Clarifying and Improving the Cognitive Theory to Meet its Explanatory Burden

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Chapter 12
New Thinking about Propositions
By
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In this chapter I reply to the probing and provocative critiques of Speaks and King, which I use (i) to clarify aspects of my position that had previously been underdeveloped and insufficiently clear, (ii) to introduce improvements needed to properly understand the sense in which propositions are genuinely representational, and (iii) to discuss the explanatory burden in terms of which any theory of propositions must be judged.

In Reply to Speaks

The Real Explanatory Burden

Speaks notes that I agree with him that *being such that Amelia talks* and other properties of this sort exist, and that we have cognitive access to them. Since both of us must explain this access, while I must also explain our access to the cognitive event types I have identified as propositions, he concludes that his explanatory debt is less than mine. I disagree; the explanation I provide of our access to (degenerate) properties like *being such that Amelia talks* is a trivial extension of the explanation already provided of our access to the propositions from which they are derived. Whereas I explain our access to these properties, he doesn't. Although we both presuppose agents' access to *simple properties*, he is silent, whereas I am not, about how complex properties are generated, how they are individuated, and how we access them.

In my system negating a property *being so-and-so*, predication of which represents its target as *being so-and-so*, generates the property *not being so-and-so,* predication of which represents its target as *not being so-and-so*. Similar stories can be told about conjoining and disjoining properties, generating n-1 place properties from n place properties, and forming complex properties in other ways. In each case, agents' access to complex properties is explained by operations they perform on more fundamental properties, while the complex properties

themselves are individuated by the ways in which predication of them represents their targets, from which their contributions to the truth conditions of propositions can be read off. This idea is extended by operations generating properties whose representational contents, individuation conditions, and cognitive accessibility are parasitic on those of already generated propositions. Operating on the proposition *that John loves Mary or Bill hates Mary*, agents can generate the property – *λx [John loves x or Bill hates x]* – predication of which represents its target as being one whom John loves or Bill hates. Taking the degenerate case of this operation in which no constituent is abstracted from the original proposition, we generate the property *being such that John loves Mary or Bill hates Mary* predication of which of any target represents precisely what the proposition represents. When S expresses p, ⌈is such that S⌉ stands for the property predication of which of represents what p represents (and nothing further). Since the individuation of, and our cognitive access to, the property are parasitic on the already explained individuation of, and access to, the proposition, these properties don't add any further explanatory burden.

It is Speaks who faces the problem of individuating and explaining our cognitive access to the properties expressed by ⌈is such that S⌉ and ⌈is such that R⌉ for arbitrary S and R. How can he do so without invoking propositional intermediaries? Well, how are Amelia and *being a talker* related to *being such that Amelia talks?* This Speaksian property/proposition is *not* the property that x instantiates iff Amelia instantiates *being a talker*. There is no unique property satisfying that condition, since *being such that Amelia talks and 1ˢᵗ-order arithmetic is incomplete* does too. Nor is it enough to say that the proposition is *a property* satisfying the condition, since Speaks needs different properties satisfying the condition to be objects of different attitudes. One could build formal structures – trees, tuples, sets of sets – out of simple properties and objects, *and then*

stipulate their instantiation conditions. But unless the structure and the conditions assigned can be shown to be nonarbitrary, this will at most model propositions, not identify them.[1]

One could, of course, go representational by maintaining (i) that *being such that Amelia talks* is the property that represents Amelia as a talker (without representing anything further) because one who predicates it of anything represents Amelia that way, (ii) that *being such that the earth is round* is the property that represents the earth as round (and nothing further) for a similar reason, (iii) that *being such that Amelia talks or the earth is round* is the property that represents Amelia as a talker or the earth as round (and nothing further) because one who predicates it of anything does, and so on. But this would take Speaks down my road, which he doesn't wish to travel – in part, I suspect, because it leads to the question, "Since predicating *being a talker* of Amelia represents her as a talker, shouldn't we already have the proposition *that she talks*, before reaching the property *being such that she does?"* Eschewing this representational route, he needs his own compositional theory of the structures and instantiation conditions of *such-that* properties that nonarbitrarily individuates them from one another and explains how agents with limited cognitive resources can access indefinitely many. Until he provides one, his explanatory burden is more, not less, daunting than mine.

Acts, Events, and the Chimera of Bare Predication

I now turn to the substantive questions he raises about the view of propositions I articulated in chapter 6, and the clarifications of that view that his questions demand. I begin with his concern about what may be described as events of bare predication. He doubts that instances of the event type predicating redness of a certain coffee mug o exists. He says, "*When I think about…events of visually representing that o is red, judging that o is red, and asserting that*

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[1] The problem of identifying propositions (be they properties or not) with essentially arbitrary structures intended to individuate them, which are then assigned truth conditions, is discussed on pp. 52-55 of *What is Meaning?*

o is red…I really don't notice an event of predication which accompanies each one." (12) What

he doesn't notice, and thinks can't be noticed, isn't the visual experience of seeing something as

red. One can certainly be aware of concrete events in which one *sees* something as red, as well

as those in which one *imagines* it as red. We are also aware of moments in which we *judge*

something to be red, or *assert* it to be. What Speaks doesn't notice are *other* events of *merely*

predicating redness of o that also occur whenever some seeing, imagining, judging, or asserting

takes place. Not noticing them, he doubts that there are any.

