

A sketch of two theories of propositions

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Jeff Speaks

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- The words and phrases that make up a sentence have contents; these contents are their contribution to the proposition expressed by the sentence. (Normally this will have to be relativized to a context of utterance — ignore this for simplicity.)
- The syntactic form of the sentence also makes a semantic contribution to the proposition expressed: one way to think about this is as a relation which holds between the contents of the words in the sentence. This relation will have some close connection to ‘instructions’ like King’s instantiation function: it will tell us what it takes for a sentence of this syntactic form to be true in the language in question. For our purposes we can think of syntactic forms as being as simple as ‘name concatenated with a monadic predicate.’ This form, in English, contributes some relation closely tied to the function from objects, properties, and words to truth-values which returns the value true iff the object has the property at that world.
- This has the advantage, relative to King’s view, of not tying the existence of propositions to the existence of sentences which express them, which seems bad for a number of reasons. It also seems more natural, since on this sort of view the syntactic form of a sentence functions in a way analogous to a word: it contributes something other than itself to the proposition expressed.
- Because propositions are a matter of a relation holding between the contents of the words which compose the sentence, propositions are a kind of relational fact. This kind of view should be compatible with any view about the meanings of words and phrases (Fregeanism, Russellianism, etc.).
- If you think that facts are structured things, then you should think of the relationship between propositions and word meanings in the same way that you think of the relationship between facts and their constituents. If you do not think that facts are structured things, then you should think of the relationship between propositions and word meanings however you think of the relationship between, e.g., Bob and the fact that Bob is tall.

If you don't think that there are such things as facts, you should probably find a different view of propositions.

- The difference between these two views of relational facts — structured or not — shouldn't matter too much for questions about the individuation of propositions. On either view we can ask whether the proposition expressed by 'Hesperus is pretty' is the same as the one expressed by 'Phosphorus is pretty.' And on either view it seems that you should say yes iff you think that 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' have the same content. On either view we can ask questions about what the content of a given word, or sort of word, is. One view will be happy saying that these contents are the constituents of propositions and the other will not, but they both assign to these contents pretty much the same role.
- A problem for this sort of view is that it is not obvious how to describe what the relevant relation contributed by syntax, or the resultant fact, are. This is a disadvantage relative to King's view.
- One way around this view is to think of propositions as complex properties, rather than as facts. Then, intuitively, what is contributed by the syntax of a simple predication is something like the three-place relation expressed by '___ is such that ___ instantiates ___' which holds between a world, an object, and a property. In the case of the sentence 'Rebecca swims', the contents of the name and predicate fill in the second two slots to deliver the monadic property of worlds expressed by '___ is such that Rebecca instantiates the property of swimming.'
- This view has the advantage that it has a kind of built-in connection to truth at a world: a proposition is true at a world iff the world instantiates that proposition. It also doesn't rely on unexplained relations in the manner of the facts view sketched above.
- Not sure about how the issue about constituents maps on to the properties view. A natural first thought is that it's pretty much the same as in the case of the facts view: either someone who thinks that the property of being such that Rebecca swims has Rebecca as a constituent, or someone that doesn't, can adopt the view so long as they have views about the individuation of properties which make the view plausible.
- As above there is a commitment to believing that there are properties like being such that Rebecca instantiates the property of swimming. This seems to involve believing in uninstantiated properties, since there are some propositions instantiated by (true at) no world. This connects to issues about whether there are impossible as well as possible worlds, and how to think about what they are.