11. Representation and structure in the theory of propositions

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My aim in this essay will be to critically examine two aspects of current orthodoxy about propositions: that they are representational and that they are structured. Along the way I'll also pause to discuss a few of the objections raised by Soames and King to the view of propositions I defend.

Are propositions representational?

To say that propositions are representational is, to a first approximation, to say that they are about things. I think that there are three main arguments in favor of the view that propositions are about things:

(i) Mental states, such as beliefs, are about things, and this fact about mental states is best explained in terms of the representational properties of the propositions which are their contents;
(ii) Sentences are about things, and this fact about sentences is best explained in terms of the representational properties of the propositions which (relative to contexts) they express;
(iii) Propositions are the sorts of things that can be true or false, and this shows that they must be have representational properties.

Each of these arguments has much to be said for it. But I think that none is as strong as it at first appears.

A first point to make about argument (i) is that, as noted in Ch. 5 above, it is weaker in the hands of King and Soames than in the hands of a traditional proposition theorist, who thinks of all representational mental states as analyzable as relations to intrinsically representational entities. Once we admit, as King and Soames do, the existence of fundamental mental states which are intrinsically representational, and don't borrow their representational properties from the representational properties of propositions, it's not obvious why we shouldn't just say this about all mental states — that is, it's hard to see why we wouldn't treat belief, desire, et. al. as intrinsically representational attitudes to propositions which are not, in themselves, representational.

But let's set this polemical point to the side, and ask: would the representational properties of beliefs be objectionably mysterious if not explained in terms of the representational properties of propositions?

First, let's get clear on *what* we're saying has representational properties when we say that, for example, my belief that South Bend is lovely is about South Bend. There are, I

think, two sorts of things that we can be saying when we make claims like this. On the one hand, we might be saying that *I* stand in a certain 'aboutness' relation to South Bend — which we might call the 'believes-about' relation. On the other hand, we might be saying that there's a certain entity — perhaps a mental sentence or something of the sort — which has the dual properties of being a belief of mine and of being about South Bend. I'll consider these interpretations in turn.

Consider first the fact that I stand in the 'believes-about' relation to South Bend. To stand in the believes-about relation to South Bend is, on my view, to stand in the belief relation to a proposition one of whose constituents is South Bend.[1] Hence the fact that I stand in the believes-about relation to South Bend is not to be explained solely in terms of the proposition that South Bend is lovely — part of the explanation is my standing in the belief relation to this proposition. On my view these relations, rather than the entities to which the relations are borne, are the source of the representational properties of subjects associated with the attitudes. Hence, to explain these representational properties of subjects, we don't need to appeal to the representational properties of propositions, but only to intrinsically representational ways of being related to those propositions.

This does not mean, of course, that the proposition has no role to play in explaining the representational properties of a subject: the representational properties that I instantiate when I believe that grass is green are different than the representational properties that I instantiate when I believe that snow is white in virtue of differences between the propositions that grass is green and that snow is white. But this does not mean that these propositions are themselves representational, or about anything.

An analogy might help. Consider the view that all theft is morally wrong. On this view, an act's being wrong can be explained simply by its being an act of theft. But this is consistent with the moral properties of the act also being partly explained by the object of the theft — one might think that stealing a car is morally worse than stealing a piece of bubble gum. But the fact that the moral properties of an act of theft is partly a function of the moral properties of the object of the theft does not imply that those objects — cars, and pieces of bubble gum — themselves instantiate moral properties. Just so, the fact that which propositions a subject believes determines which representational properties the subject instantiates does not imply that the propositions themselves must instantiate representational properties.

Of course, even if our talk about the beliefs of subjects does not directly force us to attribute representational properties to propositions, one might worry that if we do identify propositions with non-representational entities, like properties, we'll be unable to give a satisfactory account of the attitudes. King, for example, objects to the account I proposed in Ch. 5 that

> "I can consider, explain and understand the claim that arithmetic reduces to logic and in none of these cases does it seem that my attitude has anything

[1] Others, of course, will specify the relevant property of propositions differently — in terms of, for example, singular Fregean modes of presentation of South Bend. I'm ignoring such differences for simplicity here — they are independent of the question at issue.

> to do with whether the alleged property *being such that arithmetic reduces to logic* is instantiated. Take considering: when I consider the claim that arithmetic reduces to logic I can do so without any attitude at all about the instantiation of the property *being such that arithmetic reduces to logic*. I may simply have an interest in really thinking about what the claim comes to. So here Speaks' account of the attitudes seems strained at the very least."

This is a fair complaint; it *does* sound odd to talk about properties as the objects of beliefs. But this has little to do with the choice of properties as the category to which propositions are to be assimilated, and more with the very idea that propositions are to be assimilated to some category or other.