One might worry, as I do, that this objection puts too much weight on what can be

established about our mental lives by mere introspection.   However, when it comes to

predication there is more to be said. I fear that what Speaks is after are events of *bare*

predication in a sense that goes well beyond what I am committed to, and which I find to be

unrealistic. What I am committed to is the claim that all instances of the event types seeing o as

red and imagining o as red -- as well as instances of the types judging and asserting that o is red

– are instances of the event type *cognizing o as red*, a.k.a. *predicating redness of o*. This does

not mean that every instance of these types is made up of a smaller constituent event of merely

predicating redness of o *plus some further accompanying event involving one or another*

cognitive doing. On the contrary, some of the event types I have mentioned (seeing and

imagining that o is red) do *not* have instances that are composite in this way. Though the point is

not as transparent for the other event types I have mentioned (judging and asserting that o is red),

it is not obvious that their instances are composite either. However, the matter is complicated by

the need to carefully distinguish cognitive acts from instances of the event types that consist in

the performance of those acts by agents.

Let's start with cognitive acts. Some of these – judging and asserting that o is red –

involve further cognitive acts in addition to predicating redness of o, whereas others – seeing and

imagining -- do not. To judge or assert that o is red is to think of o as red and to do something else. In the case of judging this something else is endorsing, in the sense of adopting that way of thinking -- of o as red -- as a potential basis for further thought or action. In the case of assertion, the something else is an act of publicly committing oneself to o's being as one represents it to be. In each case, we (i) cognitively represent o to be red (which we also do when we merely imagine o as being red), and (ii) take a further stance toward that representation (which we do not take when we merely imagine o to be red). So, all *events* of judging or asserting that o is red involve a distinctive kind of cognizing – "predicating redness of o" – accompanied by other cognitive doings analytically distinguishable from it. This point generalizes to many related attitudes including questioning, denying, and so on. Of course, it does not follow that any of these *cognitive events* involve an initial event of predication *succeeded in time* by another event of endorsing, questioning, or what have you. How these cognitive acts are performed – simultaneously or in sequence – is not for philosophy to decide. Thus the theory generates no expectation that even the most powerful introspector should be able to notice events consisting of an agent's performance of an act of predication in splendid isolation (in the absence of the performance of any further acts) in cases in which an agent judges, asserts, questions or denies something. So the fact that Speaks doesn't notice them tells us nothing about the theory.[2]

The point is strengthened when one considers simpler cognitions – seeing, visualizing, or imagining o as red. Any event consisting of an agent's doing one of these things is an instance of the agent's cognizing o as red – a.k.a. *predicating redness of o*. Of course, not all instances of

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[2] Events of predication occur when an agent does something representational – like judge, assert, and the like. Since not all propositional attitudes – e.g. believing and assuming – require occurrent cognitive events, but may sometimes be fully dispositional, agents may sometimes hold propositional attitudes without performing any acts of predication, or experiencing any predicational events constitutive of the propositions to which the attitudes are born.

predicating are instances of seeing, not all instances of predicating are instances or visualizing, etc. How then do these different instances of predicating differ from one another? Does seeing o as red consist of predicating redness of o *plus doing something else* (the doing of which is no part of the predicating), while visualizing o as red consists of that same predicating *plus doing a different something else*, and similarly for imagining o as red? I think not. To see o as red is to predicate redness of o (i.e. to cognize o as red) *in a certain way*, while to visualize o as red is to predicate redness of o *in a different way*. But these different ways no more involve the performance of different acts (the doing of which is no part of the predicating), than the difference between punching a bag with one's right hand and punching it with one's left hand involves the performance of different additional acts (the doing of which is no part of either punching). When it comes to *events* the lesson is clear. Just as there is no bare event of my punching the bag that is not identical with an event of my punching it with my right hand or identical with an event of my punching it with my left, so there is no bare event of my predicating redness of o (i.e. of cognizing o as red) that is not identical with my seeing o as red, my visualizing o as red, imagining o as red, or my cognizing o as red *in some other way*.[3] In short, there are no events of bare predication (i.e. of cognizing but not of cognizing in any particular way) of the sort Speaks is seeking. To seek them is to misunderstand the theory.

The Special Role of Entertaining Among the Propositional Attitudes

Speaks also worries that my identification of the event of my predicating redness of o at t with the event of my entertaining, at t, the proposition that o is red, leads me to claim that the entraining event is itself an instance of the proposition entertained. Although he seems to realize

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[3]To pursue the analogy, just as I can, on reflection, determine that I have punched *with my right hand* (which is different from punching *with my left*), so, I claim, I can determine, on reflection, that I have *visually* represented o as red (which is different from *conceptually* representing o as red). Hence I am aware of representing in different ways, even though I notice no bare acts of representing, because there are none. Above and throughout, I use 'predicate' to underline that representing is something we do.

that there is no circularity, regress, or absurdity here, he finds the claim dubious because it doesn't help him identify which events, if any, are events of predicating redness of o. Unable to find instances of *bare predication*, he remains in the dark about the event type *predicating redness of o*, and so learns nothing by being told that it is the proposition that o is red. The problem is his ill advised search for bare predications, not the identity claim.

Although *entertaining* is a genuine relation between agents and propositions, and hence a propositional attitude, it is not, in my view, a relation we bear to special metaphysical objects independent of us, patiently waiting for us to cognize them. On the contrary, it is just that conception that has led to so much trouble. Since for me propositions are kinds of cognitive doings, entertaining them is *not* a matter of *thinking about them in some special way*, but of embodying them in one's cognitive life. If propositions are event types, p and the event type *entertaining p* are identical. To entertain p is *not* to have p in mind or to cognize it in any way; it is to perform a cognitive act resulting in an instance of p. Since for there to be such an instance is for *an agent* to represent something as being so-and-so, *the act performed by the agent* is similarly representational, as, we may suppose, are the concrete event and the abstract event type.

