Canadian Journal of Philosophy

Propositions and higher-order attitude attributions

Kirk Ludwig[a]

[a] Philosophy Department, Indiana University, 026 Sycamore Hall, Bloomington, IN, 47405-7005,
Published online: 26 Mar 2014.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Propositions and higher-order attitude attributions

Kirk Ludwig*

Philosophy Department, Indiana University, 026 Sycamore Hall, Bloomington, IN, 47405-7005

An important objection to sententialist theories of attitude reports is that they cannot accommodate the principle that one cannot know that someone believes that p without knowing what it is that he believes. This paper argues that a parallel problem arises for propositionalist accounts that has gone largely unnoticed, and that, furthermore, the usual resources for the propositionalist do not afford an adequate solution. While non-standard solutions are available for the propositionalist, it turns out that there are parallel solutions that are available for the sententialist. Since the difficulties raised seem to show that the mechanism by which sentential complements serve to inform us about attitudes and about sentence meaning does not depend on their referring to propositions, this casts doubt on whether talk of propositions should retain a significant theoretical role in the enterprise of understanding thought, language and communication.

Keywords: propositions; sententialism; propositional attitude reports; semantics; modes of presentation

—But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language? — If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty. — No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

§293 *Philosophical Investigations*

1. Introduction

In a tradition that stretches back to Frege and Russell, propositions have been taken to be abstract, structured sentence meanings that represent intrinsically and are the timeless bearers of truth-values. In virtue of this they are supposed to play their various roles in our theories of thought and meaning. They are (said to be) the referents of names ('Verificationism'), and demonstratives ('That's unusual'), the values of variables ('Some mathematical hypotheses may never be proven'), the bearers of modal properties ('That there is a greatest prime is impossible'), the meanings of declarative sentences ('"Snow is white" means that snow is white'),

*Email: ludwig@indiana.edu

and the objects of assertion, belief, and other attitudes ('I've sometimes believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast'). In this tradition, propositions are explanatorily fundamental. They represent intrinsically. They are that from which everything else that represents inherits its representational powers. They are grasped through a sui generis intellectual faculty. Recent objections have cast doubt on whether anything could play all of the roles traditionally identified for propositions, and especially whether as abstracta they can represent intrinsically (Jubien 2001). Defenders have still sought to retain them for at least many of their traditional roles without having them take up the burden of being explanatorily prior to thought and language (King 2007; Soames 2010; Hanks 2011). When we depose propositions from their traditional central explanatory role, the question arises whether they need to play any explanatory role in our understanding of thought and language. I have argued elsewhere that there is no need to invoke propositions in semantic theory, nor any point in doing so (Ludwig 2002; Lepore and Ludwig 2005; Lepore and Ludwig 2006; Lepore and Ludwig 2011, 2007). There is no need since a compositional semantics can be given without invoking propositions as part of the ontology of the theory. There is no point because a recursive assignment of propositions to sentences on the basis of assignments of their constituents to subsentential expressions does not *in itself* give us any insight into how to interpret of the sentences. We need a mode of referring to or denoting the propositions assigned that codes for sentences of a language we already understand. Once that is recognized, and that propositions are not essential to the recursive machinery required for the effect, they are correctly seen as the fifth wheel of semantics, turning endlessly but contributing only the illusion of progress. I will not repeat these arguments, but turn to what may seem to be the last legitimate role for propositions in semantics, namely, as part of the ontology of everyday language, things we treat our terms as referring to, or denoting, by way of various names or descriptions, and by way of the sentential complements of verbs and operators that create intensional contexts. In this paper, I restrict attention to propositions as the referents or denotations of sentential complements in attitude and indirect discourse reports (henceforth 'attitude reports'). I will advance a skeptical thesis about propositions in this connection. I will not argue that propositions are not the referents of sentential complements in attitude reports, but I will argue that they do not have the advantage, as many have thought, over the view that sentential complements refer not to propositions expressed by sentences encoded in sentential complements, but to those sentences understood relative to the context, that is to say, sententialism about attitude attributions.

The initial brief for propositions being the referents or denotations of sentential complements in these contexts is that we can report what people say and think indifferently in any suitably rich language. Sententialists about attitude reports aim to show that this is not an obstacle to taking the sentential complements to refer to sentences provided that we are sophisticated enough about how we tell the story about the relation between the semantic properties of the complement sentence in the context of use and the state or utterance of the person we are reporting about, and are

reasonably sophisticated about the point of translation. I have written about some of these matters in earlier work (Ludwig and Ray 1998). I focus here though on a particularly important objection introduced originally by Stephen Schiffer in his 1987 book *Remnants of Meaning*, and repeated, in more trenchant form, in his 2003 book *The Things We Mean*, which he suggests is insurmountable. The objection focuses on problems that emerge in higher-order attitude attributions (§3). I will call this the Higher-order Attitude Objection. This is an objection to which I think there has been no completely adequate response to date. What I want to do is to show that a parallel puzzle arises for the propositionalist. I think that the usual resources for the propositionalist fall short, for interesting reasons, which have not been generally noticed. In particular, I argue that the usual appeal to something in the ballpark of a Fregean mode of presentation of a proposition must meet two requirements. It must present its object in a way that is constitutively sufficient for grasping its object, and it must be plausible to assign it to sentential complements of attitude reports. I argue that it is implausible that anything satisfies the first requirement and that in any case nothing can simultaneously satisfy both, because anything that satisfies the first must make the appearance of the sentence in the complement inessential to how they work in the language, but it is in fact essential. That is not the end of the story, but once we see what further solutions are available, we can see that analogous solutions are available for the sententialist. The nature of the solution and the parallels for the sententialist help us to see the cash value of talk of propositions. The positive solution for the sententialist shows, in any case, that we do not need propositions to understand how higher-order attitude attributions do the work that they do for us. At the end of the day, propositions seem not to do much explanatory work, even in this more limited role, for a reason that is connected with their dispensability in semantic theory, or so I shall argue.

In §2, I sketch a sententialist account and highlight certain features of it. In §3, I develop the Higher-order Attitude Objection. In §4, I show that it is not resolved by treating propositions as the referents of sentential complements. In §5, I consider mode of presentation responses in the context of a traditional Fregean theory, Jeff King's (2007) neo-Russellian account, which derives the structure of propositions from the LF structures of sentences that express them, and the Hanks-Soames Cognitive Realist approach (Hanks 2011; Soames 2010), which identifies propositions with structured cognitive event types. In §6, I sketch a solution that focuses on the relation of propositions to attitude characterized. In §7, I consider approaches that bite the bullet and offer a pragmatic explanation of the intuitions that give rise to the problem. In §8, I show that the sententialist has responses that parallel those for the propositionalist. In §9, I draw some morals.

2. A sententialist theory

Sententialist theories treat attitude verbs as relating their subjects to sentences.[1] For example, in [1], 'that the earth moves' is treated as designating the contained sentence.[2]

[1]   Galileo believed that the earth moves.

Thus, where 'φ' ranges over sentences of English, the general rule is given in [R].

[R] $(\forall\phi)(\text{Ref}(\ulcorner \text{that } \phi \urcorner) = \phi)$.

Then [1] is given context relative truth conditions, as in (1a), where '*u*' is a variable ranging over speakers, '*s*' over states, '*t*' and '*t′*' over times, and '*t′ < t*' means '*t′* is earlier than *t*' (henceforth I will suppress the universal quantifiers for '*u*' and '*t*').

[1a] $(\forall u)(\forall t)$('Galileo believed that the earth moves' is true taken as if spoken by *u* at *t* iff $(\exists t': t' < t)(\exists s)$(*s* is a belief state of Galileo at *t′* and interpreted relative to *u* at *t* that the earth moves indicates-the-content-of *s*)).

The quantifier over states is motivated independently by the need to handle adverbs such as 'firmly' on analogy with adverbs for event verbs.[3] I abbreviate '*s* is at *t* a belief state of *x*' as 'belief(*s, t, x*)'. I abbreviate 'is true taken as if spoken by *u* at *t*' as 'is true(*u, t*)'. An attitude report is first-order if its complement sentence is not an attitude report. It is second-order if its complement sentence is first-order, and so on. The relation expressed by '*x* interpreted relative to *u* at *t* indicates-the-content-of *y*' in the first-order case requires that *x* have the same representational content as *y*. The story is more complicated for higher-order attributions. See (Ludwig 1998, 148–150) for details. I abbreviate 'indicates-the-content-of' as ' ≅ ', and further abbreviate 'interpreted relative to *u* at *t* that the earth moves ≅ *s*' as ' ≅ (*s*, that the earth moves, *u, t*)'. [1a] may then be rewritten as [1b].

