Resisting the Restriction of the Propositional Attitude Class

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It is a standard view among philosophers that an attitude is propositional if a that clause could represent its content. One way of challenging this view is to argue that attitudes whose content can be represented in that way have categorically different content. A number of authors adopted such a strategy and imposed various restrictions on the propositional attitude class. In this paper, I will argue that such restrictions are not tenable because the arguments that are used to support them turn against such restrictions as well. As a consequence, if one cannot adequately deal with these arguments from the perspective of the standard view, one is forced to discard generally the propositionality of attitudes, perhaps even their relational nature. I will consider a strategy for resolving this challenge in favour of the standard view.

Keywords: Content, facts, propositional attitudes, propositional attitude reports, propositions.

1. Introduction

The predominant way in which philosophers from Frege onwards thought about attitude reports suggests the semantic thesis that whenever a that clause complements an attitude verb, as in the report

(1)   Lucy believes that water is not necessarily H_2O,

the clause stands for a proposition and the verb for a propositional attitude. The reported attitude here would be propositional because it has a proposition for its content, namely the proposition that the complement clause picks out. So, to believe that water is not necessarily H_2O is to believe the proposition that water is not necessarily H_2O. Abstracting from this particular case leads to the metaphysical thesis that (for any agent A and any attitude V) *when A V's that p, A V's the*

proposition that p. Since that thesis rests on the idea that at least some attitudes are relations between agents and propositions, I will call it *the proposition thesis*. However, exactly which attitudes are propositional? According to the previous semantic thesis about attitude verbs and clausal complements, the answer is attitudes reportable with a sentence ⌜A V's that *p*⌝. I will call the view that combines the above semantic and metaphysical theses *the standard relational view*. On this view,

(2)   John remembers that Putnam was an externalist,
(3)   Jane fears that her arguments are inconclusive,
(4)   Tracy hopes that internalism is true,

would count as *propositional* attitude reports, just as (1) and similar sentences do, and memory, fear, or hope, just as belief and other related attitudes, as *propositional* attitudes.

My paper is a defence of the standard relational view from a family of arguments championed by a number of its critics. These arguments are supposed to demonstrate that the above semantic and metaphysical basis of the standard view have consequences sufficiently problematic to make the view untenable. I think that these arguments can be explained away in favour of the standard view. In case they could not, I will show that their consequences would be more devastating than many of their proponents thought. In section 2, I will set forth the arguments in question. In section 3, I will show how these arguments (or their cognates) are as problematic for views of many of their proponents as they are problematic for proponents of the standard view. In section 4, I will propose a strategy for dealing with such arguments that supports the standard view. If this strategy is on the right track, it eradicates these arguments as valid reasons for any departure from the standard view. In case these arguments could not be adequately dealt with from the perspective of the standard view, a radical reconsideration of the semantics of attitude reports *and* metaphysics of "propositional" attitudes would be in order.

2. *Three arguments*

The first argument against the standard relational view runs as follows:[1] The standard view is committed to truth of the explication principle: *If a report ⌜A V's that p⌝ can be explicated as ⌜A V's the proposition that p⌝ without losing the initial meaningfulness, and if the two are necessarily equivalent, the attitude for which ⌜V⌝ stands for*

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[1] Concerning the first argument, its various formulations, and interpretations, see Bach (2000b: 120), Harman (2003: 171–172), King (2007: 137–163), McGrath (2012: sect. 5), McKinsey (1999: 530), Merricks (2009: 211–215), Moltmann (2013: 126–132), Prior (1971: 16), Rosefeldt (2008: 304–309), and Schiffer (2003: 92–95; 2006: 284–286).

is propositional.[2] This principle emerges from the proposition thesis in the course of semantic ascent; with it, the metaphysical thesis enters the formal mode that allows one to focus on semantic issues. Now, if (1)–(4) are propositional attitude reports (as the opening semantic thesis alleges) and if the explication principle is true, the reports

(1*)   Lucy believes the proposition that water is not necessarily H_2O,
(2*)   John remembers the proposition that Putnam was an externalist,
(3*)   Jane fears the proposition that her arguments are inconclusive,
(4*)   Tracy hopes the proposition that internalism is true,

straightforwardly follow. Indeed, (1*)–(4*) should say something true whenever their corresponding reports (1)–(4) do. The only difference between the corresponding reports resides in expressions that rigidly pick out (one and the same) content of an attitude. For example, the clause "that water is not necessarily H_2O" and the description "the proposition that water is not necessarily H_2O" both pick out one and the same thing—the content of Lucy's belief. Add to that that a context ⌜A V's ___⌝, unlike ⌜A V's that ___⌝, is extensional,[3] and it follows that (as the argument is often formulated) substituting ⌜that p⌝ for ⌜the proposition that p⌝ in ⌜A V's that p⌝ should not cause the change of truth-value or loss of the initial meaningfulness; but *sometimes* it does and that is puzzling. Whereas the corresponding pair (1)/(1*) satisfies the explication principle because (1) (and belief reports in general) can be explicated as (1*) without *ever* changing its truth-value, the remaining pairs do not.

Take the fear report as an example. (3) might say something true whereas at the same time and world (3*) might say something false. Intuitively, one might fear that p and (at the same time and world) fear no proposition or one might fear the proposition that p without fearing that p. No doubt, speakers straightforwardly hear the difference between (3) and (3*); they hear it because these reports say substantially different things.[4] Add to that a reasonable premise that if anything

[2] I do not think that "explication" here implies *synonymy*, so, following King (2007: 137–140), I set as a condition that the corresponding reports only have to be *necessarily equivalent*. I find it plausible that the clause ⌜that p⌝ and the description ⌜the proposition that p⌝ function differently. Although they both pick out one and the same thing, they make different contributions to propositions that the corresponding reports express.