This is how the intentionality of propositions is related to the intentionality of possible agents who entertain them. It is against this backdrop that we must understand Speaks's comment, "*at least one propositional attitude state [entertaining p] also must have its representational properties intrinsically…[rather than being] explained by the representational properties of any proposition*." (13) The 'also' in this remark refers to concrete events of predication, which are taken to have their properties "intrinsically." Here, Speaks tracks my previous remarks that propositions *inherit* their representational properties from their possible instances, which unfortunately leaves the impression that, for me, the latter are intrinsically

intentional while the former are only derivatively so. Translating his talk of the *state* of entertaining p into my terminology of the *event type* of entertaining p (which, in chapter 6 is identified with p), I take him to be characterizing its intentionality as *intrinsic*. I now find this way of putting things unfortunate. The proper way to proceed is, I think, (i) to identify *the act* of *predicating being so-and-so* of o as representational because for an agent to perform it is for the agent to represent o as *so-and-so,* and (ii) to explain whatever intentionality is possessed by the event type of performing this act and the individual instances of that type in terms of (i).

Next Speaks asks:

"why not say this [that they are intrinsically representational] for all … [such cognitive acts/event-types]? Why not … let [not just the attitude of entertaining, but also] each of the familiar attitudes – belief, assertion, etc. – be intrinsically representational states [acts/event types], whose status as representational is not explained by the representational properties of the proposition to which they are relations?" (13-14)

Consider the attitudes *affirming*, *denying*, and *occurrently doubting* that o is red. Each involves taking a cognitive stance toward the proposition that o is red. Although the stance differs from case to case, what it is a stance toward is the same. Because the attitude *entertaining* abstracts away from any stance, it is perfectly suited to capturing what we focus on when we ask whether *what is affirmed, denied, or doubted is true*. This is the fundamental sense in which affirming, denying, and occurrently doubting that o is red all represent o as being the same way. This representational commonality is captured by taking those attitudes to involve *entertaining the proposition that o is red* plus a further cognitive ingredient that varies from one attitude to the next. The presence of this further ingredient is why we shouldn't treat the richer attitudes Speaks has in mind as we treat entertaining. There may be a *further sense* in which the richer attitudes are representationally different from one another. After all, an agent's take on the world will differ markedly depending on whether the agent *affirms*, *denies*, or *doubts* that o is red. But this

further representationality results from how the cognitive stances involved in these attitudes interact with their propositional object.

What these cognitive stances amount to is the least developed aspect of my view. So far, I have said that to judge that o is red is to predicate redness of o *while affirming or endorsing that predication*, to believe that o is red is *to judge, or be disposed to judge, that it is*, and so on. To this I here add a further cautionary note. To endorse or affirm a proposition p that one has entertained is *not* to predicate a property or relation of p, or to perform any representation-modifying operation on p. It is to entertain p in a certain way, which results in that cognitive event's playing a certain committing role in one's cognitive life. The same is true of other stances, such as wondering. This must be so, since even cognitively unsophisticated creatures that are unable to identify and target the types of which the cognitive events of their own experience are instances can bear the attitudes of judging, believing and wondering to propositions.

Existence and Belief

Speaks's next objection focuses on the conjunction of my views (i) that an agent can believe a proposition p without ever entertaining p and (ii) that this can happen even in cases in which the p doesn't exist. The objection is that if this were so, then certain arguments that are clearly valid wouldn't be. For example, Speaks says, Argument A would not be valid.

Argument A
A1.   Jeff believes that no circles are 726-sided.
A2.   Scott believes that no circles are 726-sided.
AC.   So, there is something that Jeff and Scott both believe.

Since A is valid, he concludes that the conjunction of (i) and (ii) is false.

The example is not well chosen. Suppose that A1 and A2 are true because Jeff and Scott are disposed to affirm the relevant proposition, even though neither they, nor anyone else, has

ever entertained it, or ever predicated *being 726 sided (having 726 sides)* of anything. This is *not* sufficient to show that the proposition doesn't exist. Since the property is complex, agents can cognize it by applying a certain functional operation to the arguments 726 and the property *having sides*. Hence, the proposition fits the existence conditions sketched in chapter 6. What is required for it to exist is not that anyone has cognized *being 726 sided* or predicated it of anything, but that each argument of the cognitive operation has been cognized and the operation itself has been applied. Since these conditions have been fulfilled in the actual world-state, the proposition said to be believed by Jeff and Scott does exist.

Might there be world-states at which the conclusion is false and the premises are true, even though no one had ever cognized the number 726 or the property *having sides*? As for the latter, I doubt that agents could implicitly believe the proposition about circles and sides if no one had the concept *having sides* because no one had ever cognized it. Could they believe it if no one had cognized the number 726? Perhaps. But now there is a different worry. Why we should think that Jeff and Scott have implicit *de re* beliefs about the uncognized number, when for many uncognized objects – e.g. particular stones buried in Antarctica – we don't think that agents have implicit *de re* beliefs about them? The answer, I think, is that we have a systematic linguistic means – the numeral system – mastery of which allows us to directly designate each number. Appealing to this systematicity, we may plausibly extend the existence conditions given in chapter 6 to allow for the existence of propositions entertainable by those who have mastered this or related systems. Systematicity – in which cognitive acquaintance with both simples and the operations that build complexity from them – was at the heart of the existence conditions proposed in chapter 6 for propositions. While the extension suggested here is new, it is well within the spirit of those conditions. Since adopting it undermines the case for falsity of AC, we still have no convincing objection to the conjunction of (i) and (ii) above.

Coming up with a better example isn't easy. On the account I have offered, there are real but nonexistent propositions some of the simple constituents of which neither have been cognized already nor are cognitively accessible by any systematic means mastered by agents. There are also propositions agents believe without having entertained them. But it isn't easy to show that some propositions are members of both classes. Displaying them in an argument is out of the question, since to do so is to guarantee their existence. There is, of course, no such bar to displaying an existing proposition that could have been believed without existing, or was in fact believed before it existed. However, as the discussion of Argument A illustrates, even this is daunting. Suppose, for the sake of argument, we find such a proposition, expressed by some sentence S. Switching the premises to the past tense gives us Argument A*.

