

HIRSCH'S AMBITIONS. Linguistic choices, Hirsch says, do not fix our ontology. They do fix, however, our discourse about ontology—in particular, the meaning of ‘what exists’. Hirsch’s claim, as he initially presents it, is that an ontological dispute is merely verbal only if each side can interpret the other’s utterances so that they come out true in their language (or: given their ontological assumptions). For example, an endurantist can interpret perdurantist’s claims so that they come out true in the language of endurantism. 231
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Hirsch registers three disagreements with Carnap. He rejects the external/internal distinction, the claim that all ontological disagreements are a matter of linguistic choice, while defending common sense. By far the most important is the second one. 232

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS. Hirsch’s example of a dispute that is *not* merely verbal is the imagined dispute between Jews and Christians. Let’s suppose that Jews wish to pass as Christians. They wish to be able to assent to all the theological statements that Christians assent to, and to dissent from those that Christians dissent from. At the same time, we stipulate that this assent/dissent exercise does not involve mere lying.

How this translation between the ‘standard’, Christian language L_C and the secret Jewish language L_J might work we can glean from Hirsch’s example: 235

- (17-1)
- a. ‘Jesus walked on water’ means-in- L_C that Jesus walked on water.
 - b. ‘Jesus walked on water’ means-in- L_J that Moses descended from a mountain.
 - c. ‘Moses descended from a mountain’ means-in- L_C that Moses descended from a mountain.
 - d. ‘Moses descended from a mountain’ means-in- L_J that Jesus did not walk on water.

But of course, there is a complication. Suppose that a certain man descends from a mountain. How to report this fact? Presumably we will have:

- (17-2)
- a. ‘That man descended from a mountain’ means-in- L_C that that man descended from a mountain.
 - b. ‘That man walked on water’ means-in- L_J that that man descended from a mountain.

As the Christians and the Jews will be assenting, in these circumstances, to different statements, the disagreement between them will become apparent.

Thus the problem is twofold. Could there be a secret language L_J that would steer clear from the troubles of (17-2)? And could that language be learned (by finite beings, in a finite period of time)? Hirsch suggests that a fictionalist prefix (or: a series of fictionalist prefixes) could deliver such a language. As far as I can see, the proposal is this: 236
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- (17-3)
- a. ‘Jesus walked on water’ means-in- L_C that Jesus walked on water.
 - b. ‘Jesus walked on water’ means-in- L_J that according to the New Testament, Jesus walked on water.
 - c. ‘According to the Old Testament, Moses descended from a mountain’ means-in- L_C that according to the Old Testament, Moses descended from a mountain.
 - d. ‘According to the Old Testament, Moses descended from a mountain’ means-in- L_J that Moses descended from a mountain.

So armed with L_J , the Jews will be able to pass as Christians without lying. For example, if they are required to claim that Jesus walked on water, they would be able to do that: as (17-3b) shows, from their point of view, they would simply assert that he walked merely according to the NT. On the other hand, they would also be able to express their own theological beliefs—e.g., that Moses descended from a mountain. As (17-3d) shows, they would simply package them in a prefixed sentence.

NOT MERELY VERBAL DISAGREEMENTS? Now comes the really interesting point: would this disagreement between Jews and Christians be merely verbal? Well, you might think it is, since the fictionalist translation, if successful, seems to work much like a translation from English into French. In fact, there is no *disagreement* left to observe: the purpose of the translation is precisely to correlate assent and dissent so as to make the conversation fluent.

Somewhat surprisingly, Hirsch claims that there is a disagreement, and it is not verbal. In fact, it's 'absurd' to think that it is. That's because there will be non-linguistic responses distinguishing Jews and Christians.

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This diagnosis is peculiar for at least two reasons. First, the anonymous non-linguistic responses will be accompanied by *linguistic* responses. Therefore, after all, there won't be the perfect correlation between the linguistic responses of the L_C - and L_J -speakers. Secondly, what of perdurantism and endurantism? There *too* we could identify different non-linguistic responses. For example, perdurantists will be hired for academic jobs, and endurantists won't. That is, at some point the secret endurantist will have to hire (or say, condemn) a perdurantist. The parallel with the Jews and Christians will be straightforward.

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To be completed

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