[1b]   'Galileo believed that the earth moves' is true(*u, t*) iff $(\exists t': t' < t)(\exists s)$(belief(*s, t′*, Galileo) and ≅ (*s*, that the earth moves, *u, t*)).

The expression 'that the earth moves' refers to a sentence but its semantic function is not exhausted by the fact that it refers to 'the earth moves' as in the case of the classical account of quotation names, for it has a feature quotation names lack. One can understand a quotation name without understanding the expression it names.[4] However, one cannot understand the noun phrase 'that the earth moves' unless one understands 'the earth moves'. For its function in the language depends on auditors understanding the embedded sentence, even though this does not figure in the truth conditions. For example,

        'La Terre si muove' in Italian means that the earth moves

is true just in case the complement sentence means the same as 'La Terre si muove', but it fails in its purpose if the auditor fails to understand the complement sentence. Uses of quotation marks to represent dialogue in a novel, or to indicate that one is quoting another's words, function similarly. This ensures that one cannot understand (1) without understanding the complement sentence and so being in a position to know what Galileo believes.

Most objections to sententialism have been answered.[5] I draw attention to one relevant to the discussion below, namely, that sententialist analyses fail the Church-Langford translation test, according to which the translation of the analysans must be the analysis of the translation of the analysandum (Church 1950). The charge is that translation preserves reference, but the analysis of the English sentence, 'Galileo said that the earth moves', for example, refers to an English sentence, while the analysis of the Italian translation, 'Galileo detto che la Terra si muove', refers to an Italian sentence. By now it is well-known that this objection relies on a false assumption, namely, that translation, in the ordinary sense in which it is accepted that 'Galileo detto che la Terra si muove' translates 'Galileo said that the earth moves', invariably preserves the referents of referring terms. Tyler Burge made this point long ago (1978). He observed that in translating sentences such as 'This sentence is false', and in translation of dialogue, the purposes of translation often require translations that do not preserve the referents of referring terms. The case of the translation of dialogue is an especially apt. We use direct rather than indirect speech in reporting dialogue. To report correctly we must report the actual words spoken. Yet in translation we substitute the best translation of the quoted material because the function of the original in its linguistic setting requires understanding the mentioned expressions. In ordinary translation practice preserving that function trumps preservation of reference. The point extends to attitude reports, for if the sententialist is right, conveying the content of an attitude is achieved by way of reference to a particular sentence, understood in context. Preservation of the main function requires a similar reflexive reference to a sentence in the target language, and so a shift of reference.

3. Higher-order attitude attributions and the insurmountable objection

Schiffer's objection to sententialism is that that it fails to secure a principle that any adequate account of attitude reports must underwrite, namely, that one cannot know that someone believes that *p* without knowing what it is that he believes (Schiffer 2003, 47):

> . . . while each version of sententialism will have its own unique flaws, there is one they all share, and I doubt that it is surmountable. A theorist who eschews contents in favour of things that merely have content must say that a person will believe one of those things S just in case she is in a belief state that has the same content as S. For example, if believing that the earth moves is standing in the belief relation to the sentence 'the earth moves', then my utterance of 'Galileo believed that the earth moves' will be true just in case Galileo was in a belief state whose content matched that of 'the earth moves'. The problem every sententialist account of propositional attitudes confronts comes to this for the example at hand: no one can know that Galileo believed that the earth moves without knowing *what Galileo believed,* the content of his belief, but one (e.g., a monolingual speaker of Hungarian) can know that Galileo was in a belief state whose content was the same as the content of 'the earth moves' without having any idea of what Galileo believed, of the content of his belief.

We can spell this out in reference to sentences [1]–[4]. We stipulate that Zoltán is a monolingual speaker of Hungarian. We consider a particular time T and speaker Σ to fix contextual parameters.

[1] Galileo believed that the earth moves.

[2] Zoltán knows that Galileo believed that the earth moves.

[3] $(\exists t': t' < \text{T})(\exists s)(\text{belief}(s, t', \text{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s, \text{that the earth moves}, \Sigma, \text{T}))$.

[4] Zoltán knows that $(\exists t': t' < \text{T})(\exists s)(\text{belief}(s, t', \text{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s, \text{'the earth moves'}, \Sigma, \text{T}))$.

Zoltán is told (in Hungarian) and thereby comes to know that [∗].

[∗] $(\exists t': t' < \text{T})(\exists s)(\text{belief}(s, t', \text{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s, \text{'the earth moves'}, \Sigma, \text{T}))$.

Prior to this he has never been told, or otherwise learned, that Galileo believed that the earth moves.

Imagine token utterances of [1]–[4], which we refer to below with these labels, by Σ at T. Let us use the expression 'expresses the same thing as' as holding between two token utterances (or two sentences or a token utterance and a sentence) just in case it would be appropriate to say that they express the same proposition.[6] Then the argument against [3] correctly analyzing of an utterance of [1] goes as follows (to avoid confusion, I use numerals without brackets to refer to premises).

1. If [3] is the analysis of [1], then [4] expresses the same thing as [2].
2. If [4] expresses the same thing as [2], then [2] is true iff [4] is true.
3. [4] is true, though [2] is not.
4. Therefore, by 2 & 3, [4] does not express the same thing as [2].
5. Therefore, by 1 & 4, [3] is not the analysis of [1].

Premise 3 is true because [4] reports the new knowledge that Zoltán acquires when he is told [∗], but it does not seem, intuitively speaking, that learning what [∗] expresses is sufficient for him to learn that Galileo believed that the earth moves, and he has not otherwise learned that.

As it stands, the argument is unsound. On the sententialist analysis, [4] does not express the same thing as [2], and so premise 1 is false. The analysis of [2] is [5]. However, the analysis of [4] is [6].

[5] $(\exists s)(\text{knowledge}(s, \text{T}, \text{Zoltán})$ and $\cong (s, \text{that Galileo believed that the earth moves}, \Sigma, \text{T}))$.

[6] $(\exists s)(\text{knowledge}(s, \text{T}, \text{Zoltán})$ and $\cong (s, \text{that } (\exists t': t' < \text{T})(\exists s)(\text{belief}(s, t, \text{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s, \text{'the earth moves'}, \Sigma, \text{T})), \Sigma, \text{T}))$.

Since [7] $\neq$ [8] (that is, the complements are not the same),

[7] that Galileo believed that the earth moves.

[8] that $(\exists t': t' < \text{T})(\exists s)(\text{belief}(s, t', \text{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s, \text{'the earth moves'}, \Sigma, \text{T}))$.

[2] and [4] do not express the same thing, for they refer to different sentences.

Unfortunately, this is only a temporary solace for the sententialist. For if what [7] and [8] refer to (the embedded sentences), taken relative to Σ and T, express the same thing, then [5] is true iff [6] is true, and [6] is true iff [4] is true, and, hence, [2] is true iff [4] is true. The argument then can be repaired as follows.

1. If [3] is the analysis of [1], then [5] is the analysis of [2].
2. If [5] is the analysis of [2], then [2] is true iff [5] is true.
3. What [7] refers to expresses the same thing as what [8] refers to.
4. If what [7] refers to expresses the same thing as what [8] refers to, then [5] is true iff [6] is true.
5. If [3] is the analysis of [1], then [6] is the analysis of [4].
6. If [6] is the analysis of [4], then [4] is true iff [6] is true.
7. Therefore, by 1–6, if [3] is the analysis of [1], [2] is true iff [4] is true.
8. [4] is true though [2] is false.
9. Therefore, by 7 & 8, [3] is not the analysis of [1].

We return to the objection to sententialism in §8. Before we do, I want to ask whether the propositionalist is any better off. I begin with a straightforward account, on which complements of attitude reports are treated as directly inserting the proposition they pick out into the proposition expressed by the embedding sentence, where the problem shows up immediately. Then I turn to what the propositionalist can to say to avoid the difficulty.