To see this, consider King's view. On that view, to consider the proposition that Amelia talks, one must consider the fact that there is a context and assignment relative to which Amelia is the semantic value of an expression e of L and talking is the value of an expression e' of L such that e occurs at the left terminal node of a relation R that in L encodes ascription and e' occurs at R's right terminal node. It is very hard for me to see why this is less strained, and more plausible, than the view that one must consider the property of being such that arithmetic reduces to logic in order to consider the proposition that arithmetic reduces to logic.

The problem here is no more particular to King's theory than to mine; parallel remarks could be made about Soames' theory and, I suggest, about any theory which makes informative and surprising claims about what propositions are. King is right that these odd-sounding claims about belief are costs of such views. But I think (as I think that King does as well) that these costs are outweighed by the benefits of reducing propositions to another category of entity in which we have independent reason to believe.

So much for the representational properties of subjects. Let's consider the other interpretation of our talk about the representational properties of beliefs mentioned above, on which 'my belief' refers to something like a mental sentence which qualifies as one of my beliefs and has the representational property of being about South Bend.[2] Do we need to explain what it is for such a mental sentence to be about South Bend in terms of the representational properties of the proposition which that mental sentence has as its content?

On my view, for one of my mental sentences to be about South Bend is for that sentence to have as its content a proposition one of whose constituents is South Bend. Hence — as with the representational properties of subjects — the representational properties of mental sentences are not explained solely by a proposition, but rather by those sentences standing in a certain relation — which we express by phrases like 'has the content that' — to that proposition. But then, as in the case of subject-level representational properties, it is open to us to trace the source of the representational

[2] Nothing much is built into 'mental sentence' here — the following remarks would apply just as well to theories which want to avoid commitment to anything like a language of thought, and so make use of syntactically unstructured 'belief states' instead.

properties of mental sentences not to the proposition to which it is so related, but to the relation itself.

The above remarks about mental sentences generalize to give us a response to argument (ii) above: the argument that we need to appeal to the representational properties of propositions to explain the representational properties of sentences of public languages like English. Such sentences also have their representational properties in virtue of standing in certain relations — like that expressed by '_ is the semantic content of _ in C' — to propositions. Hence, as above, the representational properties of sentences can be explained not in terms of the representational properties of the propositions they semantically express, but by the representational properties of the relation of semantically expressing.

This style of explanation can, it seems to me, be further generalized to bearers of contents other than sentences. In Ch. 9, Soames objects to my view of propositions that it

> "makes it difficult to capture the fact that truth is a kind of accuracy in representation. A map or portrait is *accurate,* or *veridical,* when it represents its subject matter as being how it really is; a proposition is *true* when it represents things as they really are. This parallel seems to be lost when propositions are identified with properties that, as Speaks admits, aren't intrinsically representational. Unless he can identify some sense in which they are representational, he will lose the pre-theoretic connection between truth and accuracy."

On my view, maps and portraits, like sentences, have contents; and I'm inclined to think that, despite the fundamental differences in the way these contents are encoded, maps and portraits have the same kinds of contents as sentences — namely, the sorts of properties discussed in Ch. 5. But, given this, the parallel between maps and sentences seems pretty direct: each are representational in virtue of standing in certain relations to propositions which are not themselves representational. For a map to be a map *of* South Bend, for example, just is for that map to have as its content some proposition one of whose constituents is South Bend. And just as a sentence is true iff the property which is its content is instantiated, a map is accurate iff the property which is its content is instantiated.[3]

In response to arguments (i) and (ii), then, I have recommended a two part strategy. When presented with an example of something which has a representational property, first note that this representational property is never explained solely in terms of a proposition, rather in terms of the thing standing in a certain relation to that proposition.

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[3] There remains the awkward question of why, if maps are *this* closely related to sentences, it sounds a bit odd to say that a map is 'true.' Parallel worries arise, as is well-known, about the construal of perceptual experiences as a propositional attitude. I'm inclined to think that this oddness does not reflect anything deep about the subject matter — and in any case Soames' worry here is not that my view makes maps and sentences too similar, but that it does not make them similar enough.

Second, note that we can plausibly take relations of this sort, rather than the propositions to which the relations are borne, to be the source of the representational properties to be explained.

One might object that this strategy just pushes our problem — the problem of explaining representational properties — back a step, so that we are still left with the problem of explaining the representational properties of relations like belief or 'has the content that.' This is correct. But there are two things to be said in response.

First, the fact that we located the source of representational properties in relations like these does not mean that we are forced into taking these relations as primitive. Perhaps some such relations can be analyzed in terms of others — as on theories (like those of Grice and Lewis) which explain natural language meaning in terms of propositional attitudes, or on theories (like Fodor's) which explain the attitudes in terms of the representational properties of mental sentences.[4] And perhaps we can explain some such relations in non-representational terms, as those pursuing the project of 'naturalizing intentionality' have tried to do.

Second, if we do take one or more of these relations in question as primitive, the best candidates here will likely be relations in which thinking subjects stand to propositions. But then it seems that we're locating our primitives — by Soames' and King's lights as well as by mine — in exactly the right place.