[3] One can show that ⌜A V's ___⌝ is extension and ⌜A V's that ___⌝ intensional by comparing the pair ⌜A believes [that p]⌝ / ⌜A believes [the proposition that p]⌝ with the pair ⌜B believes that [A believes that p]⌝ / ⌜B believes that [A believes the proposition that p]⌝. Reports in the former pair will always be necessarily equivalent, no matter what A knows or believes about propositions. Reports in the latter pair will not because B may lack any knowledge about propositions, be unaware of their existence, or refuse to grant it. Accordingly, B could have one of these beliefs without having the other.

[4] Concerning the fear case, see King (2007: 140–141), Merricks (2009: 211–214), Moffett (2003: 83), Moltmann (2013: 127–128), Rosefeldt (2008: 304), and Schiffer (2003: 93; 2006: 285 n. 31).

stands for a proposition exclusively and rigidly, it is a description ⌜the proposition that p⌝, and it follows that in a report ⌜A fears that p⌝ the clause stands for no proposition. Otherwise, the case where ⌜the proposition that p⌝ supplants ⌜that p⌝ should not cause any problem. However, it does, and so, back at the metaphysical level, one should distinguish *fearing that p* from *fearing the proposition that p*, which shows that fear is never a propositional attitude. The same goes for the pair (2)/(2*) and a number of other attitude reports (e.g. reports about anticipating, feeling, holding, or judging). As for the pair (4)/(4*), the situation seems to be even worse since (4*) is not even a grammatical, meaningful construction.[5] So, if this argument is conclusive, it supports the rejection of the standard relational view because this view identifies instances of many attitudes as propositional although, the considered cases show, they *never* are. At best, given the argument, one could say that sometimes *V-ing that p* comes down to *V-ing the proposition that p* and sometimes it does not. However, that is not the view with which we started.[6]

Some philosophers who embraced the first argument against the standard relational view thought that the explication principle it is based on could tell us not only which attitudes really are propositional, but also identify the appropriate kind of content of attitudes that are not propositional, only if one slightly modifies it. The modification of the principle should consist in mentioning a kind of entity other than the proposition. Then we could see what attitudes can have it as their content. This idea enables one to formulate another argument against the standard view but with a positive twist. It would show us not only that some "propositional" attitudes are of another kind, but also of what kind they are. Here is a popular modification of the explication principle concerning factive attitudes:[7] *If a report ⌜A V's that p⌝ can be explicated as ⌜A V's the fact that p⌝ without losing the initial meaningfulness, and if the two are necessarily equivalent, the attitude for which ⌜V⌝ stands for is factive.* In conjunction with the previous explication principle, we could conclude the following. Just as belief would be a propositional attitude because (1*) sound fine and memory would not

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[5] Concerning the hope case, see King (2007: 139, 142–143), Moltmann (2013: 127–128), Rosefeldt (2008: 306–311), and Schiffer (2003: 92; 2006: 284–285). The cases that lead to same consequences include attitudes such as guessing, predicting, wishing, or concluding.

[6] The same problem would emerge if one would, instead of propositions, talk about properties, states of affairs, sets of possible worlds, sentences, utterances, statements, mental representations, etc.

[7] Concerning this particular modification, see Harman (2003: 171–172), King (2007: 149–153; 2014: 64–70), McGrath (2012: sect. 5.4), Moffett (2003: 81–84), Moltmann (2013: 128), Parsons (1993: 453–457), Vendler (1972: 112–116; 1979: 223–229). See also Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1971): The general idea is that ⌜V⌝ stands for a factive attitude only if ⌜A V's that p⌝ cannot say something true unless it is true that p. By itself, however, this is not enough to establish the thesis about the categorical difference in content between factive and non-factive attitudes.

because (2*) does not capture the point of (2), the latter attitude would be factive because

(2#)   John remembers the fact that Putnam was an externalist

sounds fine, unlike

(1#)   Lucy believes the fact that water is not necessarily H$_2$O

that does not capture the point of (1). Of course, one might protest that this does not show that memory is not a propositional attitude since facts are nothing but *true propositions*. Such response, however, will not do because

(2°)   John remembers the true proposition that Putnam was an externalist

sounds just as bad as (2*).[8] Taken together, then, the two arguments seems to show that only some of the attitudes that the standard relational view identifies as propositional really are of the kind, and of those that are not, at least some are factive attitudes.[9]

Finally, to explicitly state the kind of content of an attitude, as with the above explication principles, is not the only way to identify an attitude (or to discard it) as propositional. Merricks (2009: 214–215) suggested that focusing on features of the content of propositional attitudes provides the same result. Propositions are the content of propositional attitudes and traditionally they were considered to be *abstract* entities. So one should expect that abstract entities are the fitting content of propositional attitudes; attitudes that fail to meet this requirement cannot be propositional. The explication principle emerging from this observation would be: *Whenever a report ⌜A V's that p⌝ and its generalised explication ⌜A V's an abstract entity⌝ are not both meaningful and necessarily equivalent, the attitude for which ⌜V⌝ stands for is not propositional*. If propositions are essentially abstract, the criterion established with this principle seems reasonable. From "Lucy hit Maggie" one can generalise and infer "Lucy hit a girl" without losing the initial meaningfulness and truth-value (assuming that Maggie is essentially a girl). Equally so, one should be able to generalise and from ⌜A V's that p⌝ infer ⌜A V's an abstract entity⌝ if what the clause in ⌜A V's that p⌝ stands for is essentially abstract.