4. Direct reference to propositions in higher-order attitude attributions

The propositionalist treats expressions of the form 'that p' as referring to or denoting propositions rather than sentences. For now I assume that 'that p' simply introduces into the proposition expressed by the sentence containing it the proposition expressed by 'p' in use. This is expressed in the follow reference rule.

[R′] $(\forall\phi)(\forall u)(\forall t)(\forall x)(x$ is the proposition expressed by u's use at t of ϕ in ⌜that ϕ⌝ iff Ref(⌜that ϕ⌝, u, t) $= x$).

The relativization to speaker, time and use of the sentence is required to handle context sensitivity. While the referent is given relative to a description, all that is introduced into a proposition containing the term is the proposition it refers to. In this respect, it functions like Kaplan's 'dthat[the F]' (Kaplan 1989). We can then analyze [1] as [1c].

[1c]   'Galileo believed that the earth moves' is true(u, t) iff $(\exists t': t' < t)(\exists s)$ (belief(s, t', Galileo) and $\cong$ (s, Ref(that the earth moves, u, t))).

Since 'that the earth moves' is a referring term, the question arises how it is that someone who is told 'Galileo believed that the earth moves' knows what Galileo believed, for he must not only grasp the proposition that Galileo is being related to but also know that it is that proposition he grasps that Galileo is being related

to. The answer is that he understands the sentence used to pick out the proposition. Since the rule determining the referent of the complement goes by way of the embedded sentence, and we understand the sentence in understanding the complement, if we understand 'that the earth moves', then we know what proposition it picks out in a way that guarantees that we both grasp it and know that as grasped it is what 'that the earth moves' picks out. Thus, no one can understand [1] without knowing in the relevant sense what it is that Galileo is said to believe.

Now we develop an argument against the propositionalist parallel to the argument against the sententialist. For simplicity, I assume that 'that the earth moves' is not context sensitive. This allows us to discharge the relativized reference clause in [1c]. First we observe that if [3′] gives the interpretive truth condition for [1], as it does according to [1c], then it would seem that [5′] gives the interpretive truth condition for [2].

[1] Galileo believed that the earth moves.

[2] Zoltán knows that Galileo believed that the earth moves.

[3′] $(\exists t': t' < \mathrm{T})(\exists s)($belief$(s, t', \mathrm{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s,$ that the earth moves$)$

[4′] Zoltán knows that $(\exists t': t' < \mathrm{T})(\exists s)($belief$(s, t', \mathrm{Galileo})$ and $\cong$ $(s,$ dthat(the proposition expressed in English by 'the earth moves'$)))$.

[5′] Zoltán knows that $(\exists t': t' < \mathrm{T})(\exists s)($belief$(s, t', \mathrm{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s,$ that the earth moves$))$.

[7′] $(\exists t': t' < \mathrm{T})(\exists s)($belief$(s, t', \mathrm{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s,$ that the earth moves$))$.

[8′] $(\exists t': t' < \mathrm{T})(\exists s)($belief$(s, t', \mathrm{Galileo})$ and $\cong (s,$ dthat(the proposition expressed in English by 'the earth moves'$)))$.

[9] That the earth moves $=$ dthat(the proposition expressed in English by 'the earth moves').

[7′] and [8′] are the embedded clauses in [4′] and [5′] respectively. [9] is underwritten by [R′]. Now consider Zoltán again. Zoltán does not know (we want to say) that Galileo believed that the earth moves. Suppose, however, Zoltán is told, in Hungarian, and comes to know on that basis what [8′] expresses. This then gives us [4′]. Since [9] is true, [7′] and [8′] express the same proposition. Thus, [5′] follows from [4′], and [2] from [5′], if [1c] provides the interpretive truth conditions for 'Galileo believed that the earth moves'. However, we agreed that in the circumstances [2] was false. By the same token, then, this propositionalist analysis of attitude reports is incorrect. Let us now lay out the argument in a way that shows the parallel with the argument against the sententialist.

1′. If [3′] is the analysis of [1], then [5′] is the analysis of [2].

2′. If [5′] is the analysis of [2], then [2] is true iff [5′] is true.

3′. [7′] expresses the same thing as [8′].

4′. If [7′] expresses the same thing as [8′], then [4′] is true iff [5′] is true.

5′. Therefore (by 1′–4′), if [3′] is the analysis of [1], [2] is true iff [4′] is true.

6′. [4′] is true though [2] is false.

7′. Therefore (by 5′ & 6′), [3′] is not the analysis of [1].1′–4′ here correspond to 1–4 in the argument at the end of §3, while 5′–7′ correspond to 7–9 in that argument. The three basic options for the propositionalist are to reject premise 3′, 4′ or 6′. We take up each in turn.

5. The modes of presentation response

Rejecting premise 3′ requires denying that 'that the earth moves' and 'dthat(the proposition expressed in English by 'the earth moves')' contribute the same to what propositions are expressed by sentences containing them in corresponding argument places, at least in attitude contexts. It is natural to say that the solution lies simply in explaining what more 'that the earth moves' contributes than barely the proposition it designates. This turns out to be less promising than it initially looks. I will consider resources for rejecting 3′ available in three sorts of theories of propositions: (a) traditional Fregean theories, (b) neo-Russellian views that treat propositions as a certain sort of abstraction over sentences (King 2007), and (c) views that treat propositions as complex cognitive act types (Soames 2010; Hanks 2011). The Fregean response faces two, I think ultimately insurmountable, difficulties, and there are, I will argue, versions of one or the other or both of these difficulties for each the other views I take up.

(a)   Fregean Theories

First, we consider a Fregean approach on which 'that *p*' following an attitude verb contributes to the proposition expressed by the containing sentence not the proposition it refers to but *a mode of presentation* of the proposition.

What is the relevant mode of presentation? It is natural to say that it is given by the description 'the proposition expressed by "*p*" in English' (why else is the sentence there?). This won't do, however, because it would involve Zoltán believing [8″].

[8″] $(\exists t': t' < T)(\exists s)(\text{belief}(s, t', \text{Galileo}) \text{ and } \cong (s, \text{the proposition expressed by 'the earth moves' in English}))$.

It is clear that if he does not understand English, this will give him no insight into what Galileo believes in the relevant sense, and the fact that the proposition is in part about the English sentence 'the earth moves' means that the propositionalist is saddled with the problems he charges the sententialist with besides.

The Fregean needs, for every proposition *p*, (i) a mode of presentation of *p* grasp of which *guarantees grasp of the proposition,* which (ii) plausibly can be said to be *the sense of expressions of the form 'that p'*. Can anything do the job? I believe that it is doubtful that anything satisfies the first requirement and that even if there were something that did, it could not simultaneously satisfy the second.[7]

Is there a knockdown argument against the claim that there are Fregean modes of presentation of propositions grasp of which suffices for grasping the propositions they present? I do not know that I can give one. But I think we can

raise some serious doubts about it. A mode of presentation of an object, on the classical Fregean view, is distinct from its object, if any. It is one way among others of presenting it. In general, having any sort of epistemic attitude toward the object of a mode of presentation (assuming it exists) is not required to have the mode of presentation of it. Grasp of the mode of presentation is one thing. Standing in any relation to its object other than thereby thinking about it (if it exists) is another. Some objects of modes of presentation are themselves graspable: concepts and propositions. But still grasp of a mode of presentation of such an object is logically distinct and independent from grasp of its object. If grasp of the mode of presentation is logically independent of grasp of its object (if any), then it can occur without grasp of what it presents. In this case, one could grasp whatever Fregean proposition is expressed by [1] without knowing in the relevant sense what Galileo believed. What it seems that we need is a mode of presentation that at the same time functions like Russellian acquaintance is supposed to function, so that nothing about the essential nature of the object presented (its representational properties in particular) would remain hidden from the person to whom it is so presented. But Russellian acquaintance, itself not entirely unmysterious, is in any case supposed to be direct and unmediated. That is what distinguishes it from thinking of an object via a mode of presentation. Thus, it seems that the Fregean requires something that has one nature and another incompatible with it.[8]

