Précis of *Propositions*

Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (forthcoming)

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Let an argument be modally valid just in case, necessarily, if its premises are true, then its conclusion is true. *Propositions* begins with the assumption that some arguments are modally valid. Chapter 1—"Propositions and Modal Validity"—argues that the premises and conclusions of modally valid arguments exist necessarily, have their truth conditions essentially, and are the fundamental bearers of truth and falsity. Again, some arguments are modally valid. So there are the premises and conclusions of modally valid arguments. So there are necessarily existing fundamental bearers of truth and falsity that have their truth conditions essentially. I shall call these entities 'propositions'. So there are propositions.

Chapter 1 argues that the premises and conclusions of modally valid arguments are propositions (not sentences). Chapter 2—"Logical Validity and Modal Validity"—argues that the premises and conclusions of logically valid arguments are sentences (not propositions). Chapter 2 also argues that modally valid arguments cannot be supplanted by logically valid arguments, thus buttressing Chapter 1's argument for the existence of propositions. In fact, Chapter 2 defends the claim that an argument is logically valid only if the sentences that are its premises and conclusion express propositions that are themselves the premises and conclusion of a modally valid argument. And Chapter 2

delivers both a way to block a major objection to supervaluationism and also a solution to Kripke's "puzzle of belief."

Chapter 3—"Propositions Are Not Sets of Possible Worlds"—opposes the arguments in support of the thesis that propositions are sets of possible worlds. Moreover, this chapter defends a number of objections to that thesis. If propositions really are sets of possible worlds, then possible worlds really do exist. And if possible worlds really do exist, then they have a nature. This chapter's most sustained objection to the thesis that propositions are sets of possible worlds maintains that that thesis cannot be combined, without incurring new and serious problems, with any standard account of the nature of possible worlds. In fact, this chapter argues that the best account of the nature of possible worlds rules out the thesis that propositions are sets of possible worlds.

The thesis that propositions are sets of possible worlds is one of the two leading accounts of the nature of propositions. The other leading account endorses structured propositions. The central line of argument in Chapter 4—"Against Structured Propositions"—turns on the idea of a proposition's representing things as being a certain way. (For example, the proposition *that dogs bark* represents dogs as barking, and for this reason is true if and only if dogs bark.) Chapter 4 motivates the claim that if there are structured propositions, then there is an explanation of how each proposition manages to represent things as being a certain way. This chapter then argues that if there are structured propositions, that explanation must be in terms of a proposition's constituents and structure. But this chapter also argues that a structured proposition's constituents and structure would not explain how that proposition manages to represent things as being a certain way. So this chapter concludes that there are no structured propositions.

Let a singular proposition be a proposition that is "directly about" an entity. Chapter 5—"Singular Propositions"—argues that while there are singular propositions, a singular proposition does not have the entity that it is directly about as a constituent. Chapter 5 thereby objects to the most widely defended versions of structured propositions, versions that claim that a singular proposition does have the relevant entity as a constituent. By arguing that we ought to reject the most widely defended versions of structured propositions, this chapter supports Chapter 4's conclusion that we ought to reject structured propositions. Along the way, this chapter argues that there are singular propositions about entities that no longer exist, and indeed about entities that never have existed and never will exist.

Chapters 3 through 5 consider the leading accounts of the nature of propositions, and therefore consider the principal rivals to any other account, including the account I defend. But I do not pretend to consider, much less refute, every possible rival to my own account. Nor need I. For—as far as supporting my own account of the nature of propositions goes—the point of Chapters 3 through 5 is not to refute all rivals in order to leave a void that only my account can then rush in to fill. Rather, the point of those chapters—at least as far as supporting my own account goes—is to defend claims about what a satisfactory account of the nature of propositions should, and should not, say. Of particular importance in this regard are objections raised in those chapters to alleged explanations of how a set of possible worlds or a structured proposition would manage to represent things as being a certain way.

Chapter 6—"The Nature of Propositions"—presents and defends my account of the nature of propositions. My account says that each proposition is a necessary existent

that essentially represents things as being a certain way. That is it. This simple account is supported by arguments earlier in this book for the conclusion that propositions really do exist necessarily and really do essentially represent things as being a certain way. And this account is supported by its explaining why propositions have the further features and play the roles that—so I argue in various places throughout the book—propositions really do have and really do play. As we shall see, one of the implications of my account of the nature of propositions is that there is no explanation of how a proposition manages to represent things as being a certain way. Much of Chapter 6 focuses on this implication. I find this implication plausible partly because of arguments in Chapters 3 and 4 for the claim that our cognitive activity cannot play a role in explaining how a proposition manages to represent things as being a certain way. And I find this implication plausible partly because of arguments in those same chapters for the claim that how a proposition represents things as being would not—not even if that proposition had constituents—be explained by its constituents and structure.