Propositions as Cognitive Acts  
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My topic is the notion of information needed in the study of language and mind. It is widely acknowledged that knowing the meaning of an ordinary declarative sentence, or the content of a representational mental state, involves knowing which things it represents as being which ways. Knowing this gives one knowledge of the truth conditions of the sentence or state, which are ways the world must be in order to conform to how it is represented. Intensional semantics provide precise models of truth conditions, which are approximations of meaning and content. But models that roughly approximate is all they are. Meanings and cognitive contents are not truth conditions; which are severely limited even as models. In order to continue to progress in semantics, the philosophy of language, and the philosophy of mind, we must overcome these limitations by identifying what information really is.

Pieces of information are called “propositions.” The two leading conceptions are the structured-proposition conception descending from Frege and Russell, and the truth-conditional conception from intensional semantics. Both suffer from intractable problems. Rather than detailing the problems, I will sketch a positive alternative. The construction of this alternative is guided by three traditional ideas – (i) propositions aren’t things we interpret, they are the interpretations we give; (ii) propositions aren’t instruments we use to carry information, they are the information carried; and (iii) propositions aren’t things we endow with intentionality; they are inherently representational entities capable of being true or false, independent of any actual use to which we put them. Ironically, these very ideas on which I want to build, led Frege and Russell down the wrong path.
It led them to think that of the intentionality of propositions as explanatorily prior to the intentionality of agents who bear attitudes to them. For Frege and Russell, agents who entertain propositions cognitively represent things as bearing certain properties because the propositions they entertain do. The problem with this is that we have no understanding (i) of what such primitively representational entities are, (ii) of what cognizing them amounts to, or (iii) of how or why our cognizing them in the required way results in our representing things as bearing properties. Faced with these conundrums, I start at the other end, with the obvious fact that agents represent things as being various ways when they think of them as being those ways. Next we solve for two unknowns. What kind of entity $P$ and relation $R$ can play the roles of propositions and entertaining, by guaranteeing that agents who bear $R$ to something of kind $P$ thereby represent things as being a certain way? If we find such a $P$ and $R$, we can explain the intentionality of things of kind $P$ by deriving it from the intentionality of agents who bear $R$ to them. If for $A$ to bear $R$ to $p$, just is for $A$ to represent $o$ as being sour, then $p$, may be deemed true iff $o$ is the way it is represented to be.

When we pose the problem this way, one answer to the question “What are propositions and what is it to entertain one?” jumps out. Propositions are repeatable, purely representational, cognitive acts or operations; to entertain one is to perform it. When I perceive or think of a certain lemon $B$ as sour, I predicate sourness of $B$, which is to represent $B$ as sour. This predicative act represents $B$ as sour in a sense similar to that in which acts can be insulting or irresponsible. An act is insulting when for one to perform it is for one to insult someone; it is irresponsible when to perform it is to neglect one’s responsibilities. A cognitive act represents $B$ as sour when for one
to perform it is for one to represent B as sour.\textsuperscript{1} The minimal, purely representational act of doing so is the proposition that B is sour, which is true iff to perform it is to represent B as it really is.

*Entertaining* is the attitude on which other attitudes are based. To *judge* that B is sour is perform the predication in an affirmative manner, which involves accepting it as a basis for possible action. To do so is not to predicate any property of the act, or to make it an object of cognition, but for one’s performance to involve forming, or activating already formed, dispositions to act, cognitively and behaviorally, towards B in ways conditioned by one’s reactions to sour things, e.g. to eat B if attracted by them, or to avoid B if repelled. In short, to *judge* that B is sour is for one’s predicating sourness of B to involve one’s forming or activating certain dispositions. To *believe* that B is sour is to be disposed to judge that it is. To *know* that B is sour is for B to be sour, to believe B is sour, and to be safe or cognitively justified, in so believing.