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[8] See Harman (2003: 171), King (2014: 66–68), McGrath (2012: sect. 5.4.), and Moffett (2003: 83–84). For a number of arguments for the semantic difference between factive and propositional contexts or the metaphysical difference between facts and propositions, see Asher (2000: 125–129) and Fine (1982: 46–49).

[9] Apparently, one can go still further (see Harman 2003: 173; King 2007: 151; McGrath 2012: sect. 5.4; Moffett 2003: 82; and Moltmann 2013: 124–125, 128). Attitudes such as *fear* and *imagining* fail to satisfy both of the above principles. So they are neither propositional nor factive. Nevertheless, they satisfy the principle: *If a report ⌜A V's that p⌝ can be explicated as ⌜A V's the possibility that p⌝ without losing the initial meaningfulness, and if the two are necessarily equivalent, the attitude for which ⌜V⌝ stands for is "possibilistic"*. For example, "Jane fears the possibility that her arguments are inconclusive", unlike (3*), seems to capture the point of (3).

Some attitudes meet this explication principle. Consider the conditional

(5)   when Lucy believes that water is necessarily H$_2$O, she believes an abstract entity.

If propositions are contents of beliefs, and if they are essentially abstract entities, the consequent of (5) should be true whenever its antecedent is true. If there could be a case where the antecedent of (5) would be true, and its consequent false, belief would not be a propositional attitude. Intuitively, no such case exists. What about other attitudes that the standard relational view identifies as propositional? Consider the conditional

(6)   when Jane fears that her arguments are inconclusive, she fears an abstract entity.

The same problem that the first argument raised appears again here. At the same time and world, the antecedent of (6) could be true and its consequent false. In other words, one could fear that *p* without fearing any abstract entity. Furthermore, consider the conditional

(7)   when Tracy hopes that internalism is true, she hopes an abstract entity.

Unlike the consequent of (6), the consequent of (7) is not even grammatical. So, given cases such as (6) or (7), the following conclusion seems reasonable: If propositions are essentially abstract entities, fear, hope, and a number of other attitudes that the standard relational view treats as propositional, are, in fact, not propositional attitudes.[10]

What should we make of the three considered arguments? If the standard relational view is not the right one, as the arguments seem to suggest, what is?

3. *A slippery slope*

Many philosophers expressed dissatisfaction with the standard relational view, and many of them used the above arguments to support their positions. *Some* of them thought that the metaphysical part of the standard view is correct. They saw nothing problematic in the proposition thesis as long as we put it like this: *Only if V is a propositional attitude*, when A V's that *p*, A V's the proposition that *p*. Consequently, with respect to genuinely propositional attitudes, ⌜A V's that *p*⌝ and ⌜A V's the proposition that *p*⌝ would be necessarily equivalent. What they found incorrect was the class of attitudes that the standard view identified as propositional and to which the proposition thesis was ap-

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[10] Another feature of propositions that could be exploited here in the same way is their *objectivity*. Also, it is worth noting that propositions are believable, assertable, meanable, and rejectable, but not hopable, fearable, or predictable. And "Julie fears something assertable (or asserts something fearable)" is not something that we would want to infer from "Julie fears and asserts that internalism is wrong".

plied. Recall, for proponents of the standard view, that class included (at least) *every* attitude whose instances could be reported with a sentence ⌜A V's that *p*⌝. However, arguments of the previous section, if conclusive, show that this cannot be the case if the attitudes we are in search for have *propositions* for their content and if their content is *abstract*. According to critics that accept the proposition thesis, only *some* of the attitudes reportable with ⌜A V's that *p*⌝ *are* propositional. So the view based on the proposition thesis should be appropriately restricted. One cannot thus straightforwardly read the nature of reported attitudes off the surface form of attitude reports. Only if the attitude reported with a sentence ⌜A V's that *p*⌝ is propositional, the clause in the report stands for a proposition. The mere occurrence of a that clause in some attitude report cannot guarantee that agent's propositional attitude is being reported.[11] In this section, I want to show that *such* departures from the standard view are not tenable if one builds them on some of the previous arguments. These arguments (or their cognates) undermine such restricted views as much as they support them and as much as they undermine the standard view.[12]

If one builds the case for the restriction of the standard relational view on the argument that there are factive attitudes that take facts rather than (true) propositions for their content, one faces the following problem. There are incontestably factive attitudes (e.g. realising, being sorry, proud, or glad) whose reports in conjunction with the fact-mentioning explication principle generate ungrammatical constructions, such as

(8)   when John was sorry that Putnam was an externalist, he was sorry the fact that Putnam was an externalist.

Also, there are incontestably factive attitudes (e.g. knowledge or noticing and seeing in their non-perceptual sense) whose reports in conjunction with the same explication principle generate conditionals that are not necessarily true, such as

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[11] In a sense, this would be the reversal of propositionalists' idea that the fact that a that clause does not typically (or at all) occur in a report ⌜A V's *o*⌝ (e.g. "Sam wants ice-cream" or "Joe desires coffee") cannot guarantee that a propositional attitude is not being reported. Propositionalists think that every attitude report is a propositional attitude report (see Grzankowski 2013 for a critical overview).

[12] The only version of the restricted relational view that *would not be* affected by the arguments of this and the previous section would be the one that treats as propositional only attitudes compatible with the proposition-mentioning explication principle. Such restricted view would treat other attitudes in a radically different way, not merely by changing the kind of their content. McKinsey (1999: 529) and Moltmann (2013: 151) proposed something along these lines. The defence of the standard relational view that I discuss in section 4 goes against such views as well. If that defence is on the right track, it undermines the very problem of the standard view that McKinsey and Moltmann took as the support for their proposal.