The Fregean must deny, for at least one class of modes of presentation of objects that are themselves graspable, that one can grasp the mode of presentation without grasping the object that it presents. The grasp of the mode of presentation must be logically dependent on grasp of the object presented, and as presented by that mode of presentation (so that as grasped one knows it as the object of the mode of presentation). One might insist that there are such modes of presentation and that our mistake is to try to think of how the object is presented separately from grasping it. They are, it might be said, primitive, fundamental, unanalyzable, and sui generis. One might insist on this precisely because it is what the Fregean needs and because one is committed to the Fregean view. But at this point, it is a 'we know not what.' We have been told nothing about it except that it is a thing that plays a certain role. So far as that goes, there might be many things that could play that role. If so, which of them do we attach to that-clauses? We have, I submit, no positive idea about what this could be, and so no way of answering whether there would be one or many, or what one is actually attached to sentential complements.[9]

That a theory needs something to play a role that we are hard pressed to make sense of and of which we have no positive idea would provide us with a reason to think it existed only if either (i) there were no other way to understand how we can think about thoughts while entertaining them or (ii) there was no other way to understand how we can understand what thoughts are attributed to others (in the relevant sense) than by an abstract mode of presentation of them that constitutively guaranteed grasp of its object. With respect to (i), however, there is another way: by entertaining a thought and at the same time thinking about it,

where entertaining the thought is primary, and thinking about it is a reflexive attitude toward the thought one is already entertaining. The manner by which we think about the thought does not have to secure grasp of its content because thinking it already suffices. So the fact that we can think about thoughts whose contents at the same time we grasp does not show that there is anything that satisfies the needs of the Fregean. With respect to (ii), there is also another way, namely, by using a vehicle for referring to the proposition that incidentally to how it secures its referent ensures that one grasps the referent (as the referent). This is, in fact, the way sentential complements actually seem to function, by using a sentence we understand to draw attention to a proposition, i.e., the one the sentence we understand expresses.[10]

One could, if one liked, call the act of thinking about a thought which one is at the same time thinking and so whose content one thereby grasps a 'mode of presentation' of it. But we might as well say that grasp of a mode of presentation of an instance of walking can suffice for walking because we can define the act of thinking about a walking which one is at the same time engaging in as a special 'mode of presentation' of it. Try attaching this mode of presentation of a walking to an expression by convention. It presents only a single walking and only the walker (its agent) could grasp it, and so it fails the test of intersubjectivity. In any case, it is evident that this tells us nothing interesting about a connection between ways of thinking about things and their occurrence, or, mutatis mutandis, about ways of thinking about things and understanding them.

Turning to the next point, even if there were such a thing as a mode of presentation grasp of which guaranteed grasp of its graspable object, it could not plausibly be thought to be the sense of expressions of the form 'that *p*'. For if it were, it would make the appearance of '*p*' in 'that *p*' an accident of spelling. The point is not that the Fregean could not choose to assign the relevant mode of presentation to '*p*'. The Fregean can choose to assign the relevant mode of presentation to any expression. The point is that, for that very reason, it would not be necessary on the Fregean view. It is dispensable. There could be no objection to replacing 'that the earth moves' with, say, 'Bob', attaching the relevant sense to it by stipulation.[11] However, it is obvious that it is crucial (nondispensable) to the way 'that *p*' fulfills its function that '*p*' appears in it. Moreover, it is crucial that we understand the words that appear there in their usual sense for the complement to inform us in the relevant way about what someone believes (etc.).[12] Contrast 'John accepts Logicism' with 'John accepts that mathematics is reducible to logic'. The mechanism by which the latter directs our attention to the right proposition is as the proposition the sentence expresses (in use), and our understanding the sentence is likewise crucial to our coming to see (in the relevant sense) what John accepts.

It is hardly an accident that we use a sentence (in the context) alike in content to the state we are attributing. From the design standpoint, it is an obvious device to use in specifying attitude contents. The sentence itself, and our understanding of it, then, should play a role in our understanding of what proposition is

designated by a complement of the form 'that *p*', if we take 'that *p*' to refer to propositions. But the most straightforward way of implementing this in a mode of presentation, as we have seen, leaves us with the problem of higher-order attitude attributions. We want the sentence somehow to play its role as an anchor for reference to a proposition without it or its constituents being thought about. But since the role is one in a mode of presentation, this is impossible.

(b) Propositions as Abstractions over Sentences.

It might be thought that more recent theories of propositions provide additional resources. With this in mind, let's turn to Jeff King's theory of structured propositions (King 2007, ch. 2). King's account is Russellian in spirit. It accepts structured propositions that contain as constituents properties, relations and individuals. However, it rejects the tradition assumption that propositions have their representational properties independently of and prior to language and thought. Instead, King sees propositions as deriving both their structure and representational properties from sentences and their users. In particular, King holds propositions to be a certain species of fact about there being sentences with certain syntactic structures in some actual language whose constituent expressions have certain semantic values in some possible context and whose structures encode in the language semantic information about the relation among the constituents that determines under what conditions the sentences are true. The idea is that two sentences relative to any two languages (ignoring context for now) that are to 'express the same proposition' each suffice to witness the relevant fact, which thereby captures what is common to all sentences that express the same proposition. The structure of a proposition is derived from a common LF structure (logical form) of the sentences that witness it. Such facts are to represent not intrinsically, but in virtue of speakers treating them as representing, thus reversing the traditional direction of explanation. We can call these k-propositions. For our purposes what is important is the idea is that the constituents of [7′] and [8′], 'that the earth moves' and 'dthat(the proposition expressed by "the earth moves")', respectively, do not contribute the same thing to the propositions expressed by each because 'that the earth moves' is a term with internal structure that itself is relevant to the structure of the proposition expressed by the sentence in which it appears. This makes the appearance of the sentence in the complement crucial to the work it does. This is, in a certain respect, a Fregean move, since it has the effect of distinguishing 'ways of presenting propositions' when they are the subjects of propositions. The question is whether it can secure grasp of the k-proposition picked out and avoid explicit reference to a sentence or to the constituents of sentences.

Both of these are problems, but I will focus on the second, which is particularly salient for an approach like King's. We take 'that the earth moves' as our example. Let 'R' express the relevant syntactic relation between 'the earth' and 'moves' in 'the earth moves'. 'The earth' contributes its semantic value, the earth, to the proposition. The predicate 'moves' contributes the property of

moving. We'll ignore tense. Then what 'that the earth moves' refers to is:

[F] the fact that there is a sentence S, containing expressions e_1, e_2, in a language L, such that $R(e_1, e_2)$ in S in L, and in L the semantic value of e_1 is the earth, and the semantic value of e_2 is the property of moving, and $R(e_1, e_2)$ in L encodes the instantiation relation.

We say that $R(e_1, e_2)$ encodes the instantiation relation in L iff a sentence consisting of e_1 and e_2 in R is true in L iff the semantic value of e_1 instantiates the semantic value of e_2. What 'that the earth moves' has to do is to determine R and the semantic values of the expressions it relates. And this is where the trouble lies. For the only way it can do this is by providing a sample sentence with the right structure and words whose semantic values are the right one's in the right place in the structure. Identifying the right syntactic relation obviously must be done in relation to the sentence in the complement itself. In the case of the semantic values of the constituent expressions, one might think that we can construe the expressions as simply referring to their semantic values. This works for 'the earth', which simply contributes the earth. But 'moves' is not a name of a property, like 'Bob'. We know what property is its semantic value because we understand it. One might suggest that we can construe it to mean 'the property of moving' in this context. But the same problem arises here because it is not an accident of spelling that 'moving' appears in this description (cf. note 9). We understand the word, and that the property is to be the property it attributes, but the understanding that enables grasp of the referred to property does not enter into how the property is picked out. Thus, identifying the syntactic relation and the semantic values crucial for identifying the k-proposition requires reference to the sentence itself in the complement and constituents of it, and we are no better off than the sententialist.

(c) Cognitive Realism

Let's consider a second recent approach to propositions, developed independently by Scott Soames (2010) and Peter Hanks (2011). This approach takes propositions to be structured cognitive acts of predication and function application. It is motivated by the thought that our cognitive capacities are the ultimate source of the representational properties of sentences and propositions, which do not have their representational powers independently of their relations to us. In this respect, the approach is similar to King's. But it differs in treating propositions as independent of language. The proposition that Alfred is rich on this view would be the cognitive event type of predicating being rich of Alfred. Soames calls this the Cognitive Realist account (CR). Whatever its other virtues, I do not think that CR introduces anything new with respect to the present issue. The problem lies not with the kind of object one identifies propositions with, but with the mechanism by which the linguistic vehicles we use to pick them out do so. CR too must reject $3'$, $4'$, or $6'$. If it rejects $3'$, then it must maintain that 'that the earth moves' does not merely contribute its referent to the proposition

expressed by the containing sentence. What it contributes must be something, however, which enables the person who grasps the containing proposition to grasp the proposition it is about.