These attitudes aim at truth, but the story is similar for attitudes -- doubting, denying, disputing, or imagining -- that don’t aim at truth. The objects of these attitudes – the things doubted, denied, disputed, or imagined -- may be true or false, just as the things judged, believed, known, or asserted may be. Since what is believed by x – e.g., that B is sour -- may be doubted, denied, disputed, or merely imagined by y, the *objects* of the truth- and of the non-truth-normed attitudes are the same. This

\textsuperscript{1} When one says, referring to an act, “That was an irresponsible thing to do,” what one says is true iff it is possible to accurately describe the agent as doing something – e.g. as making a promise with no intention of keeping it in such and such circumstances – from which it follows that the agent acts irresponsibly. Taking act types to be fine grained – in the sense in which traveling to Colorado is distinct from flying there (because to perform the latter act is also to perform the former but not conversely)--we may characterize irresponsible acts as those every possible performance of which involves neglecting one’s responsibilities. By parity of reasoning, a cognitive act type represents B as sour iff every possible performance of it is one in which an agent represents B as sour.
suggests that the intentionality of both the truth-normed and the non-truth normed attitudes is due to something common to all of them -- and hence that it is not any of these attitudes but their objects that, in the first instance, represent things as being certain ways. It is these objects, not further truth- or non-truth-normed attitudes, that represent things as being certain ways, and so have truth conditions.

However, not all objects of attitudes are propositions. The object of the attitude in “John asked whether B is sour” is a question. Whereas a proposition represents the world as being a single way, and so has truth conditions, yes/no-questions are cognitive acts that represent the world as being several ways, and so don’t have truth conditions. The question whether B is sour is the act Q of (i) entertaining the proposition that B is sour, and (ii) applying an operation to it that results in representing the world in two ways – as being such that B is sour and as being such that B isn’t sour (which isn’t to represent the world as being such that B is sour and B isn’t sour). To ask Q is to request a judgment as to which of those ways the world is.

Wh-questions are a little different. The question Q* reported by “John asked which F’s are G’s” can be identified with the act of (i) entertaining the proposition that some F’s are G’s, and (ii) applying an operation to it that yields the property being all the Fs such that some F’s are G’s. To ask Q* is to request a complete specification of those Fs. Since the complex act Q* doesn’t represent anything, it doesn’t have truth conditions. However, one who understands what it is to ask Q* knows that Mary’s answer that Bob and Ted are G knows that she presupposes that Bob and Ted are F and implicates that she knows of no other relevant F who is G.
This is the basis of a naturalistic epistemology of propositions. Since believing p doesn’t require cognizing p, any organism that can perceive or think of its constituents as being certain ways can believe p, whether or not it can predicate properties of propositions. Knowing things about propositions requires the further ability to distinguish one’s cognitive acts from one another. One who can do this can ascribe attitudes to oneself and others, and predicate properties of propositions. Focusing on their cognitions, such agents identify distinct propositions as different thought or perception types, which leads them to conceive of truth as a form of accuracy in representation.

So far I have spoken only of simple propositions, which predicate properties of objects. Complex propositions involve additional cognitive operations. But the basic idea is always the same. In speaking of propositions as acts, I don’t mean they are always intentional or conscious. They aren’t. But they are doings in which things are cognized as being one way or another. How a proposition represents things to be is read off the cognitive doings with which it is identified. From this we derive its truth conditions. P is true at world-state w iff were w instantiated, things would be as p represents them – where what p represents is what any conceivable agent who entertains p would represent. Since this doesn’t vary from state to state, p’s truth conditions don’t either. No one has to entertain p for p to be true.

This conception has the foundational advantage of explaining how an organism without the concept of a proposition or the ability to cognize one can know or believe

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2 See chapter 2 of Soames forthcoming.

3 Existence conditions for propositions are discussed in chapter 6 of King, Soames, and Speaks (2014).
them. It also explains how sophisticated agents can acquire the concept, and come to know things about propositions by monitoring their own cognitions. Further progress comes from solving the problem of propositional unity and from the account what it is for a proposition to be the meaning of a sentence. According to the cognitive conception, for S to mean p in L is for speakers of L to use S to perform p. One who understands the sentence ‘The Union Jack is a symbol of Britain’ uses the name to pick out the flag and the verb phrase to predicate being a symbol of Britain of it. Since to do this is to perform the act that is the proposition expressed, one’s use of the sentence is one’s entertaining the proposition. Since no other cognition is needed, understanding what S means in L – when in fact S means that p in L -- doesn’t require knowing that S stands in some theoretical relation R to the proposition that p and L, or having any concept of a proposition or a language.\footnote{In this sentence ‘p’ is used as a schematic letter.}

