**Review: Facts in Logical Space: A Tractarian Ontology, by Jason Turner**

Suppose you think the fundamental nature of reality consists of Facts, structureless entities corresponding to appearances such as ‘John met Sally’ or ‘John is bald’. This might strike you as odd. For it surely seems reality consists of individuals, properties they have, and relations they stand in. You will not find Sally in the Fact ‘Harry met Sally’, so what becomes of this individual? A satisfactory grounding story is needed to answer this question. In particular, a satisfying story will explain how our appearances arise from entities lacking the structure that seems so obvious.

It is this explanation that largely concerns Jason Turner in *The Facts in Logical Space: A Tractarian Ontology*. For the purposes of his book, Turner claims only Facts exist, they are atomic, i.e. correspond to atomic appearances, spatial, i.e. occupy logical space, and structureless, i.e. lack any internal structure. An ontology consisting entirely of Facts gains points in terms of qualitative parsimony, provides grounds for satisfying truth-maker theories, and fits nicely with combinatorial views of modality. Largely for these reasons, Turner sets out to tell an adequate grounding story, which begins in Chapter 2. Here Turner introduces primitive ideology characterizing external relations between Facts, represented in a formal axiomatization. As ideology, these external relations are mere *facon de parlar*, providing structure to the structureless Facts. The benefit of having these relations is that with them it becomes clear how Facts may generate the appearances of individuals, properties, and relations, we know and love. The grounding story itself takes up Chapter 3. Chapter 4 is concerned outlining and defending compatibility of the story told thus far with combinatorial modality, with particular reliance on Moss’s recent answer to the Exclusion Problem which plagues Factualist, Turner included.[[1]](#footnote-1) Chapter 5 is concerned with labelling stories, and 6 is concerned with fleshing out alternatives and examining applications of Factualism as defended. In the coda, Tuner admits that despite the book-length defense of Factaualism, he doubts the view is true. The problem is that it simply seems too obvious that there are individuals, properties, and relations. Here then we find intuitions marshalled against theory, with no clear winner between the two.

But I think Turner does not do justice to his project here. Though he claims that even if Factualism is no true, we still learn something about the nature of reality by thinking carefully about Factualism. This is correct, but it amounts to claiming that we learn about true theories by studying false theories. This is, of course, correct, but in a defeatist way. But Turner need not rest admitting defeat. Let us see if we can defend his Factualism a bit more.

Consider two toy theories, both of which are concerned, roughly speaking, with characterizing squares. The first theory, call it Toy Theory 1, includes two primitives, lines and points. The second theory, call it Toy Theory 2, includes only squares. With respect to Toy Theory 1, the goal is to characterize squares using only lines and points, which we might think of as a bottom-up approach. On the other hand, Toy Theory 2 has the task of characterizing lines and points using squares, what we might think of as a top-down approach. In addition to the primitive of Toy Theory 1, add an incidence relation holding between lines and points. Such a relation is transitive and symmetric. With a few more axioms defined in terms of incidence, we may construct squares. In particular, parallel lines do not intersect, perpendicular lines do, and when they do there are other lines perpendicular which they intersect. On the other hand, Toy Theory 2 includes a meeting relation. Each square can only meet four others, and lines are defined as where two squares meet. Points require another member to ideology which we will call the touching relation, where lines are said to touch, and from which we may derive points.

Assume for the sake of argument that both oy theories adequately do the job. Toy Theory 1 adequately defines squares from numbers and lines, while Toy Theory 2 adequately defines lines and points from squares. How do we choose between these two theories? To be sure, Toy Theory 1 has more primitives than Toy Theory 2.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, it is not a comparatively complex theory,[[3]](#footnote-3) and it has less ideology than oy Theory 2.[[4]](#footnote-4) In contrast, Toy Theory 2 has fewer primitives, more ideology, and seems on par in terms of complexity. With these features in mind, the decision seems to concern solely the tradeoff between ontology and ideology. In other words, is it better to have more ontology but less ideology, less ontology but more ideology, both, or neither? Qualitative parsimony suggests ontology, at least with respect to types, is key, and so the victory seems to go with Factualism. This is contestable, of course, but I make the point this way to illustrate another line.

More specifically, observe that appearances did not play a role in deciding between Toy Theory 1 and Toy Theory 2. The purpose of each was to construct squares. Each does that job well enough. Whether there *are* squares or whether there *are* lines and points is a bit beside the point. Would it be so alarming to learn that nature did not carve lines and points are the joints? Squares? I am not sure. But I do not take my lack of certainty with respect to my metaphysical intuitions to be a sign that I should obviously give more weight to what appears intuitive.[[5]](#footnote-5) Rather, I take my lack of certainty with respect to metaphysical intuitions to be a sign that I should *doubt* them. All hope is not lost on this view. We are, after all, rational beings doing rational metaphysics.[[6]](#footnote-6) If in the end of our project we break a few eggs, at least we have an omelet, and Turner has offered up a fine breakfast indeed.

Perhaps this is too quick though. I suspect Turner would agree with most of what I have said thus far, but would nevertheless not be convinced Factualism is to be preferred. If not, then he would perhaps not be convinced that Toy Theory 2 is preferable to Toy Theory 1, or vice versa. Here, however, the problem becomes apparent. For the story concerning squares in each toy theory is *symmetrical*. This is made clear by observing we might build on theory atop the other, with little loss. If we begin with Toy Theory 1, we can construct Toy Theory 2. If we begin with Tot Theory 2, we can construct Toy Theory 1. As a matter of construction, there is no real preference. The only difference then is in terms of ontology and ideology. Putting issues of metaphysical intuitions aside, these two proposals seem too close to call. That is, determining the preferable theory based on such a close call between ontological and ideological parsimony is tough. This is perhaps what makes it so difficult to commit. Even if we eliminate metaphysical intuitions, each theory seems as good as the other. It is this near balance that I think gives Turner pause.

1. But see () for response to Moss. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See (Turner, ; , ) where qualitative parsimony is lauded as a theoretical virtue. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See (Turner, )’s discussion of similarity relations for reasons to reject an overly complex theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See (Turner, ) where he counts having more ideology a cost. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Regardless of what Lewis says; see (Turner, )’s remarks indicating reliance on intuitions and appearances. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As Turner acknowledges (Turner, ). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)