A1*.   At t, Jeff believed that S.
A2*.   At t, Scott believed that S

Next consider the following conclusions.

a*   There is something that Jeff and Scott both believed at t.
b*   There exists something that Jeff and Scott both believed at t.
c*   At t, some proposition was believed by both Jeff and Scott.
d*   At t, there was a proposition that both Jeff and Scott believed.
e*   At t, there existed some proposition that both Jeff and Scott believed.

Suppose that A1* and A2* are true, and that the proposition expressed by S exists now, but didn't exist at t. Then a* and b* will be true, and we won't have a counterexample. Whether or not c* is a counterexample depends on whether we can at t quantify over things not existing at t. Since I have argued we can, I can recognize the truth of c*. I also believe that we can, and sometimes do, use 'there is/are' to range over domains that include nonexistent things. Thus, d* has a reading in which it is true. What Speaks needs is e*. If the right sort of sentence S can be produced, A1* and A2* will be true and e* will be false. Such a result, though mildly surprising,

wouldn't be a weighty objection.[4] What we are engaged in is theory construction, not ordinary language analysis. Sometimes philosophical theory leads to correct, but surprising and even mildly counterintuitive results about which pretheoretic opinion isn't determinative. So long as wholesale rejections of commonsense convictions are avoided, as they are here, philosophical explanation may sometimes prevail.

Representation Without Cognition

Speaks considers a barren world-state bw with no cognitive agents and (according to the view I have outlined) no existing propositions. Still, I hold that the proposition gg *that grass is green* is true at bw; it is true at any world-state w iff (i) gg represents grass as being green, and (ii) at w grass is that way. I have argued that (i) is true because gg is the event type of one's predicating greenness of grass, which just is for one to represent grass as green (and nothing further). So understood, the intentionality of gg expressed by (i) isn't relativized to world-states. But since what gg represents doesn't vary from state to state, there is no harm in speaking of each state as being one at which it represents grass as being green.

For Speaks, this means that on my account gg represents grass as being green at bw "because it is true in [b]w that were some subject to, for example, judge that grass is green, that judgment would involve predicating greenness of grass."(17). But, he asks, *what makes this counterfactual true*? He answers that the representational properties of gg make it true. But now, he thinks, we have gone in a circle, since we have illegitimately explained the truth of the counterfactual in terms of the representational properties of the proposition while also explaining the representational properties of the proposition in terms of the truth of the counterfactual.

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[4] As Brian Bowman has pointed out to me, one can probably find the right sort of sentence S if one constructs an argument in which one concludes that there (now) exists a proposition that Jeff and Scott didn't believe at t, from ⌈~ Scott believed S at t⌉ and ⌈~ Jeff believed S at t⌉. However, this doesn't add much to the weight of the objection.

There is no circle. The counterfactual is, of course, true at bw because were some agents to perform the *cognitive act* of predicating greenness of grass, they would thereby represent it as green. But the representational properties of the proposition are *not* explained by a conceptually prior appeal to the truth of the counterfactual. On the contrary, according to the view for which I have argued, the proposition represents grass as green because it is the event type in which an agent performs *the representational act* of predicating greenness of grass. *The act is representational because to perform it is to represent grass in this way.* From this it follows that all possible events of entertaining gg are instances in which agents represent grass as green, which in turn entails (but is not entailed by) the truth of Speaks's counterfactual. Thus, there is no circle. Rather, one and the same thing – the inherently representational act – explains both the intentionality of the proposition and the truth of the counterfactual.[5]

Types, Tokens, and Representation

Toward the end of his critique, Speaks takes up a closely related point, objecting to my previous, all too familiar claim that cognitive event types are representational *because* their (possible) tokens are. He worries that since types don't inherit all properties of their tokens, we have no reason to think that they inherit the representational properties of their tokens. There is a legitimate concern here, but it has already been addressed. By distinguishing the representational *act* of predicating redness of o both from the abstract *event type* in which an agent does so and from *concrete events* that are instances of that type, I can eliminate any suggestion that the tokens *transfer* their representational properties to the type.

It is all right to think of the event type and its tokens as *representing o as red* because *the act* does. However, it is *not* the act itself that most fundamentally represents o as red, but the

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[5]This explanation supersedes my careless comments (from 2010 on) about propositions *inheriting* intentionality from their possible instances – comments that, doubtless, contributed to Speaks's impression of circularity.

agents who perform it who do. Of course, the properties of agents – of doing this or that – are not literally *transferred* to the acts they perform, or to the event types or instances in which someone performs them. For agents to predicate redness of o and thereby to represent o as red is for them *to do* something. Since acts don't *do* anything, but rather are the things done, this is *not* precisely the sense in which the act *predicating redness of o* represents o as red; nor is it the sense in which events or event types do. Rather, there is an extended sense of *representing o as red,* attributable to acts, the function of which is to allow us to use the intimate relation these entities bear to the cognitive experience of agents to track their mental states and to assess their veridicality. The extended sense in which acts (and perhaps events) are said to represent is related to the more basic sense in which agents represent in a manner analogous to the way in which the extended sense in which some acts are commonly said to be intelligent, stupid, or thoughtless is related to the more fundamental sense in which it is agents who are intelligent, stupid, or thoughtless.