It might be thought that CR can secure this in a particularly neat way. For someone who grasps [1], repeated here,

[1]   Galileo believed that the earth moves.

will think the thought that the earth moves in doing so – since this is involved in understanding the complement – and so be acquainted with the proposition it refers to. Thus, it may seem that [1] expresses a proposition grasp of which guarantees grasp of the proposition it is about. Then there could not be any sentence that expressed the same proposition understanding of which did not afford grasp of the proposition to which it relates Galileo.

But the sententialist can make a parallel point: whoever understands [1] understands 'the earth moves', and so is in a position to say what it is that Galileo believes. This doesn't solve the problem for the sententialist because grasping the sentence that appears in the complement is incidental to how the complement refers. The rule that determines the referent makes use of properties of the sentential complement, but grasping the embedded sentence is incidental, and plays no role in how the referent is determined. The same goes whatever the referent is, whether a sentence or a proposition of whatever sort. The referent is located in relation to the sentence in the complement, as the sentence itself, or the proposition expressed by it, or a structure of things derived from the structure of the sentence and the meanings and referents of its parts, or the event type the grasp of which is integral to the understanding of the sentence. However this is spelled out, we will be able to talk about the features of the complement that the rule operates on without it conveying understanding of them. What we are seeking is again a mode of presentation of the proposition that guarantees grasp of it. But if the mode of presentation involves a relation to the sentence itself, we are no better off than the sententialist.

Is there not a further move to be made? The totality of the cognitive acts involved in understanding [1] involves grasp of the proposition to which Galileo is related as the proposition to which he is related. Let us identify the proposition expressed by [1] *with that type*. If grasp of a proposition expressed by [1] involves executing the totality of cognitive acts involved in understanding it, then any sentence which expresses that proposition is such that grasp of it involves grasp of the proposition to which Galileo is related as the proposition to which he is related. The trouble is that the *totality* of the cognitive acts involved in understanding [1] includes recognition of the expressions as English expressions with certain meanings. But then the translation of [1] into Hungarian will not on this account express the same proposition, since its understanding will involve recognition of expressions as Hungarian with certain meanings, not English expressions. Suppose that we identify the proposition with the totality of cognitive acts involved in thinking *what [1] expresses* rather than understanding

[1]. But our question was whether what [1] expresses suffices for grasp of the proposition to which it relates Galileo, and if so, how. So this is not a solution. We need to understand how it could express something grasp of which suffices for grasping the proposition it is about and without any essential reliance on reference to complement expressions. We need the same thing that the Fregean needed.

Do we not actually, however, think about what others think in a way that enables us to know in the relevant sense what it is that they think? Isn't this a proof that there are propositional constituents which are about propositions but which pick them out in a way that suffices for grasp of them? Yes, and no, respectively. We can think about what others think and know in the relevant sense what they are thinking, how they see the world, in doing so. But the mechanism is just to entertain the proposition itself while thinking about it as the one that gives the content of someone's thought. This is in fact the mechanism that sentential complements invoke. Using a sentence in a language one understands in the complement forces one to (as we say) entertain the proposition it expresses. But this is incidental to how it picks out the proposition. One's entertaining the proposition plays no role in locating the proposition to think about. What the complement adds to the content of [1] is what it contributes to determining the conditions under which it is true, namely, how it secures a proposition the embedding sentence is about. It is not a condition on referring to or designating a proposition that one entertain it, nor is any way of picking out a proposition *ipso facto* to entertain it.

This suggests a strategy, namely, to refer to a proposition at a time as the (or this) proposition one is thinking then. One succeeds in referring to a proposition only if one is in fact entertaining it. This respects the point that the way we have of presenting it does not itself suffice. But this can't be the right account of how 'that the earth moves' designates the proposition it does. It cannot be that for a speaker u and time t, a use of 'that the earth moves' designates the proposition the speaker is entertaining at t, for this does not constrain it to be the proposition expressed by the use of 'the earth moves' in 'that the earth moves'. But if we incorporate reference to the use of 'the earth moves' by saying that it designates the proposition u is thinking at t which is expressed by 'the earth moves', understood relative to u at t, then appeal to the proposition u is thinking at t is superfluous, and in any case we are no better off than the sententialist. In addition, relativizing it to the speaker guarantees only that the speaker entertains the proposition. But in application to [2], it is Zoltán whose entertaining of the proposition we are concerned with, not the person reporting what he knows.

6. Complicating the relation by which the proposition gives the attitude's content

The next option is to reject premise $4'$. If the propositionalist takes this option, then he must take the context following the attitude verb to involve a condition to the

effect that, if the proposition referred to itself involves a proposition x which functions to give the content of an attitude, and x is presented using a term of the form 'that p', then the proposition, in being presented as giving the content of an attitude, is presented to the subject of the embedding attitude sentence in a way that involves his grasp of it. This would require treating 'indicates-the-content-of' as having an additional argument place for the subject, Z, ' $\cong$ $(s, x,$ Z)' (where, as a reminder, 's' is the variable whose values are belief states and 'x' is the variable whose values are propositions – so we have x indicates-the-content of s relative to Z). However, this must be sensitive to not just the referent (or designatum) of the expression that appears in the place of 'x' but also the expression used to refer, for we want this result when we use a term of the form 'that p'. The position of 'x' is then similar to that of 'Giorgione' in Quine's example, 'Giorgione is so-called because of his size'. It must play a dual role. That is, (i) the term δ that appears in the position of 'x' provides a proposition as an argument for the underlying relation and (ii) δ itself is an argument for another position in the underlying relation to ensure the subject grasps any proposition p referred to by a term τ in δ in thinking of p as providing the content of an attitude, *provided that* τ is a term of a special sort. With this in mind we can explicate ' $\cong$ $(s, x,$ Z)' as follows where a canonical term is of the form 'that p' ('x' is a schematic letter in the following, not a variable).

$\cong$ $(s, x,$ Z) $=$ $_{df}$ x indicates-the-content-of s and for every y in 'x' such that y refers to a proposition p in an argument place a in 'x', if y is a canonical term for referring to propositions, then Z apprehends p in s in a in a way adequate to grasp p.

'Z apprehends p in s in a' means that Z in s thinks about p in a position corresponding to a in 'x'. We must keep track of 'positions' in the representational state because the same proposition may be thought about in different roles in the same thought. When we require Z to apprehend p in s in a in a way adequate to grasp p, we require Z to think about the proposition in being in that state (in that position) in a way that associates the proposition he thinks about with grasp of it. But this does not require that what it is in virtue of which he thinks about it be *itself* what suffices for grasp of it. A model for this would be entertaining the proposition that the earth moves while thinking of it as what Galileo believed. This would suffice intuitively for the truth of [2]. It would in turn suffice for this for Zoltán to be told what Galileo believed using a translation of [2] into Hungarian. For then he would relate Galileo to a proposition expressed by a sentence which he understands. The sentence used anchors the reference, and since it is understood, Zoltán entertains the proposition he thinks of as what Galileo believed while entertaining it. But Zoltán's being told [8′] would not suffice for this.