(9)   when Maggie saw that Russell was a realist, she saw the fact that Russell was a realist.[13]

I do not see how "factivists" could deal with this problem except by maintaining that the style of argumentation exploited here is somehow infelicitous. Thereby, however, they would lose the main support for their position. Alternatively, they might grant that such argumentation is a good one but that it cannot support the factive idea and the standard view that would be restricted accordingly. That would, apparently, invite a more radical departure from the standard view. In any case, the previously considered support for this particular restricted relational view fails.[14]

Furthermore, we can grant that reports such as (2*)–(4*) show that the standard relational view is wrong because some attitudes that it identifies as propositional are not of the kind. If they were, reports such as (2*)–(4*) should sound fine when derived from (2)–(4). Granting this, however, still does not put attitudes such as memory, fear, and hope, aside as unproblematic for those who want to preserve the proposition thesis. Presumably, such philosophers want to defend the restricted relational view. But this restricted view should be considered (which seems to be inevitable) as part of the larger account of genuinely propositional attitudes (such as belief or assertion) and ostensibly propositional attitudes (such as fear or knowledge).[15] When they restrict the propositional attitude class, the proponents of such a view surely do not want to deny that ostensibly propositional attitudes are *relational* states that relate agents to *something*. However, that something has to have a category. Also, they cannot deny that at least some such attitudes are typically reported with a sentence ⌜A V's that p⌝. So the thing for which the clause in such cases stands for appears not to be something "logically simple" (a particular or an attribute). It must

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[13] For this point see Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1971: 348), McGrath (2012: sect. 5.3), Moltmann (2013: 87, 128, 131, 144), Parsons (1993: 459 n. 14), and Rosefeldt (2008: 304). On the other hand, Harman (2003) and Moffett (2003) see nothing problematic in reports such as "Mary knows/realises the fact that three is even". Apparently, intuitions about meaningfulness and other semantic features of such reports vary. For example, Moltmann (2013: 124–125, 151) suggests that in the case of *noticing*, (8) would be acceptable. At one point, however, she suggests that it would not (2013: 128). To my ear, one could notice the fact that p (if facts are a kind of thing that one could notice in the first place) without noticing that p (or vice versa). The noun phrase here seems to trigger a different, perceptual reading of "notice", as in "Maggie noticed a strange man in the corner". Notice, by the way, that this report differs from "Maggie noticed that there is a strange man in the corner". The former one might say something true even when the latter one does not.

[14] For an additional argument against this version of the relational view, see Williamson (2000: 43).

[15] As I have already said, the only two exceptions that I am aware of would be McKinsey (1999) and Moltmann (2013). McKinsey would deny that ostensibly propositional attitudes are relational and Moltmann that they are relations to a single, proposition-like entity.

be something complex and structured, such as a fact, state of affairs, event, possibility, etc. In other words, some attitudes that would not be propositional would be *objectual*, such as loving (philosophy) or fearing (dogs). Other such attitudes would be *non-objectual*, e.g. fearing (that a dog will bite me) or hoping (that a dog will not bite me). All genuinely propositional attitudes would be non-objectual too. Moreover, whatever the kind of the content of non-objectual instances of ostensibly propositional attitudes would be, it seems mandatory for proponents of the restricted relational view to introduce the analogue of the proposition thesis for them.

In that case, the restricted relational view should be understood as part of the generalised relational view concerning non-objectual attitudes. That view would be based on the thesis that *for any attitude V (reportable with a sentence ⌜A V's that p⌝), when A V's that p, A V's the F that p* (where "*F*" stands for whatever kind of complex entity one takes to be the proper content of an attitude in question). However, how can one instantiate this thesis for ostensibly propositional attitudes that do not satisfy the initial explication principle? Is the content of such attitudes of a single kind *F* or should one expect variations in kind? To answer the latter question, one would have to pair *every* ostensibly propositional attitude V with a kind *F* to which its content belongs. In the previous section, I have mentioned two such candidates—the category of facts and the category of possibilities. However, there are ostensibly propositional attitudes that are neither factive nor "possibilistic". So what about them? Perhaps we could pair *some* of these attitudes with the appropriate explication principle (I am unaware of any such example). Nevertheless, we would still be left with the class of attitudes for which we could *never* appropriately instantiate the schema ⌜when A V's that *p*, A V's the *F* that *p*⌝. There would be no instances of the schema that are necessarily true. To support the generalised relational view, however, one would have to find, for *every* attitude report, some kind *F* that would make instances of the schema true.

As King (2007: 139, 142) and Schiffer (2003: 93; 2006: 285, 292) point out, any attitude verb that cannot be grammatically combined with a description ⌜the proposition that *p*⌝ (e.g. "complain", "hope", or "surprise"), cannot be combined with *any* other description (and most other noun phrases). For example, no matter how the conditional

(10)   when Tracy hopes that internalism is true, she hopes the ___

is filled out, the result will be some ungrammatical construction. More interestingly, King (2007: 150–151) mentions cases, such as feeling, hearing, and indicating, for which the schema ⌜when A V's that *p*, A V's the *F* that *p*⌝ *can* be meaningfully (and so grammatically) instantiated. However, no matter what category we identify *F* with here, the resulting conditional will *never* be necessarily true. There will always be a world where e.g. Peg felt that Frege was wrong but where at the same time she did not felt the ___ (fill the blank at will). In that case,

the content of her feeling would be of no (explicable) kind *F*. That is clearly not an epistemological problem of not knowing the kind of the appropriate content of feeling (or other similar attitudes). The problem is a metaphysical one. No kind could in principle be identified as the kind of content of attitudes in question. Indeed, we could not even identify the content of attitudes in question as such-and-such *content*. All this is implausible; something has gone wrong.

