a mammal*, *that Bella is a mammal* etc.)? Are there the modal states of affairs *that it is possible that the sun revolves around the earth* and *that it is necessary that 2 plus 2 equals 4*? Is there the existential state of affairs *that there is at least one cow on farmer Knuchel's farm*? Are there the tensed states of affairs *that Plato's being Aristotle's teacher has been the case* and *that the next US president's being a democrat will be the case*?

As comes hardly as a surprise, views on these matters largely diverge. For at least some of these questions it seems to be pertinent which roles states of affairs are supposed to play. If one considers only the truthmaker function, there seems to be no need for conjunctive, disjunctive and subjunctive states of affairs. One may say that "*p* and *q*" is true, if, and only if, both the state of affairs *that p* and the state of affairs *that q* obtains, that "*p* or *q*" can be made true either by the state of affairs *that p* or by the state of affairs *that q*, and so forth. If, however, one considers the function of being the object of intentional attitudes, things may look different.

3.2.1 Conjunctive, disjunctive, negative, existential, modal and totality states of affairs

Armstrong denies disjunctive states of affairs (simply because he sees no reason to postulate them) and negative states of affairs, because they "are rather suspicious entities. There are far too many of them and it is natural to think that they have no causal powers. The world's work is done by positive states of affairs." (Armstrong, this volume, 46) Armstrong accepts

conjunctive states of affairs, but he holds them to be ontologically uninteresting.

However, Armstrong also accepts a particular kind of states of affairs which he calls "totality facts" or "totality states of affairs", respectively. These are facts of the form *that these are all Fs* or *that there are no more Fs than these*. For instance, it may be that Ann is a person who lives in this house and that Bob is a person who lives in this house and that Ann and Bob are all the persons who live in this house. *That Ann and Bob are all the persons who live in this house* is a totality state of affairs. (See Armstrong 1997, chapter 13.) Totality states of affairs are the truthmakers of negative propositions (and thus they are the substitutes for negative states of affairs). For instance, the totality state of affairs *that Ann and Bob are all the persons who live in this house* is, among others, the truthmaker of the proposition that Claire does not live in this house. Totality states of affairs are a particular kind of higher-order states of affairs, i.e., states of affairs that have other states of affairs as constituents.

Armstrong is undecided with respect to modal states of affairs. He thinks that he does not need to postulate states of affairs as truthmakers for propositions about possibilities, but he is unsure about necessities. (Armstrong, this volume, section 9)

Armstrong denies "existence states of affairs". He believes that the state of affairs *that a is F* may serve as a truthmaker for the proposition that *a* exists. Another reason why he does not accept existence states of affairs is that he denies that existence is a property. (Armstrong, this volume, sections 11 and 12)

Meixner assumes that there are all kinds of states of affairs: negative, disjunctive, existential and modal states of affairs (see Meixner, this volume, sections 8, 9, 11 and 12; also Meixner 2004, Ch. VII, section 4).

Meixner's argument in favour of negative states of affairs consists of two steps. The first step is to define the concept of a negative state of affairs in such a way that a negative state of affairs is a negation of some other state of affairs. The second (more problematic) step is the claim that every state of affairs is the negation of some state of affairs. Both steps together yield the conclusion that every state of affairs is a negative state of affairs. (Meixner, this volume, section 8)

3.2.1.1 Negative singular existence states of affairs

There is a particular problem with singular negative existential states of affairs, e.g., the state of affairs *that Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist*. This state of affairs does not obtain, but obviously it *could have* obtained (given that Arnold Schwarzenegger is a contingent being). But could this state of affairs have obtained if Arnold Schwarzenegger had not existed? If the following three statements were true, it could not:

1. A state of affairs is ontologically dependent upon its constituents; i.e., it is impossible that a state of affairs exists if any of its constituents does not exist.
2. A state of affairs of the form *that a does not exist* has *a* among its constituents.
3. It is impossible that a state of affairs obtains without existing.

From 1 and 2 follows

4. It is impossible that the state of affairs *that Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist* exists and Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist.

From 4 together with 3 follows

5. It is impossible that the state of affairs *that Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist* obtains and Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist.

5 yields

5'. Necessarily, if the state of affairs *that Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist* obtains, then Arnold Schwarzenegger exists.

Now assume that the above stated relationship between states of affairs and propositions holds, such that, if a state of affairs *that p obtains*, the correlated proposition *is true*. Then, 5' entails:

6. Necessarily, if the proposition *that Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist* is true, then Arnold Schwarzenegger exists.