In addition to these advantages, there is also an objection, namely, that propositions can’t be acts because they aren’t things we do. To think otherwise is to make a category mistake. Nor, the objection continues, would it help to identify propositions with event types, which happen. Just as it sounds bizarre to say that the proposition that the earth is round something I have often done, so it sounds bizarre to say that it has often happened. If one of these identifications is refuted by ordinary “intuition” the other is too. I will argue that there is no refutation.\footnote{See also chapters 2 and 10 of Soames forthcoming and chapter 12 of King, Soames, and Speaks (2014).}

First, consider a version of the Frege-Russell conception of numbers. Zero is the set whose only member is the empty set; one is the set of those sets z that contain
some x, and only x, two is the set of sets z that contain some distinct x and y, and only them, and so on. The successor of a set n is the set of sets z such that removing a member of z yields a member of n. A natural number is a member of the smallest set containing zero and closed under successor. The conception was brilliant and the methodology was sound; numbers are whatever they must be to explain our arithmetical knowledge. Had that explanatory goal been met, no one would have objected that the Frege-Russell conception can’t be right because it violates our intuition that people aren’t members of members of numbers.

Just as the explanatory standard was correct for numbers, so it is correct for propositions. In both cases, we know many facts about the target entities while knowing next to nothing about the kinds of things they are. We have no images of numbers or propositions and no robust pre-theoretic sense of what they are. If asked to pick out the entity that is the number 7 or the proposition that the sun is a star, common sense draws a blank. Since most candidate entities appear to be non-starters, the search for explanation is all we have. The crucial difference in the two cases is that we can give good explanations of the relations we bear to propositions and the knowledge we have of, or about, them.

These are the cognitive conception’s foundational advantages. Its empirical advantages for theories of language and information are equally important. Here, the contrast with Frege-Russell numbers is stark. Whereas arithmetical theorems didn’t depend on, but rather provided the crucial tests for, that conception, empirical theories in which propositions figure are not independent our conception of what propositions are. Fragmentary, conceptually incomplete, and subject to revision, these theories
yield different results when combined with different conceptions of propositions. By supplying us with *representationally identical* but *cognitively distinct* propositions, the cognitive conception provides results we need. Because these propositions represent the same things as being the same ways, they impose identical truth conditions on the world. Because they are cognitively distinct, they impose different conditions on minds that entertain them. This opens up new explanatory opportunities.

First consider (1) and (2).

1a. Russell tried to prove (the proposition) that arithmetic is reducible to logic.
   b. Russell tried to prove logicism.

2a. Mary believes that Russell tried to prove that arithmetic is reducible to logic.
   b. Mary believes that Russell tried to prove logicism.

‘Logicism’ is a Millian name for the proposition \( L \) *that arithmetic is reducible to logic*, designated by the directly referential *that*-clause. Although \( L \) is what the two terms contribute to the representational contents of (1) and (2), (1a) and (1b) express different propositions, and (2a) and (2b) can differ in truth value. If Mary picked up the name ‘logicism’ by hearing it used to designate some thesis in the philosophy of mathematics that Russell tried to prove, (2b) may be true, even if she has no clue what he thought about arithmetic, in which case (2a) is false. Although propositions (1a) and (1b) each require one who entertains it to predicate *trying to prove* of Russell and \( L \), (1a) also requires one to identify \( L \) by entertaining it. Thus *to perform, i.e. entertain, proposition (1a) is to perform, i.e. entertain, (1b), but not conversely.* From this, the different truth conditions of (2a) and (2b) follow. Because
propositions are cognitive acts, they can place different constraints on how an agent
cognizes an item, even when they predicate the same property of the same things.⁶

Next consider (3) and (4).

3a. I am in danger. *Said by SS*
b. SS is in danger.

4a. I believe that I am in danger. *Said by SS*
b. SS believes that SS is in danger.

Since (3a) and (3b) express representationally identical but cognitively distinct
propositions, (4a) can be false even if (4b) is true. This happens when I believe of
someone I see on closed-circuit TV – who is in fact me – that he is in danger of
being attacked, without believing that I am in danger. To capture this, we distinguish
predicating a property P of an agent A cognized in the 1st-person way from
predicating P of A however cognized. Since to do the first is to do the second, but
not conversely, the acts are different. Since the same property is predicated of the
same agent, they are cognitively distinct but representationally identical propositions.
In this way, we capture the fact that my *de se* epiphany – *My gosh, I am in danger* –
involves coming to believe a truth I hadn’t previously believed, even if my believing
it is just my coming to believe, in a new way, something already believed.⁷

Examples (5a) and (5b) extend the point.