The first two arguments against the standard relational view (namely, arguments based on the proposition and the fact mentioning explication principles) are clearly nonstarters *if* one wants to preserve the proposition thesis. Let us now follow the logic of the third argument.

If an entity is not abstract, it is reasonable to assume that it is *concrete*. So if fear, hope, memory, feeling, etc., are still considered to be relational states, it follows that when one fears that *p*, one fears something. Moreover, if that something is not abstract, it must be a *concrete* entity. From that it follows, for example,

(6*)   when Jane fears that her arguments are inconclusive, she fears a concrete entity.

However, if one derives it from "Jane fears that her arguments are inconclusive", the report "Jane fears a concrete entity" seems just as problematic as "Jane fears an abstract entity". There will always be a world where Jane fears that her arguments are inconclusive and where at the same time she fears no abstract or concrete entity. Also,

(7*)   when Tracy hopes that internalism is true, she hopes a concrete entity

is as ungrammatical as (7).[16] In that case, the mere removal of attitudes such as fear or hope from the propositional attitude class, even if it resolves the letter of the initial problem, cannot resolve its spirit.

The arguments considered in this section resemble in style arguments of the previous section. So, anyone who grants the former style of argumentation seems to be obliged to accept the latter arguments as well. Otherwise, one would have to deny that seeing is (sometimes) a factive attitude, that the abstract/concrete distinction exhausts the domain of entities, that some attitudes have content of some explicable kind, and even then one would not solve all the problems indicated here. If so, one should not understand the opening arguments against the standard relational view in the way that some of their proponents

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[16] Furthermore, even if contents of various non-objectual attitudes categorically differ, each particular content of such attitudes is an *entity*. But explicating ⌜A V's that *p*⌝ as, for example, ⌜A V's the entity that the clause in w_x at t_x stands for⌝ turns out to be as problematic for a number of attitudes as explicating it as ⌜A V's the proposition that *p*⌝. The same goes for the generalisations ⌜A V's an entity⌝ or ⌜A V's entities⌝ (for similar examples see Moltmann 2013: 128 and Rosefeldt 2008: 311, 316). Should we take this as evidence that what a clause ⌜that *p*⌝ stands for is not an entity? If we want to preserve the generalised relational view, we should not.

have recommended. It is not just a particular kind or nature of the entity that "propositional" attitudes take as their content that is at stake, but the relational nature of such attitudes as well. Philosophers who were in the light of the previous arguments proposing more radical departures from the standard relational view precisely argued that not only do we need a different semantic analysis of "propositional" attitude reports, but also a different metaphysical thesis. Whatever they are, "propositional" attitudes are *not* relations between agents and propositions (or even proposition-*like* entities).[17] This could further mean one of the two things. Either *no* attitude that the standard relational view identifies as propositional would be something that relates agents to propositions/proposition-like entities or no such attitude would be something that *relates* in the first place.

4. *A way out*

If the considered arguments constitute a genuine problem, they do it for any version of the relational view. The moral of the two previous sections was *either* that there is something wrong with drawing metaphysical lessons from considerations based on the explication prin-

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[17] One referee objected here that I have disregarded Bach's (2000b) semantics for propositional attitude reports. That semantic analysis rests on the idea that in attitude reports "that"-clauses merely *indefinitely describe* rather than specify the content of reported attitudes. Bach (2000b: 120) takes the first argument of section 2 to be a "striking linguistic evidence" against the standard relational view and a support for his modified relational view. I think that his and similar views suffer the same problem (Dožudić 2013: 103–104). Firstly, Bach does not specify the kind of content of "propositional" attitudes. All he says about it is: "since it is not clear what these 'things' are, I am reluctant to call them 'propositions'" (Bach 2000b: 122). (He conveniently ends another paper defending the same conception with the remark: "What, then, are belief contents, such that their contents can't be specified fully by 'that'-clauses, and how *can* belief contents be specified fully? Now that's a puzzle." (Bach 2000a: 108).) However, as soon as his view would be metaphysically completed in that respect—as soon as one would identify the kind of attitude's content—the same "striking linguistic evidence" would undermine it as well. Recall, one could never appropriately instantiate the schema ⌜when A V's that *p*, A V's the *F* that *p*⌝ for a number of "propositional" attitudes. Secondly, whatever the kind of the content of "propositional" attitudes on Bach's view would be, the view would face the third argument of section 2 (or its cognates from this section). Bach's content of attitudes would surely be something abstract or concrete, objective or subjective, something believable or assertable, etc. Also, "that"-clauses are surely not the only devices that enable us to describe attitude's content indefinitely. So Bach would have to cope with reports such as "Garry hopes something abstract" or "Lucy fears a believable/fearable thing". Finally, Bach's argument that "that"-clauses do not specify attitude's content does not show that such clauses do not specify something outside attitude contexts. In fact, Bach (2000b: 132) allows that "that"-clauses function differently within and outside attitude reports, and suggests that such clauses do specify the relevant content outside such reports. However, the same "striking linguistic evidence" undermines that idea. We face problems analogous to those of pairs (2)/(2*) or (4)/(4*) in other contexts where "that"-clauses occur (see Rosefeldt 2008: 306 and Schiffer 2003: 93 for several such examples).

ciples (and so that there was no serious problem with the standard relational view in the first place) *or* that "propositional" attitudes are plainly not propositional (including proposition-like entities here too) and relational. In the latter case, a version of the adverbial, multiple-relational, or paratactic analysis of attitude reports would be in order. How one will resolve this dilemma depends on how one understands the previous arguments. I think that there are compelling reasons for thinking that so far considered criticism of the standard relational view (including its restricted versions) does not constitute a substantial, let alone decisive problem for it. Accordingly, this criticism would not call for some alternative analysis.