6 yields

7. Necessarily, if Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist, then Arnold Schwarzenegger exists.

7 yields

8. Necessarily, Arnold Schwarzenegger exists.

8 contradicts the assumption that Schwarzenegger is a contingent being.[14]

There are several obvious ways out of this trouble. Among other things, one might reject the assumption that a state of affairs of the form *that a does not exist* has *a* among its constituents. One way of doing this would be to deny that there really are states of affairs of the form *that a does not exist*. This denial might come in different varieties. One might just deny the existence of negative singular existential states of affairs; or one might deny the existence of negative states of affairs in general or of (singular) existential states of affairs in general or even the existence of singular states of affairs altogether. Each of these options amounts to claiming that a sentence of the form "*a* does not exist" does not stand for a state of affairs that has *a* as a constituent, i.e., that in this case the grammatical form of the sentence is not a reliable guide to the structure of the corresponding state of affairs.

Alternatively, one might reject the assumption that a state of affairs has to exist in order to be able to obtain.[15] But one might also reject

1. A state of affairs is ontologically dependent upon its constituents; i.e., it is impossible that a state of affairs exists if any of its constituents do not exist.

[14] Cf. Marian David's derivations "R" and "□R" (this volume, 186f.) and also his argument on p. 202.

[15] Cf. the "propositional" version of this assumption in David, this volume, 182: "(6) Necessarily, if [Socrates does not exist] had been true, then [Socrates does not exist] would have existed." David defends this principle in section 4 of his paper against attempts to get rid of it put forward by Kit Fine and others.

1 is a variation of a principle that Alvin Plantinga calls "Existentialism".[16] Existentialism is *prima facie* highly plausible if one accepts the view that an atomic state of affairs is a complex consisting (among other things) of one or more individuals. Indeed, it seems hard to hold that, e.g., the state of affairs that Alma is an ant is a complex having Alma among its constituents and in the same breath to deny that this state of affairs could exist even if Alma did not exist.

Plantinga puts forward an argument against Existentialism, an argument that draws upon the possible truth of singular negative existential propositions (like "Arnold Schwarzenegger does not exist").

The principle of Existentialism and Plantinga's argument against it is the main issue of Marian David's contribution to this volume. He investigates the prospects of defending Existentialism against Plantinga's argument within the framework of "Russellianism" (i.e., the view that states of affairs have individuals among their constituents).

3.2.3 Tensed states of affairs

Whether a philosopher accepts tensed states of affairs (i.e., states of affairs of the form "that it will be the case that *p*", "that it has been the case that *p*" and "that it presently is the case that *p*") depends largely on her or his views on the nature of time. Armstrong, for instance, denies tensed states of affairs, since he is a declared "omnitemporalist", "holding that past, present and future are equally real". (Armstrong, this volume, 48) This view is also called the "B-theory" of time, in contrast to the "A-theory", according to which there is such a thing as a real passage of time, which is usually spelled out by the claim that the past does not exist anymore and the future does not yet exist.

The question of whether there are tensed states of affairs is the topic of Nathan Oaklander's contribution to this volume. Oaklander discusses and rejects a recent version of an A-theory of time put forward by Quentin

[16] Plantinga's version goes: "A singular proposition is ontologically dependent upon the individuals it is directly about." (Plantinga 1983, xx) To substitute "state of affairs" for "proposition" in this principle does not alter its spirit, since Plantinga, in this context, is talking about *Russellian* propositions, i.e., to propositions which are structurally very similar to what I call "states of affairs".

Smith. As an A-theorist, Smith denies the B-theorists' contention that the past, the present and the future exist equally. However, Smith does not follow other A-theorists in claiming that only the present exists. According to Smith's theory, which he calls "degree presentism",

> [t]he past and future do exist, but to a lesser degree than the present. […] What is simultaneous with the present is maximally existent; what is earlier than the present is past and has a lesser degree of existence, and what is later than the present is future and also has a lesser degree of existence than the present. Temporal passage involves states or particulars gaining (as they approach the present) and then losing (as they recede from the present) varying degrees of existence. (Oaklander, this volume, 152)

Oaklander, an avowed B-theorist, sets out to show "that degree presentism is not phenomenologically grounded and that its logical consistency cannot be defended." (Oaklander, this volume, 152)[*]

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