5a. The meeting starts now! *Said at t*
b. I only just realized that the meeting starts now! *Said at t*

Just as for each person p there is a 1st-person way of cognizing p no one else can use to
cognize p, so, for each time t there is a “present-tense” way of cognizing t at t that

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⁶ See chapter 2 of Soames forthcoming.

⁷ See Soames (2013) and, for a fuller account, chapter 3 of Soames forthcoming.
can’t be used at other times to cognize t. Suppose I plan to attend a meeting that will start at t – noon on May 1st. Not wanting to be late, I remind myself of this on the morning of the 1st. Still, when I hear the clock strike noon, I utter (5a), and change my behavior. Coming to believe of t in the present-tense way that the meeting starts then motivates me to hurry off. Had I not believed this, I wouldn’t have done so, even though I would have continued to believe, of t, that the meeting starts then. As before, I believe something new by coming to believe something old in a new way. What makes (5b) true is that the proposition to which I have only just come to bear the realizing relation requires cognizing t in the present-tense way.

Linguistic cognition is another source of representational identity without cognitive identity. Learning a language involves learning how to use its sentences to entertain, i.e., to perform, the propositions they express. One who understands the sentence ‘Plato was human’ uses the name to pick out the man, the noun to pick out humanity, and the phrase ‘was human’ to predicate the property of the man -- thereby performing the proposition p that the sentence expresses. Since using the sentence to predicate humanity of Plato is itself a purely representational cognitive act, it too counts as a proposition p*. Since to entertain p* is to entertain p, but not conversely, they are cognitively distinct but representationally identical.

Next consider (6).

6a. Carl Hempel was a famous philosopher.
   b. Peter Hempel was a famous philosopher.
   c. x was a famous philosopher (with Mr. Hempel assigned as value of ‘x’)

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8 Complications involving this case are discussed in chapter 3 of Soames forthcoming.

9 The conditions for a n act to be a proposition are discussed in chapters 2 and 4 of Soames forthcoming.
Let p be expressed by (6c). $P_c$ is a proposition representationally identical to p which requires one to cognize Mr. Hempel via the name ‘Carl Hempel’. $P_p$ requires cognition via the name ‘Peter Hempel’. Utterances of (6a) assert both $P_c$ and p; utterances of (6b) assert $P_p$ and p. With this, we reconcile a pair of hard-to-combine insights: one who accepts (6a) may, as Frege noted, believe something different from what one believes in accepting (6b) – thereby explaining the potentially different truth conditions of assertive utterances of (7a) and (7b) -- even though the propositions believed are representationally identical, as intimated by Kripke.

7a. Mary believes that Carl Hempel was a famous philosopher.
7b. Mary believes that Peter Hempel was a famous philosopher.

Next, consider the names, ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’, the representational content of which is their referent. What makes these names special is that understanding them requires having some standard information. Those well enough informed to employ them are expected to know that speakers who use these terms typically presuppose that ‘Hesperus’ stands for something visible in the evening and ‘Phosphorus’ stands for something visible in the morning. One who mixed this up would misunderstand the names. With this in mind, consider A’s utterance of (8) addressing B, each presupposing that both understand the names.

8. Hesperus is Phosphorus

A asserts not only the bare singular proposition that predicates identity of Venus and Venus, but also the corresponding proposition entertainable only by identifying Venus via the two names. Although this proposition merely represents Venus as being Venus, B extracts more information from A’s assertion of it. Presupposing that A understands the names, B reasons that A knows he will be taken to be committed
to the claim that the object Hesperus, visible in the evening, is identical with the object Phosphorus, visible in the morning. Knowing that A expects him to so reason, B correctly concludes that A asserted the descriptively enriched proposition.

The extra content carried by A’s remark arises from the linguistically enhanced proposition asserted, the presupposition that A and B understand the names, and the descriptive information that comes with this understanding. The conversation then continues as in (9).