All arguments considered so far manifest the same style of argumentation. In fact we should treat them as exemplifications of one and the same phenomenon that I will call *the explication problem*. In outline, the problem is the following: According to the standard relational view, in a report ⌜A V's that p⌝, ⌜A⌝ stands for an agent, ⌜V⌝ for an attitude by which the agent is related to its content, and ⌜that p⌝ for the proposition that p—the abstract, objective, content of V. However, explicating numerous instances of ⌜A V's that p⌝ by stating the kind or the nature of their content in accordance with the standard view (what in practice means replacing ⌜that p⌝ in such reports for a noun phrase) results either in ungrammatical constructions or in reports that have substantially changed meaning and truth conditions. And all this happens although ⌜A V's ___⌝ is an extensional context, and ⌜that p⌝ and the corresponding noun phrases, such as ⌜the proposition that p⌝ or ⌜an abstract entity⌝, rigidly designate or apply to one and the same thing.[18] Now, if one could adequately explain this problem in a way that is compatible with the standard view, any criticism of that view that exploits it would fail. Here, I will consider one strategy of dealing with the explication problem that, I think, vindicates the standard relational view. It comes down to a slight rephrasing of the proposition thesis.

Here is a motivation for this strategy: Some philosophers have argued that there were a number of category mistakes related to principles of causation. In principles such as *if E causes F and F causes G, then E causes G* the subject and the object of the cause, according to them, are of different categories (namely, facts and events). If so, entities that cause (namely, facts) could not be caused entities (namely, events). In discussing such category mistakes, Harman (2003: 168)

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[18] See the opening paragraph of section 2 for further clarifications of the explication problem. This problem is usually called the "substitution" or "substitution failure" problem (cf. King 2007, McGrath 2012, Moltmann 2013, and Schiffer 2003, 2006). In order to avoid confusing it with the more familiar substitution failure problem concerning the substitution of coreferential names in attitude reports, I prefer a different name. Also, I think that talk of *substitution* here might mislead one to think that the problem substantially depends on substituting descriptions for clauses (which, from the Russellian point, is quite controversial). That is not the case, so I adopt a more neutral talk in terms of *explication*.

in passing mentions a potential way out of the problem for those who think that causes and effects are of the same category. The idea is that one "might replace statements using the verb *cause* with statements using *is a cause of*, *(causally) leads to*, or *is (causally) responsible for*. Or, statements of the form *E causes F* are replaced by statements using constructions like *F is an effect of E*, *F is a result of E*, or *F is a consequence of E*". Such rephrasing of the initial sentence "*E* causes *F*" would make the category mistakes illusory and metaphysically irrelevant because it would expose them as the consequence of the particular *formulation* of a causal principle, not the principle itself.

It seems that we could adopt the analogous strategy in dealing with the explication problem. Prima facie, the strategy works. All that we need to do is rephrase the proposition thesis.[19] Initially, the thesis was put like this: *When A V's that p, A V's the proposition that p*. It was this formulation that led into the explication problem. Nevertheless, if that problem is a genuine one for the standard relational view, it should persist no matter how the proposition thesis is being rephrased (just as e.g. the Gettier problem persists however we rephrase the three traditional conditions for knowledge). However, as it turns out, it does not. Here is a rephrasing of the proposition thesis that in no way affects the originally intended metaphysical point but that bypasses problems discussed in previous two sections: (For any agent A and any attitude V) *when A V's that p, A stands in (or bears) the V relation to the proposition that p*.[20] Indeed, one may argue that the proposition thesis as initially formulated was nothing but a *shortened* statement of this alternative formulation. This would make sense because the rephrased proposition thesis, unlike the initial one, provides a fuller analysis of what it means *to V that p*. To wit, it explicates not only the kind of the content of V, but also V's relational nature. I seriously doubt that anyone who grants the initial proposition thesis would deny that rephrasing in this way adds anything unintended.[21]

Furthermore, the initial proposition thesis, strictly speaking, does not commit one to any particular view of propositions. So it would still

[19] Although here I talk about rephrasing the *thesis*, I mean rephrasing the *formulation* of the thesis. In the course of rephrasing the thesis itself should remain the same.

[20] Philosophers discussing the standard relational view occasionally do use constructions such as "stands in (or bears) the belief relation to the proposition" (cf. Fodor as cited in Bach 2000b, King 2007, McGrath 2012, McKinsey 1999, Merricks 2009, Rosefeldt 2008, Schiffer 2006). Such constructions come as a natural way of formulating the basic idea of the view.

[21] Perhaps we should not be surprised that supplanting a clause ⌜that p⌝ with a description ⌜the proposition that p⌝, that is of an entirely different grammatical category, at least sometimes requires adjustments to a context ⌜A V's ___⌝. The situation is similar in the case of supplanting a predicate with the corresponding abstract noun. For example, when supplanting the predicate "red" in "This car is red" with "redness", "This car is ___" becomes "This car instantiates (or participates in) ___". Otherwise, the sentence would be false.

be possible to subject that thesis to the adverbial interpretation (cf. Quine 1960: 216 and Prior 1971: 18–21), rather than take it as something that is not compatible with such interpretation. For proponents of the adverbial analysis, that would be mandatory. They certainly need to explain reports such as ⌜A V's the proposition that p⌝ or ⌜A V's the fact that p⌝ that are (at least the latter one) used even outside technical philosophical discussions (just as nominalists have to explain the explicit reference to universals). Therefore, instead of denying the truth evaluability or even the meaningfulness of such reports, they could accommodate them on their terms. Accordingly, a proponent of the adverbial analysis might construe ⌜V's the proposition/fact that⌝ as a functor that connects a singular term ⌜A⌝ and a sentence ⌜p⌝ that is here called a "proposition" or "fact" but interpreted as an entity compatible with the adverbial analysis, just as one can construe ⌜V's that⌝ that way. That was in a way Quine's (1995: 77) idea: "There is indeed a usage of 'proposition' that is useful and unobjectionable. It can be construed as denoting the sentences themselves, rather than their meanings, but it is used instead of 'sentence' when we are concerned with the sentence as an object of belief […] rather then with its morphology and syntax."[22] My rephrasing of the proposition thesis in principle precludes such an analysis since it replaces the original attitude verb with a phrase ⌜stands in the V relation to⌝. So the proponents of the standard relational views should prefer it to the initial proposition thesis.