Although we already have a notion of an agent's overall accuracy on this or that subject, we also need to assess the veridicality of the agent's, or our own, individual sayings, doings, and cognizings – which requires discrete entities that can be assigned truth conditions *one by one*. This leads us to speak *derivatively* of *certain aspects of agents' cognitive activity* as representing what they, *the agents*, represent, and so as being true or false in so far as those agents represent things accurately or inaccurately when they perform the acts in question. For this we need notions of truth and falsity, plus a notion of cognitive doings that *represent* things as being various ways, *where the sense in which these doings represent is not identical to, but rather is a natural extension of, the sense in which agents represent*.[6] These cognitive products are what

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[6] I will say more about this extended sense below.

philosophers call "propositions," and which, up to now, I have identified with cognitive event types, but which I now think might better be identified with the cognitive acts themselves.[7]

In Reply to King

Expressible Perceptual Content

King is surprised that I assume without extended argument that the content of perceptual experience is expressible in natural language. I think the worry is exaggerated. Though complications exist, and questions can be raised, it is, I think, overwhelmingly plausible that much perceptual content is linguistically expressible, provided one observes certain niceties. Suppose I truthfully report 'This looks red' on the basis of seeing an object o, which is red. When one sees something as red, one typically, perhaps always, sees it as some finely individuated shade of red. Since not all these shades are (nonindexically) named, there is no guarantee that the particular shade I visually predicate of o is nonindexically expressed by any English term. But surely, it is *expressible*. If we can see it, attend to it, and discriminate it from other shades, we can, name it, if the need arises. That is the sense in which it is nonindexically expressible – as well as being indexically expressible as "that shade (of red)." In addition to *visually predicating* this shade of o, do I also *visually predicate* the redness of o? I think so. For any particular red-shade, predicating it of o also counts as predicating *being red* of o. Hence, visually entertaining the proposition that o is that shade of red also counts as visually entertaining the proposition that o is red.[8]

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[7] The reason that Speaks's event types (i), (ii), (vi), and (vii) on page 18 are not good candidates for propositions, and are not naturally assigned representational content that makes them bearers of truth conditions, is that they are not connected closely enough to the cognitive lives of agents to serve the function that is the *raison d'être* of this extended sense of *representing*.

[8] As for the vexed but much discussed question about the general relation between perceptual and conceptual content, I largely align with the position outlined by Jeff Speaks in "Is There a Problem about Nonconceptual Content?", *The Philosophical Review,* 114, 2005, 359-398.

Other questions about visual content are more challenging. One of these, which I raised in chapter 6, is whether the representational content of a visual perception of a complex scene can be encompassed by a complex web of related propositions. Though I am not certain that it can, I do think that much of that content is propositional. Other important and far-reaching questions arise concerning how the vague color terms of natural language come to encode the different properties they do (in different contexts as used by different speakers), and how we should think of the not-fully-determinate clouds of propositions asserted by utterances of sentences containing them in different contexts. However that is work for another time.[9]

How Many Propositions?

King also worries about how many propositions I allow. He points out that philosophers who hold presentist or actualist views, and so require true propositions to exist, will fault my account for providing too few propositions. Since King offers no arguments for those views, I won't reply, other than to say that I believe them to be mistaken on independent grounds. Because I am trying to track the truth, my view of propositions is embedded in a framework that incorporates what I take to be other philosophical truths. That said, the resulting account remains a package deal, some aspects of which are detachable from others. For example, my student Justin Dallmann has shown that one can recapitulate my account of propositions in a "serious actualist" framework by trading my distinction between existent and non-existent truth bearers for a distinction between propositions the existence of which (at the actual world) is grounded in what is actually concrete and those the existence of which (at the actual world) is grounded in

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[9] See chapter 3 of my *Language, Mind, and Meaning: The Hempel Lectures*, Princeton University Press, forthcoming.

what is merely possibly concrete.[10] Though I don't favor this reconstrual, I commend it to serious acutalists who find themselves unable to recant their metaphysical error.

In addition to raising worries that I make room for too few propositions, King gives two reasons for thinking that I countenance too many. He claims (i) that my account of the *de se* and related cases opens the floodgates to too many proposition-building operations which allow too many proposition-candidates to be constructed, and (ii) that sometimes performing legitimate proposition-building acts in different orders produces different cognitive event types where there is only one proposition. I will take up these points separately.

First the *de se*. What makes the first-person way of thinking of oneself a proposition-building operation is its direct, non-descriptive role in inference and action. Because of this, admitting it (and related *de se* ways of cognizing) doesn't commit me to other garden-variety "ways of thinking" as analogous proposition builders. *De se* ways of identifying predication targets differ from King's examples – thinking of o as inhabiting a world in which water is H_2O and thinking of o as self-identical – in *not introducing any new predications or functional applications*. One can, of course, think of o as *the x: x = o & x inhabits a world in which water is H_2O*, or as *the x: x = o & x is self-identical*. To do so in the service of predicating redness of o is to entertain a proposition that requires one to apply f_{the} to the propositional function corresponding to the extra descriptive condition with the intention of predicating *being red* of the result.[11] Though these descriptive propositions exist, they are of a different kind than the *de se* propositions to which King assimilates them. Thus, he is wrong to imagine that I am committed to propositions the constituents of which are simply o and redness, the entertainment of which requires o to be cognized in one of his ways.

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[10] Justin Dallmann, "Existence and the Cognitive Event Type Theory of Propositions," (unpublished manuscript, USC).

Comparing (1) and (2) provides further perspective.

1a. Scott Soames is the messy shopper.
  b. I am the messy shopper. (used *de se* by SS)

2a. Russell sought to prove logicism.
  b. Russell sought to prove that arithmetic is reducible to logic.

