

Introduction

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Increasingly, beginning in the 1970's and 1980's, many philosophers of language found themselves in a difficult situation.

On the one hand, many came to believe that, in order to do semantics properly, as well as to give an adequate treatment of the attitudes, one needed to posit certain entities — propositions — which could be the meanings of sentences (relative to contexts), the contents of mental states, and the primary bearers of truth and falsity. However, many — largely due to the arguments of Scott Soames¹ — also came to distrust the standard theoretical account of the nature of propositions, which treated them as sets of worlds, and came to think of them instead as structured entities of some sort.

However, there was no consensus about what these structured entities could be. A standard way of talking around the problem was to point out that propositions could be represented as ordered pairs. But it is pretty plain that this is *just* a way of talking around the problem — to say that propositions can be represented as ordered pairs is not to say what they are. The unsatisfactory situation persisted.

Jeff King's 2007 book, *The Nature and Structure of Content*, had a decisive impact on this situation, in two ways. First, it made clear just *how* unsatisfactory the situation was, by stating the desiderata on a theory of propositions — desiderata which thinking of propositions as ordered pairs, for instance, plainly did not meet. Second, and perhaps more important, it made clear that the situation did not have to *remain* unsatisfactory: the book presented a novel view of propositions which both provided a clear metaphysical account of their nature, and made the case that propositions, so understood, could play the roles for which philosophers of language and mind wanted them in the first place. It made clear that progress on the question of the nature of the proposition, the question which so puzzled Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein, is possible. This book is a contribution to the ongoing discussion to which King's book, as well as the work of others, gave rise.

The three co-authors of this book agree on the views which led to the unsatisfactory situation described above. The aim of the first Part of the book is to make the case for this constellation of views, in two ways: first, by arguing that we need propositions in our accounts of language and the mind, and in our semantic theories; and, second, to show that traditional accounts of propositions — the classical theories of Frege and Russell, and the view of propositions as sets of possible worlds — are not up to the task.

There, the agreement ends. In Part II, each of us lays out and defends his favored theory of propositions. King elaborates and refines his view of propositions as facts; Soames extends his view (first defended in his 2010 book, *What is Meaning?*) of propositions as cognitive event types; and I defend the view that propositions are a kind of property. The essays in Part III criticize the views defended in Part II; and in Part IV each of us presents some further thoughts on the task of giving a theory of propositions.

¹ See especially Soames (1988).