7. Biting the bullet

Finally we consider rejecting premise 6′. For this, the propositionalist needs a way of explaining away the inclination to judge that in the circumstances

described [4′] is true though [2] is false. The natural way to do this is to argue that the inclination we have to judge that [2] is false involves confusing the literal content of [2] with a standard conversational implicature of it, which is not carried by [4′]. The account might plausibly run as follows. Suppose that [1c] gives the interpretive truth conditions for [1]. The proposition expressed could be believed by someone who does not know, in the relevant sense, what Galileo believed – he does not know how Galileo saw the world. However, we know that anyone who asserts [1] will know what Galileo believed because he uses a term to pick out the proposition that gives the content of Galileo's belief that guarantees, given how its referent is determined, that the speaker does grasp the proposition and that it is the proposition which gives the content of Galileo's belief. When we attribute beliefs to people, we tend standardly to attribute them using sentences that we believe they would use to express them, if this is possible. This is because (a) often what people say is one of our best sources of information about what they believe and (b) using the sentences they would use conveys useful information about them, for how they would express their beliefs often plays a role in our anticipations about what they will do in various circumstances, particularly in response to what others say. This is especially important when different directly referring terms may have different sorts of information associated with them, as in the case of proper names. Given this, in the case of second-order belief attributions, we will standardly implicate that the subject would report his belief using the sentence (or a sentence constructed from it by replacing indexicals to preserve reference across context shifts) which we use in the complement, which, if he speaks our language, will in turn convey the information that he is in a position to know, in the relevant sense, what the content of the person's belief is. Now, in the case of an attribution to someone who does not share the language of the speaker, the implication that he would report it using the sentence the speaker uses (or a relevantly similar sentence in the speaker's language) will be canceled. However, minimally, it will be implicated that he would report it using a sentence which is the best translation of the sentence the speaker uses (appropriate adjustments being made in context sensitive terms), and this will include that he would report it using a sentence in his language in which the term that refers to the proposition plays the same semantic role as the term in the reporter's language. This then will carry the information that the other speaker knows, in the relevant sense, what the content of the person's belief is about which he has a belief. Thus, as this explanation goes, an utterance of [2] carries the information that the speaker knows, in the relevant sense, what Galileo believes, while an utterance of [4′] does not. When we judge that an utterance of [4′] is true in the circumstances while an utterance of [2] is not, we are noting the difference in the truth values of the total content conveyed, including the implicatures, and, in particular, that an utterance of [2] will standardly convey that Zoltán knows, in the relevant sense, what Galileo believes, even though it does not state this as part of its literal content.

8.   Parallels for sententialism

The options open to the sententialist in responding to the argument at the end of §3 are to reject premise 3, 4 or 8, repeated here along with [5]–[8]. [13]

3.   What [7] refers to expresses the same thing as what [8] refers to.
4.   If what [7] refers to expresses the same thing as what [8] refers to, then [5] is true iff [6] is true.
8.   [4] is true though [2] is false.
[5] $(\exists s)$(knowledge(s, T, Zoltán) and $\cong$ (s, that Galileo believed that the earth moves, Σ, T)).
[6] $(\exists s)$(knowledge(s, T, Zoltán) and $\cong$ (s, that $(\exists t': t' < T)(\exists s)$(belief($s$, t', Galileo) and $\cong$ (s, 'the earth moves', Σ, T)), Σ, T)).
[7]   that Galileo believed that the earth moves.
[8]   that $(\exists t': t' < T)(\exists s)$(belief($s$, t', Galileo) and $\cong$ (s, 'the earth moves', Σ, T)).

(Reminder: here ' $\cong$ (s, x, u, t)' means 'x interpreted relative to u at t indicates-the-content-of s'.) Given how we characterized 'expresses the same thing as', namely, as capturing the idea of two sentences expressing the same proposition without the ontology of propositions, if we take 'that the earth moves' and 'the earth moves' to both be directly referring terms that refer to 'the'⌢'earth'⌢'-moves', then, as long as we allow that the analysis of the logical form of a sentence expresses the same proposition as the analysandum, fixing any contextual parameters needed for determining truth conditions, we must accept that premise 3 is true. It is of course open to the sententialist to hold that 'that the earth moves' does not contribute just its referent. For example, the sententialist could hold that it is a description. This is the parallel to the mode of presentation response for the propositionalist. It is just that it is transparent in this case that it does not help, because the sententialist is overtly committed to the complement clause designating the complement sentence, and so however we understand the term on analysis, it seems that what it expresses could be expressed in Hungarian, but the monolingual speaker who grasps it could fail to see how Galileo saw the world. But if the argument of §4 is correct, the propositionalist is no better off, though the difficulties are easier to overlook. This leaves for consideration premises 4 and 8. The options available to the sententialist in rejecting 4 or 8 parallel those available to the propositionalist in rejecting 4' and 6'.

   If we reject 4, we must hold that we cannot intersubstitute in the place of 'x' in ' $\cong$ (s, x, u, t)' on the basis of the arguments being alike in what they express, and we must explain this in a way that is connected with why [4] can be true while [2] is false. [2] is judged to be false because Zoltán intuitively does not know what Galileo believes. The difference in the terms used to refer to the sentences that fix the content must somehow be involved in this. We employ a maneuver here analogous to the one we employed for the propositionalist, though with one additional twist. If Zoltán were a speaker of English, we would say that, in asserting [2], we attribute to Zoltán a belief about the content of Galileo's belief

to the effect that it is the same in content as 'the earth moves' taken relative to the context. But we also want to ensure that in thinking of the sentence in relation to Galileo's belief he understands it. This suffices for him to know in the relevant sense what Galileo believed. To generalize to the case in which Zoltán is not a speaker of English, we need to invoke a relation between the sentence we use and some sentence of Zoltán's which serves likewise to fix the content of Galileo's belief and which he understands in thinking about it. This will require an additional argument place in ' $\cong (s, x, u, t)$' for Zoltán, Z, ' $\cong (s, x, u, t, Z)$'. Then we can explicate ' $\cong (s, x, u, t, Z)$' as follows (with 'x' being as before a schematic letter).

$\cong (s, x, u, t, Z) =_{df} x$ indicates-the-content-of s (relative to u and t) and for every z in 'x' that occupies an argument place a in 'x', if z is a canonical term for referring to sentences, then there is a sentence σ and a term y of Z's such that y refers to σ and $\approx (\text{Ref}(z), \sigma, Z)$ and Z apprehends σ in s in a in a way is adequate to understand σ.

Here ' $\approx (a, b, x)$' is true iff a in English translates b relative to x, in the ordinary sense of translation, which allows for reference shifts of various sorts to preserve the function of the original in the translation, as we noted at the end of §2. We understand 'Z apprehends σ in s in a' to mean that Z in s thinks about σ in a position corresponding to a in x. When we require Z to apprehend σ in a way adequate to understand it, we require Z to think about it in being in that state (in that position) in a way that associates the sentence he thinks about with understanding of it. This does not require that the way he picks it out itself suffice for understanding. A model for this is thinking about the sentence 'the earth moves' by way of being presented with the sentence itself which one understands. For Zoltán, being told what Galileo believed using a translation of [2] into Hungarian would suffice. For in that case the way of referring to the sentence that gives the content involves being presented with it and he understands the sentence. Being told [*] in Hungarian, however, does not suffice for this.

The last option is to reject premise 8. This requires giving an explanation of the inclination to judge that [2] is false while [4] is true compatible with rejecting [8]. As in the case of the corresponding move by the propositionalist, it seems that the natural, and perhaps only, way to do this is to argue that we are responding to a false implicature of [2] rather than its literal truth value. Again, there is a natural story to tell on the assumption that [1b] gives a correct account of the truth conditions of [1]. Against a standard background practice of attributing beliefs to others using sentences they would use, or the best translations into our language of sentences they would use, there will be a standard implicature in the case of second-order belief attributions, e.g., of an assertion of [2], that the subject of the attitude knows, in the relevant sense, what Galileo believes. For it will be assumed that he would use a sentence in his language with a complement that functions semantically in the way that 'that the earth moves' does in English and is otherwise a best translation of it, which would suffice for him to understand the sentence that is used to indicate the content of Galileo's attitude. This implicature

will be absent in the case of an utterance of [4]. Thus, we judge that what is conveyed by [2] is false in the circumstances though what is conveyed by [4] is true. Yet, on this account, the literal truth of [2] and [4] are the same, and the divergence in judgments arises from our attending to the whole content standardly conveyed and not just to literal content.