The (immediate) constituents of the (a) and (b) propositions are the same in both cases, as is the form of predication (direct). The propositions differ only in that the (b) propositions impose *an extra requirement* on the way in which a *predication target* must be cognized by one who entertains the proposition. Proposition (1b) requires SS to be cognized in the first-person way; (2b) requires its propositional constituent to be entertained. Although in (1b) this extra requirement doesn't involve any further predications (functional applications, etc.), in (2b) it does. *However, in neither case does the extra requirement involve predicating anything further of (or operating in any further way on) the relevant predication target*. This, I suspect, is what King missed in wrongly concluding that, for me, extra requirements on how predication targets are cognized can introduce new predications of, or operations on, them. They can't. Nor is it arbitrary that proposition-building acts can involve targeting propositions in way that involves entertaining them (as in (2b)). This is simply the combination of two cognitive acts both of which we know independently to be proposition building – entertaining propositions and directly targeting them (as we can do with anything with which we are acquainted or for which we have a name). Once all this is clear, King's contention that proposition-building acts employed in my analyses of (1b) and (2b) over generate, and so leave us with too many propositions, can be seen to be groundless.

This is not true of his second worry, which raises a real issue, albeit a minor one. Is the proposition that Romeo loves Juliet the cognitive act (or event type) in which *loving* is

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[11] I here employ the Fregean definite description operator f_{the}. Other choices are possible.

predicated of the pair consisting of Romeo followed by Juliet? Is it the act (or event type) in which one first operates on *loving* and Juliet to form the property *loving Juliet,* which is predicated of Romeo? Or is it the act (or event type) in which this order is reversed? Since there are three slightly different acts (or event types), it might seem that I am saddled with three different propositions where there should be only one. Though puzzling, this issue is not, I think, very serious. One response would be to allow three different but related Romeo-loves-Juliet propositions, while characterizing attitudes like judging, believing, and asserting in a way that guarantees that an agent who bears them to one of the three propositions bears them to all three. A different response would be to identify the proposition that Romeo loves Juliet with the act (or event type) in which one *either* predicates loving of <Romeo, Juliet>, *or* combines loving with Juliet and predicates the resulting complex property of Romeo, *or* combines loving with Romeo and predicates *being one whom Romeo loves* of Juliet. Short of investigating how to extend these (and perhaps other) strategies generalize across the board, I will not here attempt to adjudicate between them.[12] Still, I see no reason to think that the issue (which arises for most accounts of structured propositions including King's) can't be resolved.

Circularity?

King's next contention – that my account of propositions is circular because the explanation of their representational properties presupposes possibility, while my notion of a possible world-state presupposes propositions – is misguided on two counts. First, and foremost, his critique tacitly assumes that ordinary modal notions like *what could* and *what could not possibly be* are conceptually dependent upon, and so to be analyzed in terms of, the conceptually prior notion of a *possible world-state*. As I have repeatedly argued, this Lewisian assumption

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[12]As Brian Bowman has reminded me, particular languages, like English, which recognize verb phrases as sentential constituents but not subject+transitive verb combinations, might constrain the proposition candidates expressible by their sentences. Even so, using such languages to report the attitudes of others would itself raise the issue.

couldn't be further from the truth.[13]   Although there are both epistemically and metaphysically possible world-states – ways the world could be (or have been) – they are defined in terms of our ordinary modal notions, rather than the other way around. As I explain in chapter 3, on my analysis, the notion of a proposition conceptually depends on objects, properties and cognitive acts of agents, while the notion of a possible world-state – i.e. a maximal property of a certain sort that the universe could have instantiated – conceptually depends on truth, propositions, and our ordinary modal notions. Since propositions don't conceptually depend on possible world-states, an explanation of how they manage to be representational can make use of ordinary modal notions, including the possibility of a cognitive act being performed and an event type having instances, without circularity.

Second, as I made clear in my reply to Speaks, a proposition represents things as being a certain way *because it is either the cognitive act of representing things as being that way*, *or the event type of performing that act*. Though it *follows* from this explanation that any possible performance of the act is one in which an agent represents things as being a certain way, it is not obvious that the explanation *conceptually presupposes* any modal notions at all (though even if it did, there would be no circularity).

Agents, Acts, and Events

King's final objection targets the substance of my (old) explanation of the representationality of propositions. Since my view of how this explanation should go has undergone a subtle change in the last nine months, I have more sympathy with his critique than I once did. As he notes, in the past I have often given the explanation by claiming (i) that certain

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[13] See Soames, "The Place of David Lewis in Analytic Philosophy," forthcoming in "The Place of David Lewis in Analytic Philosophy," *David Lewis*, eds. Barry Loewer and Jonathan Schaffer, Oxford: Wilely Blackwell; chapter 5 of Soames, *The Philosophy of Language*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010, and Soames, "Actually," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 81*, 2007, 251-277, reprinted in Soames, *Philosophical Essays*, Volume 2, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009.

concrete cognitive events (e.g. of predicating redness of o) are inherently representational, and (ii) that event types inherit their representational properties from those of their instances. As indicated in the final section of my reply to Speaks above, I now see the matter differently, and I hope more clearly.

The explanation begins with agents. First, we observe that when an agent sees or thinks of o as red, the agent represents o as red. Next, we consider *what the agent does* – namely *represent o as red*, which I call 'predicating redness of o'. At this point, we appeal to a derivative sense of 'represent' in which this act itself *represents o as red*. Though distinct from the primary sense in which *an agent* represents o as red, this extended sense is related to that primary sense in a way analogous to the way in which the senses in which some acts are intelligent, stupid, thoughtful, or kind is related to the primary senses in which *agents who perform those acts* are intelligent, stupid, thoughtful, or kind. Very roughly, (i) for an act to be intelligent or thoughtful is for it to be one the performance of which marks one as behaving intelligently or thoughtfully, and (ii) for a cognitive act to represent o as red is for it to be one the performance of which marks one as representing o as red.