If one takes the rephrased proposition thesis as the basis for the standard relational view, the arguments of previous sections, i.e. the explication problem, in no way affects it. There is nothing strange in saying e.g. that Jane stands in the fear or hope relation to the proposition that internalism is true when she fears or hopes that internalism is true. Also, there is nothing strange in saying that she stands in the fear or hope relation to an abstract entity when she fears or hopes what she does. Moreover, instead of propositions, any other kind of entity (concrete or abstract) could *prima facie* be identified via the rephrased proposition thesis as the content of V. There is nothing in the very formulation of that thesis that prevents this. For me, that is its virtue. One should make the choice of the appropriate kind of content of V on metaphysical (or at least non-linguistic) grounds. Anyone who accepts the explication problem (the list includes most of the authors mentioned in footnotes 1, 4–5, and 7–9) seems to be obliged to explain why that problem would undermine the standard relational view even though the rephrased proposition thesis generates reports that make perfect sense for *any* attitude standardly treated as propositional, namely for any attitude reportable with a sentence ⌜A V's that p⌝. In fact, I would

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[22] Of course, proponents of the adverbial analysis would not talk about "propositions" or "facts" as *objects* of attitudes. They might say instead that "propositions" and "facts" are sentences on which a ⌜V's that⌝ operates, or that they are merely *grammatical* objects connected with attitude verbs.

say that it is far from clear to what extent the explication problem undermines the standard view in the first place. It is legitimate to wonder who bears the burden of proof here, the proponents of the proposition thesis who need to deal with problematic cases, such (2*)–(4*) and (6)–(7), or their opponents who need to deal with unproblematic cases, such as (1) or (5). We would certainly need an additional argument that favours one standpoint over the other.

In response, one might object to the rephrasing of the proposition thesis in the following way. Although ⌜that p⌝ and ⌜the proposition that p⌝ are rigidly codesignative expressions, one cannot infer the report ⌜A stands in the V relation to that p⌝ from the report ⌜A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p⌝. Such an inference would be meaningless, and it would be meaningless for any V. Then, the conclusion would be that the rephrased proposition thesis faces consequences that are as problematic as those that the initial proposition thesis has faced after all. However, I do not think that would be a problem for the proposed rephrasing. There is a straightforward explanation of the meaninglessness of a conditional ⌜when A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p, A stands in the V relation to that p⌝. The conditional is meaningless because its consequent is meaningless, and the consequent is meaningless because it is *ungrammatical*. It is easy to explain why. It is ungrammatical because in English "that"-clauses cannot follow prepositions; only noun phrases can. There is no mystery here, and so no problem for the rephrased proposition thesis.[23]

Finally, there seems to be a cross-linguistic reason to prefer the rephrased proposition thesis to the initial one. One cannot literally translate the initial proposition thesis into a number of languages (Slavic languages are a good example). One can translate its rephrased version. So the rephrased proposition thesis should be preferred to the initial one, at least if metaphysical points we want to make should exceed English or a restricted class of languages.

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[23] One referee (a native English speaker) objected that (s)he sees no problem in combining prepositions with "that"-clauses and that, consequently, there is nothing problematic in a construction ⌜A stands in the V relation to that p⌝. If that were the case, I would have one less problem to worry about, but I am not so sure about that. To wit, I am not a native English speaker, but English grammar books seems to agree that "that"-clauses *cannot* follow prepositions in grammatical constructions (see Downing and Locke 2006: 104, 536; and Eastwood 1994: 287, 344). Of course, to some degree one could ignore English grammar in order to deliver a point using ungrammatical constructions. Philosophers sometimes do that. In that case, however, one could not at the same time appeal to the explication problem to make any point since that problem heavily depends on English grammar. If, however, one decides to take grammar seriously, the only ways I can hear a construction ⌜A stands in the V relation to that p⌝ as grammatical and meaningful is either by taking ⌜that p⌝ as a complex demonstrative not as a clause or by assuming that ⌜that p⌝ is capitalised or altered with another convention for which one stipulates that it transforms expressions into names of their contents (that would allow one to say things such as ⌜THAT P is structured and abstract⌝).

5. *Concluding remarks*

Suppose that we can describe one and the same state of affairs in (at least slightly) different ways. Suppose further that some (but not all) of these descriptions sometimes lead into problems that are primarily caused by their syntactic features. What is the proper reaction to that? Should we deny that some state of affairs that actually obtains is ever being described with any of these descriptions? Should we conclude that some of the competing descriptions are just not adequate for making certain (or any relevant) points? I am inclined to side with the latter option. In fact, as the previous section shows, I think that one could discard the explication problem along that line. There are ways to express basic ideas of the standard relational view that the explication problem does not affect. This possibility, of course, does not explain the phenomena that enabled the formulation of the explication problem in the first place. However, I do not think that this is important for present purposes. Whatever the ultimate explanation of this phenomena is, we can expect that it will at the same time be the explanation of why the original formulation of the proposition thesis is problematic and the rephrased one is not.