9a. If Hesperus’s orbit had been different it wouldn’t have appeared in the evening. 
   Said by A
b. In that case would Hesperus still have been Phosphorus? Asked by B
   c. Of course. Hesperus would have been Phosphorus no matter what. A again

A’s final utterance commits him to the necessity of the linguistically enhanced proposition that Hesperus is Phosphorus, but not to the absurdity that no matter what, the unique thing that was both Hesperus and visible in the evening would have been the unique thing that was both Phosphorus and visible in the morning. The difference between the descriptive enrichment of A’s use of (8) and the lack of such enrichment of A’s use of (9c) hinges on what understanding the names requires. It requires knowing that most agents who use them take, and expect others to take, ‘Hesperus’ to stand for something seen in the evening and ‘Phosphorus’ to stand for something seen in the morning. Presupposing this, A and B add descriptive content to A’s utterance of (8). Since taking the names to refer to things actually seen at certain times tells one nothing about when they are seen at possible world-states, A and B don’t descriptively enrich the utterance of (9c).

This explanation depends on three points: (i) To cognize o via a name n does not involve predicating being named n of o (any more than cognizing oneself in the 1st-
person way involves predicating of oneself that one is so-cognized); (ii) the linguistically enhanced propositions asserted by utterances of sentences containing names are representationally identical to, but cognitively distinct from, the semantic contents of the sentences uttered; (iii) to understand an expression requires not only the ability to use it with its semantic content, but also the knowledge and recognitional ability needed to use it to communicate with others in ways widely presupposed in the linguistic community. This dynamic extends to natural kind terms, where it provides solutions to further instances of Frege’s puzzle involving them.  

It also gives a twist to John Perry’s example of the amnesiac Rudolf Lingens reading a book about himself. From his reading, he knows of Rudolf that he is named ‘Rudolf’, but doesn’t know this in a 1st-person way, and so doesn’t self-ascribe being so named. This changes when he remembers “who he is” and truthfully utters (10a).

10a. I have just realized my name is ‘Rudolf’. *Said by RL*

The truth of his remark requires that the proposition to which he previously had not born the realizing relation be one requiring him to be identified in the 1st-person way. Suppose, however, that he expresses his epiphany using (10b).

10b. I have just realized that I am Rudolf Lingens. *Said by RL*

How can that be true? Suppose the library has a mirror. Looking in it, Rudolf says “I am he,” self-ascribing being *RL*, realizing he has done so. This threatens standard *de se* stories, but not the cognitive analysis -- which enriches the semantic content (10sb) of (10b), requiring the first argument of *identity* to be cognized in the 1st-person way, and the second to be cognized via the name ‘Rudolf Lingens’.

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10 See chapter 4 of Soames forthcoming.
10sb. Only just now has it been so that: *RL realizes that RL is RL*

The 2nd-person singular pronoun adds another twist. Suppose the amnesiac Otto, reading the same book over Rudolf’s shoulder, recovers his memory and says (10c).

10c. I have just realized you are Rudolf.

There is no trouble explaining Otto’s epiphany, and how communicating it leads to Rudolf’s. *But we must also explain why Otto’s remark asserts something true and nothing false.* He asserts that *only just now* has he realized something. The just-realized proposition *isn’t* the semantic content of the embedded clause in the context, because Otto has long realized that Rudolf is Rudolf. It also isn’t the proposition *that the person he addresses is Rudolf.* Otto didn’t *assert* that he *addressed anyone.* The proposition he reported himself to only recently realize predicates identity of Rudolf and Rudolf, cognizing the second argument via the name and the first argument via the 2nd-person pronoun, which Otto understands to designate the one he addresses.\(^{11}\)

So far I have mentioned four Millian modes of presentation – entertaining a constituent of a proposition, cognizing a constituent in the 1st-person way, cognizing it in the present-tense way, and cognizing it linguistically. Perception is another such mode. Agent A watches bird B, predicating *being red of B* cognized visually. Since A’s act of perceptual predication is a sub case of the general act predicating *being red* of B, the two acts are distinct but representationally identical propositions. So are *predicating being Tom’s pet of B* and *doing so cognizing B visually.* Even if A already knows the former – namely, that B is Tom’s pet -- from Tom’s previous testimony, A may faultlessly respond to an utterance of (11a) by uttering (11b).