9.   Conclusion

My goal has been to question the utility of propositions in explaining how attitude attributions do their work by arguing that an important objection to sententialism raises a parallel problem for propositionalist accounts as well. The problem arises from an interplay of views about the indicates-the-content relation and the objects it relates states and utterances to and how they are picked out. The basic problem is that, if attitude reports relate subjects to something that has or is a representational content, it seems someone could know someone was so related without knowing what he believed, wanted, etc. The natural response is to appeal to modes of presentation. But there are two problems with this. First, the mode of presentation has to be a mode grasp of which guarantees grasp of its object, but it is mysterious what mode of presentation of a proposition could guarantee grasp of it. A mode of presentation is wanted that involves *entertaining* the proposition designated. But entertaining and thinking about a proposition are logically distinct and independent acts. The only way around this would appear to be to locate a proposition in part by reference to one's own act of entertaining it. Second, whether or not we can make sense of a mode of presentation of a proposition grasp of which suffices for grasp of its object, any adequate account of the role of sentential complements must recognize that the words used after a complementizer are not there as an accident of spelling. They are used to locate what we relate the person's attitude to in giving its content, and our understanding of the words in the sentence is evidently central to their function as well. The upshot is that a 'linguistic mode of presentation' that uses or codes for a sentence we understand is essential to the work that sentential complements do for us in conveying what others think. This leaves us with two responses to the Higher-order Attitude Objection: make truth conditions of attitude attributions employing sentential complements sensitive to the form of the expression used, or bite the bullet and accept one can know the proposition expressed by an attitude report with a sentential complement without knowing what it is that the person to whom the attitude is attributed believes, etc., and argue that the inclination to judge otherwise is to be explained as a response to a conversational implicature. The propositionalist can avail himself of either response. However, both of these options are also open to the sententialist. In light of this and the fact that understanding the sentence in the complement is the mechanism by which attitude sentences illuminate for us how others see the world, the idea that sentential complements refer to propositions seems to contribute nothing to our understanding of the work that language does. It might still be maintained that, even if a sententialist account is adequate to the work actually

carried out by such attitude attributions, everyday language still is committed to sentential complements designating one or another style of proposition. But even if that were so, that would not suffice to give talk of propositions a role in explaining how we communicate about each other's attitudes. For were there no such things, but only talk about them, no essential function of language would be disturbed. This is connected in a straightforward way with the inutility of propositions in the theory of meaning, for the same problem arises in attributions of knowledge of meaning: what it is for someone to know what an expression means cannot be captured just by relating him to a proposition that relates an expression to any object as such. In this case too there is an essential reliance on understanding a sentence that is to indicate the content of the sentence whose meaning is being given. I suggest that this casts doubt on whether talk of propositions should retain a significant theoretical role in the enterprise of understanding thought, language and communication.

Notes

1. I draw on the account in (Ludwig 1998). I assume attitude reports are relational, but this is also a presupposition of the puzzle that I want to explore.
2. For convenience I focus on 'that'-clauses. With some more circumlocution the discussion can be extended to other sentential complements which encode sentences without exhibiting them fully in surface structure.
3. See (Schein 2012; Ludwig 2010) for overviews.
4. This point has been urged also by (Burge 1978; Higginbotham 1991, 2006; Seymour 1992).
5. See (Ludwig 1998) for a list with replies; for a different approach, see (Higginbotham 2006).
6. I have in mind the equivalence relation among utterances that propositionalists have in mind when they are willing to say that the utterances express the same propositions. This does not signal or presuppose commitment to propositions.
7. Cf. Kripke 2013, 258–261. Kripke says it must be 'revelatory,' showing what the referent is, but the cash value in this case is that grasp of the mode of presentation must suffice for grasp of what it presents.
8. Perhaps it is *exactly* acquaintance that provides what the Fregean needs. Here is a suggestion by Kripke:

    My suggestion ... is that Frege, like Russell, has a doctrine of direct acquaintance. Every time we determine a referent, we are introspectively acquainted with how the referent is determined, and that is the corresponding sense. And our introspective acquaintance with this sense gives us a way of determining it, and of referring to it, and this is the indirect sense. (Kripke 2011, 271)

    The idea is that if we think that *p*, which on Frege's view refers to a truth value, we are acquainted with how we determine it. This 'how we determine it' is to be identified with a mode of presentation of the truth value, i.e., the thought expressed by '*p*', i.e., its sense. Being acquainted with how we determine the truth value of the thought that *p* 'gives us a way of determining it' in turn, which is a mode of presentation of the thought (proposition) itself.

    It is not quite clear how we are to think about acquaintance giving us a way of determining what we are acquainted with. I think the idea is that acquaintance

itself is a kind of thinking about an object, and so something of the sort that plays the right role. I will assume this is the intent. Then either acquaintance with the proposition is mediated by a mode of presentation or it is not. Suppose it is mediated by a mode of presentation (and put aside the worry that this undercuts the idea that it is acquaintance that is involved). Then the mode of presentation must be sufficient for grasp of its object or it will fail to meet the needs of the Fregean. But if the relevant notion of acquaintance involves a mode of presentation that must be sufficient for the grasp of its object, appealing to it does not explain how a mode of presentation could be sufficient to grasp a thought, but instead presupposes it. Calling it *acquaintance* doesn't help. Suppose then that it is not. Then, even if it suffices for grasp of the proposition, it does not in fact provide a *sense* that suffices for grasp of its object, for its object is not thought about via a mode of presentation at all. One could say: but can't we say that the sense is given by the phrase (relativized to speaker and time) 'the sense that I am now acquainted with'? Even so: grasp of *that* does not suffice for grasp of the thought one is acquainted with: acquaintance (whatever that is) is what does the trick. (For I could grasp the sense of that expression in someone's mouth without grasping the thought it refers to.) So we have still not found any *account* of a mode of presentation grasp of which suffices for grasp of its object.

Why can't one just say: acquaintance suffices for grasp and is a mode of presentation! The foregoing argument just assumes that if a mode of presentation is involved, it must be something independent of acquaintance because indirect, but we should instead extend our notion of a mode of presentation to cover any way of thinking about an object, even thinking about an object directly. Then if there is a way of thinking about an object (acquaintance) that suffices for grasp of it, we have got what the Fregean, or, at any rate, the propositionalist needs. However, acquaintance is not suitable as a sense to be assigned to an expression in a public language. Obviously, assigning the relation (as a type) to an expression is no help, for to understand 'x is acquainted with y' is not ipso facto to be acquainted with y. And token relations of acquaintance between subjects and objects aren't suitable at all. One might give a rule: the sense of 'that p' as uttered by x at t is the token acquaintance relation obtaining between x at t and that p. But what would it be to 'grasp that sense' (if it is to suffice to grasp its object) except to stand in the relation? But then only x could in principle grasp the sense, and his interlocutors would be at a loss. The situation is not improved if one selects any other pair $<y, t>$. In addition, to come to stand in the relation, one would have to independently figure out what proposition was being referred to and how to grasp it. Appeal to acquaintance in this way does not engage with any mechanism the public language could use to put one in touch with the right objects.

9. In chapter 8 of (Peacocke 2008), Peacocke offers what might be thought to be a way of satisfying the requirement in the idea of a canonical concept of a concept F (can (F)). The idea is that there are ways of referring to concepts that uniquely fix them, namely, by way of their individuative application conditions (The Leverage Account). The general idea is expressed in (∗).

(∗) For an arbitrary concept C to fall under can(F) is for the fundamental condition for something to fall under C to be the same as the fundamental condition for something to fall under the concept F. (291)

Here we imagine for particular cases that 'the fundamental condition for something to fall under the concept F' to be replaced by a statement of the condition. For example, if 'F' = 'red', then: For an arbitrary concept C to fall under can(red) is for

the fundamental condition for something to fall under C to be being red. To put it another way, can(red) $=$ the concept of being a concept the fundamental condition for falling under which is being red. Here the concept of red is deployed in the specification of the condition, and so in deploying the concept can(red) one deploys the concept of red, as in deploying the concept of a red ball one deploys the concept of red, though in the former unlike the latter the concept applies to the concept of red as well. The purpose of this is to describe a way of generating a hierarchy of concepts of concepts by starting with grasp of a first order concept, and tacit knowledge of (*). There is one more thing that we need to add to the story, for what we want is that one thinks about a concept, grasps it, and thinks about it as the one grasped. What is needed for this is that one know that if condition F is the fundamental condition for falling under a concept C, then 'F' expresses C, or the concept one deploys in thinking of the condition F is the concept C. Note that the total effect this is to prompt one to deploy the concept of red and to think of the concept that one there deploys. We are in effect given instructions of the following sort: think of the concept the deployment of which is required in thinking of the condition of being red. This is a clever idea. Does it supply what the Fregean needs?