There is, however, an additional worry one might have concerning the rephrased proposition thesis, and it runs as follows:[24] The thesis *when A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p, A V's the proposition that p* seems to be just as good as the rephrased proposition thesis that I was defending, namely *when A V's that p, A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p*. Indeed, anyone who accepts the latter one seems to be obliged to accept the former one as well. If so, then the rephrased proposition thesis does not provide a desired way out of the problems with the initial proposition thesis discusses in section 2. A report ⌜A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p⌝ might say something true and at the same time and world the corresponding report ⌜A V's the proposition that p⌝ might say something meaningless or false. I think that we can avoid this problem.

Consider the two reports that make the formulation of the rephrased proposition thesis, namely ⌜A V's that p⌝ and ⌜A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p⌝. Although they (by my assumption) report or describe one and the same state of affairs, they do it by expressing *different* propositions. They express different propositions at least because the expressions ⌜V⌝ and ⌜stands in the V relation to⌝ make different contributions to propositions that the corresponding reports express.[25] Now, we may construe the rephrased proposition thesis as an inference, namely

(11)   A V's that p; *so* A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p.

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[24] One of the referees for the journal raised this worry.

[25] I would say the same for ⌜that p⌝ and ⌜the proposition that p⌝; see note 2.

As it stands, however, that inference is incomplete. Some premises essential to reach the conclusion are missing here. The inference "Cicero is Roman; so Tully is Roman" is incomplete as long as the premise "Cicero = Tully" is missing. Equally so, (11) is incomplete until one adds the premises ⌜that p = the proposition that p⌝ and ⌜to V = to stand in the V relation to⌝.[26] Accordingly, the complete form of the above inference would be

(11*)   A V's that p, ⌜that p⌝ and ⌜the proposition that p⌝ stand for the same thing, ⌜V⌝ and ⌜stands in the V relation to⌝ stand for the same thing; *so* A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p.

If the three premises are true, the conclusion must be true as well; (11*) is a valid inference.

Similarly, we may construe the problematic thesis *when A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p, A V's the proposition that p* as an inference, namely

(12)   A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p; *so* A V's the proposition that p.

If (12) is valid, its conclusion should be true whenever its premise is true. However (and this is the apparent problem), the conclusion might be false although the premise is true. So the inference seems not to be valid after all. If this inference is not valid, the standard relational view cannot be correct. Notice, however, that (12), just as (11), is an incomplete inference as long as the premise ⌜to V = to stand in the V relation to⌝ is missing. The complete inference form of (12) would be

(12*)   A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p, ⌜stands in the V relation to⌝ and ⌜V⌝ stand for the same thing; *so* A V's the proposition that p.

Again, if (12*) is valid, the conclusion should be true whenever the premises are. However, if one should construe the problematic thesis as (12*) rather than (12), how does it represent a threat to the standard view? Assume that in (12*) the report ⌜A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p⌝ says something true and ⌜A V's the proposition that p⌝ something meaningless or false. Is that a problem for the standard view? I think that it is not. If the conclusion in (12*) is meaningless, it is such because it is not grammatical, and it is not grammatical because noun phrases cannot follow some attitude verbs (see King 2007: 139 and 142).

What if the conclusion in (12*) is meaningful but false? That could mean one of the two things. Either all the premises are true and the

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[26] Of course, to make any sense of the premises so formulated we would have to adopt a convention that I have mentioned at the end of the note 23. I will disregard it here. Instead, for simplicity sake, I will use metalinguistic formulations. Also, I will ignore here general tacit assumptions, such as the one that the same expressions within a sentence stand for the same thing unless it is differently stated.

inference is invalid or a premise is false and the inference is valid but unsatisfied. The former option straightforwardly undermines the standard view and the latter one does not. So all that one need to do in order to save the standard view here is to show that a premise in (12*) *might* be false. By stipulation, the premise ⌜A stands in the V relation to the proposition that p⌝ says something true. So the only suspect here could be the premise "⌜stands in the V relation to⌝ and ⌜V⌝ stand for the same thing". Could this premise be false although the proposition thesis, (11), or (11*), are true? I think that it could.

Let us return to the previous fear case in which we had two corresponding reports, namely (3) and (3*), of which one could be false and at the same time and world the other one true. If we carefully observe (3) and (3*), we can notice that, intuitively, *different* relations towards one and the same thing are being reported. In that case, the verb "fear" must be ambiguous in the sense that it picks out different relations. Accordingly, "stands in the fear relation to" must be ambiguous in the same sense too. If so, the premise "⌜stands in the V relation to⌝ and ⌜V⌝ stand for the same thing" could be false whenever ⌜V⌝ is ambiguous in the above sense. In such cases, expressions ⌜stands in the V relation to⌝ and ⌜V⌝ would stand for different relations. That seems to be precisely the case with problematic instances of (12*).

If we start with the true report "Jane fears that her arguments are inconclusive", infer via (11*) the report "Jane stands in the fear relation to the proposition that her arguments are inconclusive", and then from it infer via (12*) the report "Jane fears the proposition that her arguments are inconclusive", this chain of inferences would be invalid. The reason is that throughout this chain of inferences the verb "fear" does not stand for the same relation. As King (2007: 153–159) has argued, when combined with verbs such as "fear" or "desire", noun phrases trigger different readings of such verbs than clauses do, making them pick out different attitude relations.

By itself, then, (12*) will be valid for *any* attitude whose representative verb does not turn it into an ungrammatical constructions. However, only for *some* such attitudes the validity will remain when (12*) is combined with (11*). This is something that in no way undermines the standard relational view.[27]

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