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\(^{11}\) For details see chapters 3, 4, and 5 of Soames forthcoming.
11a. That is Tom’s pet. *Said to A demonstrating B*
   b. I didn’t realize it was Tom’s pet. *Said by A looking at B*

A’s assertion is *true*, because the proposition A claims not to have known, is one the entertainment of which requires B to be visually identified.12

My final Millian mode of presentation is *recognizing* something previously cognized. When one has cognized x before in predicing *being F* of x and one now *recognizes x* when predicating *being G* of x, one doesn’t need further premises to predicate *being both F and G* of x. To recognize recurrence is to immediately and noninferentially connect the information carried by one cognition with information carried by others.13 Ubiquitous in cognition, *recognition of recurrence* connects elements both within individual propositions and across multiple propositions we entertain. Incorporating it within propositions generates trios of cognitively distinct but representationally identical propositions of the sort indicated by P1-P3.

P1. The act of identifying o as 1st and 2nd arguments and predicating R of the pair, *whether or not one recognizes o’s recurrence*.

P2. The act of identifying o as 1st and 2nd arguments and predicating R, *recognizing the recurrence of o*.

P3. The act of identifying o as 1st and 2nd arguments and predicating R, *not recognizing any recurrence*.

Since I can believe P1 without believing P2, I can use (12a) to say something true without saying anything false, even (12b) is false and a = b.

12a. I don’t believe that a R a.
   b. I don’t believe that a R b

In all cases from (1) to (12), conceiving of propositions as purely representational cognitive acts facilitates the derivation of correct but otherwise

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12 See chapter 5 of Soames forthcoming.

13 See Fine (2007), Salmon (2012), and chapters 6-8 of Soames forthcoming.
elusive results about what is believed, asserted, etc. These results extend the naturalistic epistemology of propositions that began with a story of how one can know, assert, and believe propositions by cognizing, not the propositions themselves, but the objects and properties that are their subject matter. That epistemology continued with an account of how self-conscious agents acquire knowledge of propositions by attending to events in their cognitive lives. Once identified, propositions are made targets of predications, enabling agents to entertain various complex propositions, including attitude ascriptions. This is the basis of the explanations I have given of attitudes born to propositions incorporating Millian modes of presentation, and to propositions that ascribe attitudes incorporating those Millian modes. All that is needed for these explanations to go through is for agents to identify predication targets via these Millian modes, and to have the concepts on which those modes are based.

That, in sum, is why I think that taking propositions to be purely representational cognitive acts explains our knowledge of, and the relations we bear to, propositions. Why then does it initially seem absurd to say that propositions are things we do? If one asks oneself, pretheoretically, “What is a proposition?” one naturally starts with examples. What is the proposition that 7 is a prime number, that Seattle is sunny, or that there is a red dot on the wall in front of me? In bringing these examples to mind, one thinks of 7, Seattle, and the wall as being certain ways. One doesn’t necessarily judge them to be those ways, one merely entertains the propositions that they are. Sometimes one may also conjure up images, but even then one knows that the proposition entertained isn’t the image in one’s mind, but something more general.
Still, there is something in the visual model to which we wrongly tend to cling. Just as seeing a wall with a red dot is a phenomenally robust form of being aware of it, so, we are incautiously inclined to think, visualizing the wall is a phenomenally poorer form of awareness of a mental image, while entertaining a proposition about the wall is a minimal, or even phenomenally empty, form of awareness of something that represents the wall as being a certain way. It isn’t. To entertain a proposition is not to be aware of it, nor is to believe it to affirm something of which we are aware.

We are wrongly encouraged to think otherwise by the parallels, (i) and (ii), between our talk about perception and our talk about propositional attitudes.

(i) Just as ‘see’ is a two-place predicate relating agents to things seen, so ‘entertain’, ‘believe’, ‘assert’, and ‘know’ are two-place predicates relating them to propositions entertained, believed, asserted, and known.

(ii) Just as standing in the relation expressed by ‘see’ requires agents to be aware of things involved in the perception, so standing in the relations expressed by ‘entertain’, ‘believe’, ‘assert’, and ‘know’ requires them to be aware of things involved in the attitudes.

The natural, but readily explainable, error is to jump from (i) and (ii) to (iii), when in fact it is (iv) rather than (iii) that is true.