As indicated in my reply to Speaks, we, as agents, need this extended sense of representation in part because we wish to isolate individual aspects of the thought and perception of ourselves and others in order to assess them for accuracy. When o is such that to perceive or think of o as red is to represent it accurately, it is both enormously useful and very natural to seek an entity – a particular sort of perceiving or thinking – plus a property that entity has when this sort of perceiving or thinking is accurate. The entity is a proposition, which is either the cognitive act of representing o as red or the cognitive event type of so doing. The property is

truth, which the act (or event type) has iff to perform it (or to bring about an instance of the event type) is for an agent to represent o as o really is.

In *What is Meaning?* I ruled out acts as propositions on the basis of a short-sighted ordinary-language argument about what is or isn't an absurd "category mistake" of the sort that fills the last few pages of King's current critique of my view.[14] As I said in my response to Mark Richard at the session on *What is Meaning?* at the Eastern Division Meetings of the APA in December of 2011, I now see the error of those ways. Because our task is theory construction – which in philosophy as well as empirical science can, when successful, usher in new, surprising, and sometimes counterintuitive truths – ordinary-language style arguments that deny this have no more force against the act view of propositions than they do against the event-type view.[15] Since I no longer see a compelling reason to analyze propositions as event types as opposed to acts, I

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[14] *What is Meaning?*, pp. 101-102.

[15] It is, for example, common in the philosophy of language for propositions to be said to be the meanings of non-indexical sentences, despite the fact that this goes strongly against the grain of some of our ordinary ways of speaking about meaning. This is noted in Richard Cartwright's classic article, "Propositions," in R. J. Butler, ed., *Analytical Philosophy*, First Series, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962; reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987. On pp. 49-50 of the latter he says, "If what someone asserts, on some occasion [namely a proposition] is itself the meaning which the words he utters have, on that occasion of their utterance, then anything predicable of what he asserts must also be predicable of the meaning of his words. But it is obvious on very little reflection that ever so many things predicable of what is asserted cannot (on pain of nonsense) be predicated of the meaning of a sentence. And the fundamental point to be noticed in this connection is that although we may predicate of something asserted that it is (or was) asserted, this cannot be predicated of the meaning of a sentence. *It simply makes no sense to say that someone asserted the meaning of a sentence* [my emphasis]…Just as the meanings of sentences cannot be asserted, neither can they be affirmed, denied, contradicted, questioned, challenged, discounted, confirmed, supported, verified, withdrawn, repudiated; and whereas what is asserted can be said to be accurate, exaggerated, unfounded, overdrawn, probable, improbable, plausible, true, or false, none of these can be said of the meaning of a [i.e. any] sentence." Try it. Bill asserted/proved/contradicted/supported/ questioned/withdrew the proposition that mathematics is reducible to logic vs. *Bill asserted/proved/ contradicted/ supported/questioned/withdrew the meaning of the sentence 'Mathematics is reducible to logic'*. Whereas the former sound fine, the latter sound like category mistakes – incoherent or without sense (when they are not taken as suggesting some entirely different content). Similarly for *The meaning of the sentence 'Mathematics is reducible to logic' is plausible, probable, or untrue*. But these are not incoherent or without sense, as Cartwright himself came to realize between 1967 and 1986. (See the addenda on pp. 52-53 for persuasive argument.) But then, what reason is there to deny that some meanings may be propositions even though certain things truly attributable to propositions initially sound as if they couldn't be true of meanings (and conversely)? There is no good reason; the results of fruitful and systematic theorizing justify the revision of some of our ordinary, pretheoretic thought and talk. This is just as true in the case of successful theories that identify propositions with cognitive acts or event types as it is in the case of theories that identify the meanings of some sentences with propositions.

no longer see a serious objection to propositions as a species of purely representational cognitive acts.[16]

This revised way of looking at things circumvents King's final objection(s). Crucially, it debunks the idea that, on my view, the representational properties of acts or events (types or tokens) are simply transferred to them on the basis of the absurd supposition that every property of an agent who performs an act must also be a property of the act, or of events in which an agent performs it.[17] Although my talk, from 2010 onward, of the *derivative* sense in which we speak of propositions as being representational was meant to signal that such a view was never in play, it is clear that more explicit discussion was needed, of the sort I have now provided. Despite his protest, it seems to me that King is in pretty much the same boat. For him, a proposition F (which he takes to be a very complex linguistically based fact) represents o as red, and so is true iff o is red, because *agents use F* to represent o as being that way. Of course, it is not the case that whenever agents use x to do y that x itself does y. I use a spoon to eat my soup, but my spoon doesn't eat my soup. Since what I use something to do is not, in general, what it does, we may ask King a version of his own question. Why should we conclude from the alleged fact that an agent uses F to represent o as red that F itself represents o as red? To answer this question, King must, I suspect, appeal to what he must recognize to be an extended sense of 'represents' –

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[16] Chapters 3 and 6 were submitted in September of 2011 to Speaks and King for their criticism, before my change of mind on this point. Since those chapters could not be altered to reflect this change of mind after my co-authors had begun working on their critiques, my restatement had to wait for this chapter on "further thoughts." In fact, I now am now more inclined to identify propositions with cognitive acts than with event types.

[17] King says, "In general, when an *agent* bears R to something o at a time [and so has the property *bearing R to o*], the *event token* of the agent bearing R to o does not itself bear R to o. If I hug Annie, the event token of my hugging Annie doesn't hug Annie. So why, from the fact that an agent represents o as red (by predicating redness of it), would it *follow* [my emphasis] that the event token of the agent representing o as red itself represents o as red?" Later he makes the same argumentative move concerning event types.

not of course the extended sense I invoke, but a different one – that makes one of his facts representational depend on what agents allegedly represent when using it.[18]

What is to be Explained?