What is the semantics for 'the condition of being red', for this gives us the sense attached to it. How more specifically does 'being red' pick out the right property or condition? It picks out the property attributed or the condition specified by 'red' in English. But we don't want that to be part of the specification of the concept can(red), because it would make it in part metalinguistic. Moreover, it is clear that using 'red' here as a way of specifying the condition or property is crucial for ensuring that the concept of red is deployed in deploying can(red). Here is a solution: We can say instead that 'being red' refers to that property an object is fundamentally required to have in order to fall under the concept red. Then we avoid the appeal to any metalinguistic element! But now we have another problem. We are now using in the specification of can(red) a term that refers to the concept red (and that is what can(red) is supposed to enable us to do). How does 'the concept red' pick out the concept red? We could say that it picks out the concept that 'red' expresses. But this gets a metalinguistic element back into the content. So we could say that it picks out that concept the fundamental condition for falling under which is being red. But this reintroduces the problem we started with. We could appeal to a mode of presentation of the concept red that suffices for its grasp and attach that to 'the concept red'. But that was what the proposal was supposed to supply us with. The fundamental problem has not actually been avoided, but like the bump under the rug, it has been relocated. Perhaps there are other moves to be made here, but perhaps we do not need to make them. At least, that is what I will suggest in sections 6 and 7 (for the propositionalist) and in section 8 (for the sententialist). We can of course think about a thought that we are entertaining, and we do so by understanding the complement of an attitude report while understanding that it is to refer to what we thereby grasp or understand. In higher-order attitude reports, we need to say that when attributed using that-clauses for content positions, the person to whom we are attributing them grasps what it is that they refer to, or something equivalent, in thinking about them. (There is something similar to this in Peacocke's own suggestion about the semantics of higher-order attributions (see 307).) More details below.

10.   In his 'Postscript to "Belief *De Re*"' (Burge 2007, 65–81), Tyler Burge says that a thought about a thought, e.g., the thought that snow is white is true, specifies the thought 'in the that-clause way,' where this is *de re* and 'the *de re* reference feeds directly off immediate understanding of representational contents, the *res*' (70). Of this case, he says that 'the representational thought contents that carry out the *de re* reference are completely conceptualized' and so 'there is a striking relation to a *re*

that goes beyond merely conceiving of it or forming a concept that represents it' (70). Burge goes on to say: 'That-clause forms of representation in thought are individual concepts. They are complex structure- and content-specifying concepts when they name whole representational thought contents. ... Mastery of such an individual concept, of either sort, requires comprehending the representational content that the individual concept names' (70–71). There is, however, something not completely conceptual about the relation to the thought content because it involves 'comprehending the *re*, not merely conceiving of it' (71), and it is for this reason that Burge says that it is a *de re* and not a *de dicto* thought. And, he says, 'This form of *de re* representation is possible only for *res* that are themselves representational contents' (71). Thus, the account appears to hold that there is a mode of presentation (or way of conceiving) of an object that has representational content, namely, a thought content, that suffices for its grasp. Does this help us to understand how a way of conceiving or presenting a thought content could suffice for grasp of it? It does not. It merely describes the idea that we have been trying to make sense of: a way of presenting a proposition that suffices for grasp of it, that is, a mode of presentation of a proposition *p* grasp of which suffices for the grasp of *p* (an individual concept whose mastery requires comprehending the content it names). This does not respond to the independence argument, and it does not engage with the fact the mechanism by which that-clauses secure their referents go through our understanding the sentences that appear in them. One could, as I have noted, insist that since the theory requires such individual concepts, they exist, but this is an *ad hoc* defense of the theory, and as there is an alternative account, we should feel no pressure to adopt it.

11. It might be objected that 'that *p*' is syntactically complex while 'Bob' is not. But, first, we can assign a complex sense to a simple expression, and, second, we could, in any case, introduce a complex expression whose components are not the words in that appear in '*p*'.

12. Davidson remarked, 'If we could recover our pre-Fregean semantic innocence, I think it would seem to us plainly incredible that the words "The Earth moves", uttered after the words "Galileo said that", mean anything different ... than is their wont when they come in other environments' (Davidson, 2001, 108). I think this is right, but I think we can say something stronger: if we did not understand those words in their usual sense, what Galileo said would remain opaque to us.

13. Higginbotham (2006, 110–112) offers a response on behalf of the sententialist to Schiffer's objection. If I understand it correctly, it is that the relevant matching-in-content relation the sententialist needs can be construed so that 'that Galileo believed that the earth moves' does not stand in it to, in Higginbotham's phrase, its target truth conditions, as given by the analysis. This would amount, I believe, to rejecting premise 4 in the argument. Perhaps the suggestion I make in the text is a version of what Higginbotham has in mind, for it likewise rejects premise 4. However, it works by treating the position of the complement as sensitive not only to the referent but also the term used to refer to it, and Higginbotham's suggestion appears to be that it is the relation between the referents alone that does the work. Higginbotham does not elaborate, however, and it remains unclear to me how he intends the relation and the relata to be understood so that the right result is obtained.

Notes on contributor

Kirk Ludwig is Professor of Philosophy at Indiana University Bloomington. He has published numerous papers on the philosophy of language, mind, action and epistemology. He is the editor of *Donald Davidson* (CUP 2003), co-author with Ernie Lepore of *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality* (OUP 2005) and *Donald Davidson's*

Truth-theoretic Semantics (OUP 2007), and co-editor with Ernie Lepore of the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Donald Davidson* (2013).

References

Burge, Tyler. 1978. "Self-Reference and Translation." In *Meaning and Translation*, edited by Guenthner and Guenthner-Reutter, 137–156. London: Duckworth.

Burge, Tyler. 2007. "Postscript to '*Belief De Re*'." In *Foundations of Mind: Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Church, Alonzo. 1950. "On Carnap's Analysis of Statements of Assertion and Belief." *Analysis* 10: 97–99.

Hanks, Peter. 2011. "Structured Propositions as Types." *Mind* 120: 11–53.

Higginbotham, James. 1991. "Belief and Logical Form." *Mind and Language* 6 (4): 344–369.

Higginbotham, James. 2006. "Sentifentialism: The Thesis that Complement Clauses Refer to Themselves." *Philosophical Issues: Philosophy of Language* 16: 101–119.

Jubien, Michael. 2001. "Propositions and the Objects of Thought." *Philosophical Studies* 104 (1): 47–62.

Kaplan, David. 1989. "Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives." In *Themes From Kaplan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

King, Jeffrey C. 2007. *The Nature and Structure of Content*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kripke, Saul A. 2011. "Frege's Theory of Sense and Reference: Some Exegetical Notes." In *Philosophical Troubles: Collected Papers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lepore, E., and K. Ludwig. 2006. "Ontology in the theory of meaning." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 14 (3): 325–335.

Lepore, Ernest, and Kirk Ludwig. 2005. *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lepore, Ernest, and Kirk Ludwig. 2007. *Donald Davidson: Truth-theoretic Semantics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lepore, Ernest, and Kirk Ludwig. 2011. "Truth and Meaning Redux." *Philosophical Studies* 154: 251–277.

Ludwig, Kirk. 2002. "What is the Role of a Truth Theory in a Meaning Theory?" In *Meaning and Truth: Investigations in Philosophical Semantics*, edited by D. Shier, J. K. Campbell and M. O'Rourke. New York: Seven Bridges Press.

Ludwig, Kirk. 2010. "Adverbs of Action." In *Blackwell Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, edited by T. O'Connor and C. Sandis. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Ludwig, Kirk, and Greg Ray. 1998. "Semantics for Opaque Contexts." In *Philosophical Perspectives: Language, Mind, and Ontology*, edited by J. Tomberlin. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Peacocke, Christopher. 2008. *Truly Understood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schein, Barry. 2012. "Event Semantics." In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Language*, edited by Delia Graff Fara and Gillian Russell, 280–294. New York: Routledge.

Schiffer, Stephen. 1987. *Remnants of Meaning*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Schiffer, Stephen R. 2003. *The Things We Mean*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Seymour, Michel. 1992. "A Sentential Theory of Propositional Attitudes." *Journal of Philosophy* 89 (4): 181–201.

Soames, Scott. 2010. *What Is Meaning?* Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press.