(iii) Just as standing in the relation expressed by ‘see’ requires one to be aware of the things seen, so standing in the relation expressed by ‘entertain’, ‘believe’, ‘assert’, or ‘know’ requires one to be aware of the propositions entertained, believed, asserted, or known.

(iv) Although standing in the relation expressed by ‘see’ to an object o that is seen requires one to be aware of o, standing in the relation expressed by ‘entertain’, ‘believe’, ‘assert’, or ‘know’ to a proposition p merely requires one to be aware of the things p represents and the ways they are represented as being.

The error of opting for (iii) rather than (iv) is one main source of the mistaken idea that propositions can’t be cognitive acts. It is obvious that one can perform an act without making it the object of one’s awareness, and also that forming cognitive and
behavioral dispositions when performing an act need not involve thinking of it. Since this is what entertaining and believing propositions amount to if propositions are cognitive acts, the objector’s commitment to (iii) leads him to conclude that the cognitive conception is absurd. But it isn’t absurd; (iii) is false and (iv) is true.

Although this rebuts a familiar objection, it leaves us with a question. When agents become aware of propositions, first by entertaining and then by predicating properties of them, why do they remain unaware that propositions are cognitive acts? Why does one who entertains the proposition that Seattle is sunny, and predicates being widely disbelieved of it, fail to realize the kind of entity it is? Since ordinary human agents -- who do make propositions objects of thought in this way -- don’t have any precise idea of what they are, every theorist faces this question.

Here is my answer. Suppose an agent entertains the proposition that Seattle is sunny and focuses on the event token which is his entertaining of it. This token isn’t what he takes to be widely disbelieved. Rather, he would say, that type of thing is widely disbelieved. What type? Is it the event type in which one predicates being sunny of Seattle, is it the act type performance of which results in an event of that type, or is it some other type? It is, I think, whatever type best plays the proposition role in our theories – which, I have maintained, is the repeatable act type of predicating being sunny of Seattle. But this philosophical answer isn’t one an ordinary agent would give. All the agent can say about the type (i.e., the proposition) is that it is the thought he just had – which is true enough provided he doesn’t succumb to the seeing-in-the-mind’s-eye temptation of taking the thought to be what he focused on when whispering “Seattle is sunny” to himself.
If he does succumb, he is likely to object when told that the thought he entertained when whispering to himself was his act of entertaining it -- which it must be if propositions are cognitive acts.\textsuperscript{14} The agent who has succumbed to the \textit{minds-eye} temptation will object because he wrongly thinks that entertaining a thought involves focusing on \textit{it}. Thinking this, he may protest, “Obviously \textit{what I was focusing on} when I whispered “Seattle is sunny” wasn’t \textit{my act of focusing on it}.” Although that’s right, he is confused. What he primarily focused on when entertaining the thought was Seattle, which isn’t an act. But if, in response to our question, \textit{What is that proposition?}, he self-consciously attended to \textit{what he was doing} when entertaining it, then he did secondarily focus on predicating \textit{being sunny} of Seattle. These are two simultaneously performed acts, one of which was entertaining the proposition, the other was focusing on it. Conflating them into an imagined single act of \textit{entertaining x by focusing on x}, and clinging to the truism that \textit{no act of focusing on x is identical with x}, the agent will indignantly reject the idea that the proposition he entertained was his act of entertaining it. But he’s wrong. Succumbing to the \textit{minds-eye} temptation and conflating the two cognitive acts undermine his conclusion.

The truth of the matter is that entertaining the proposition that Seattle is sunny doesn’t involve cognizing it, that one’s act of entertaining the proposition and one’s act of attending to that act are distinct, and that the act of entertaining the proposition is the act of predicating \textit{being sunny} of Seattle -- which, in turn, \textit{is} the proposition entertained. In this way we explain both how cognitively unsophisticated agents can bear attitudes to propositions without being able to cognize them and how self-

\textsuperscript{14} Because entertaining is performing, and for any act \textit{A}, the act \textit{performing A} is identical with \textit{A}. 
conscious creatures like us succeed in identifying them. In addition, we identify and correct the errors responsible for the so-called intuition that propositions can’t be things we do. The result is a conception of propositions that is both foundationally secure and theoretically fruitful in solving the problems illustrated by examples (1-12).