As I see it, the issue between King and me is which (if either) of these imagined ways of extending the primary sense in which agents represent is, or should be, in play when we think of, and theorize about, propositions as representational. This is a matter not of arbitrary stipulation, but of theoretical insight. More generally, the three theories of propositions sketched in this book are attempts to sketch sound and fruitful conceptions capable of playing the roles for which propositions are needed in both philosophy and empirical science. It is true that each of us holds views that are at least mildly revisionary. Up to now, propositions – *what is said, believed, etc.* – have not ordinarily been thought to be either the cognitive acts/events that are central to my account, the complex linguistic facts that are central to King's, or the complex properties central to Speaks's conception. But, since the task is theory construction, this is of no great consequence. To assess our theoretical accounts, one must determine which best accommodates the most important features of our uncontentious pretheoretic talk of propositions, while providing us with entities that can play the theoretical roles for which we need propositions in philosophy, psychology, biology, linguistics, and philosophical logic.

The following are a few of the facts that I think need to be explained by any successful theory of propositions:

(i)   that one who judges or affirms that *that o is red,* himself represents o as red, and cognitively commits himself to o's being so;

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[18] One might construe King in a slightly different way – not as holding that agents use F in order that *they* may represent o as red, but rather that, *already being able to represent o as red themselves*, they use this ability to stipulate that the otherwise brute fact F is henceforth to be understood as representing o as red. However, this is *not* a plausible story for him to tell, in part because it presupposes that agents already bear propositional attitudes to the propositions his account is supposed to explain, and in part because agents do not have his enormously complex linguistic facts in mind as things to be endowed with representational properties by their stipulations.

(ii)   that such an agent may thereby stand in the judging, affirming, and believing relations to the proposition *that o is red* without having any conception of propositions, and without having the ability to represent them as bearing properties and standing in relations to anything;

(iii)   that agents with sufficient cognitive sophistication can acquire the ability to represent propositions as having properties and standing in relations by focusing on their own cognitive acts and experiences of representing things as being one way or another, by grouping these acts and experiences into similarity types (on the basis of what things in the different cases have been taken to be what ways), and by treating the different types as units, thereby implicitly identifying propositions as what similar types have in common without forming any worked out positive conception of what these unities are;

(iv)   that judging, affirming, or believing that *that o is red* does not require an agent to have mastered any language; agents could stand in these attitude relations to the proposition even if there were no sentences or languages at all;

(v)   that all propositions represent things as being certain ways and so are true iff the things in question are as they are represented to be;

(vi)   that the proposition *that o is red* would represent o as being red, and could be true, even if there were no agents;

(vii)   that it is possible for one and the same proposition to be the content of a perceptual experience, a nonlinguistic thought, and an assertive utterance of a sentence;

(viii) that the proposition *that some past philosophers, including Socrates and Plato, don't exist* itself both exists and is true, even though Socrates and Plato no longer exist;

(ix)   that the proposition (a) *that o is red* is distinct from the propositions (b) *that o is red and o is self-identical* and (c) *that o is red and 1st-order arithmetic is incomplete*, and that one may stand in the affirmation, judgment, or belief relations to (a) without standing in those relations to (b) and (c), but one cannot stand in those relations to (b) or (c) without standing in them to (a).

(x)   that the proposition *that Cicero shaved himself*, represents Cicero as having the property *being a self-shaver*, and so is distinct from the proposition *that Cicero shaved Cicero*, even though the same are true in the same metaphysically and epistemically possible world-states.

(xi)   That the propositions *that Russell sought to prove that arithmetic is reducible to logic* and *that Russell sought to prove logicism* are different – since the latter can be asserted or believed by someone who doesn't believe or assert the former – even though they represent precisely the same things as being precisely the same ways, and hence have identical truth conditions.

(xii)   that the points just made in (xi) also hold for the propositions *that I wrote this chapter* and *that Scott Soames wrote this chapter*.

In taking (i – xii) to be facts, I am not claiming that they are the contents of privileged *intuitions* that must, if at all possible, be preserved by theories of propositions. As far as I can see, few, if any, of our strongly held pretheoretic convictions are so privileged. Rather, what are often called *intuitions* are things we strongly believe, frequently but not always with good reason, prior to conscious theorizing of the sort found in logic, philosophy, linguistics, or psychology. For this reason, it makes considerable sense that we should seek to preserve and explain most of them, while being ready to revise some of them when necessary

This is the background against which one should judge pretheoretically surprising identifications of propositions with one or another class of entities. Since the explanations provided by the theory I have sketched seem superior to those provided by other theories, I judge it to be more likely to be correct than they are. According to it, propositions are, very roughly, *ways of thinking, conceiving, or perceiving things to be*. Although this doesn't sound terribly surprising or counterintuitive, it becomes so when one becomes more specific – identifying propositions with cognitive acts (in which case they become a species of things done) or with the event types in which one performs those acts (in which case they become a species of things that happen). It is true that both of these claims sound jarring at first. However, the unreflective opinion that propositions can be neither things we do nor things that happen is not sacrosanct and may itself be due either to a failure to theorize, or to a tendency to do so incorrectly.

It may also be true that any theory of propositions that leads to plausible explanations of facts like those illustrated by (i-xii) will lead to jarring surprises of its own. Since we are not in a position to rule this out in advance, we must not hobble ourselves by prohibiting surprises of the sort that I am willing to accept, or that those of my co-authors are. As I see it, success in our common enterprise will be success in identifying what agents have been referring to all along when speaking of propositions, and what properties they have ascribed to these entities when

characterizing them as having been asserted or believed, or as having truth conditions – even if little of the theoretical detail about what these entities are, or how precisely we or they manage to represent the world, is something we are in a position to know without careful theory construction.[19]