This leaves us only argument (iii), which might well seem the most fundamental. Even if sentences and mental states don't require the introduction of representational properties of propositions, one might think that the fact that propositions can be true or false just shows that they obviously do have representational properties. Isn't having truth conditions a representational property *par excellence*?

It is important to disentangle the substantive issue here from a merely verbal one. I agree that propositions have truth conditions. (Though, unlike Soames and King, I don't think that their possession of these truth conditions is explainable in terms of anything about us.) What I deny is that propositions are about anything. The interesting debate is not about whether we should call the possession of truth conditions a representational property; the interesting question is whether it is coherent to hold that propositions can have truth conditions despite not being about anything.

As noted in Ch. 5, this sort of view is less of a departure from the way that we ordinarily think about these matters than it might at first seem. Even those who don't identify propositions with properties think of properties as *true of* objects but not about anything. But if this is coherent, why not the view that propositions are true, but not about anything?

One might worry, though, that saying that propositions can have truth conditions without being about anything will force us to deny some platitudes about truth. For example, it seems plausible that something is true just in case it represents the world as being some way, and the world is that way — but that can't be right if, as I think, propositions are true or false but don't represent the world as being any way at all.

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[4] See, respectively, Grice (1968), Grice (1969), Lewis (1975), and the essays in Fodor (1992).

I think that this is the strongest argument in favor of ascribing representational properties to propositions. But I don't think that it is decisive. The right thing to say, it seems to me, is that these seeming platitudes are really platitudes — but only when we're talking about the notion of truth applicable to sentences or beliefs. On my view, it is a platitude that a *sentence* is true iff it represents the world as being some way, and the world is that way — what it is for a sentence to represent the world as being some way is for that sentence to have a certain property — a way things could be — as its content, and what it is for the world to be that way is for the property to be instantiated. But no such claim holds about the truth of propositions.

Like many, I think that propositions are the fundamental bearers of truth and falsity, and that the truth and falsity of sentences, mental states, maps, et. al. is to be analyzed in terms of the truth and falsity of propositions to which these entities stand in the relevant relations.[5] On a view like this, it will be no surprise if the right account of truth and falsity for propositions is different from the right account of truth and falsity for the non-fundamental bearers of truth and falsity. Hence, I think, it should not be surprising if platitudes which are correct about the truth and falsity of sentences don't hold when we're talking about the truth and falsity of propositions.[6]

One might doubt, though, that any theory which denies that propositions are about anything will be able to give an adequate account of the truth and falsity of propositions; and this is one of King's worries about the account I defend in Ch. 5. He objects that

> "it just does not seem as though the property *being such that Amelia talks* is something that is true or false. To say that it is seems like some sort of category mistake. ... If propositions really are properties as Speaks claims, why when we consider *the predicate* 'being such that Amelia talks' that allegedly expresses the proposition in question are we not inclined to say that *it* expresses something true or false?"

As with King's objection to my account of belief, though, I think that this is less an objection to the property theory in particular than to any reductive theory of propositions which assimilates propositions to another metaphysical category. One way to see this is, as above, to note that just the same objection can be raised against King's account (or Soames'). One might object to King's view that[7]

> It just does not seem as though *the fact that Amelia is the semantic value of an expression e of L and talking is the value of an expression e' of L such*

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[5] For defense, see Soames (1999).

[6] It might also be worth noting that it seems not to be a platitude that propositions are about anything. The following hardly counts as commonsense: 'That South Bend is lovely is about South Bend.' By contrast, it is hard to deny either of ''South Bend is lovely' is about South Bend' or 'The belief that South Bend is lovely is about South Bend.'

[7] Here I simplify King's theory by ignoring the need to relativize to contexts and assignments; nothing hangs on this here.

> *that e occurs at the left terminal node of a relation R that in L encodes ascription and e' occurs at R's right terminal node* is the sort of thing that could be true or false. This is just a fact about what languages happen to exist, and it's a category mistake to say that such a fact could be true or false. Further, if propositions really are facts as King claims, why, when we consider the description 'the fact that Amelia is the semantic value of .. [fill in full analysis here]' which allegedly expresses the proposition in question, are we not inclined to say that it expresses something true or false?

This objection seems to me to be at least as strong as King's; and (as with King's objection about the attitudes, discussed above) it seems to me that any theory which made a surprising claim about what sorts of things propositions are would be open to a similar objection.

King, though, objects not just to the idea that properties can be true or false, but also to the idea that the properties with which I identify propositions could provide an adequate account of truth at a world. He begins with the claim that a proposition should be true at a possible world because of that world's intrinsic properties, rather than the other way around. But, he says,

> "Suppose a world w possesses the property ***being such that snow is white***. This is an intrinsic property of w. ... Speaks claims that w possessing or instantiating a property like ***being such that snow is white*** is just this property qua proposition being true at w. But then on Speaks' account, we should say w is a certain way, ***because*** the property/proposition ***being such that snow is white*** is true at w (i.e. is instantiated at w). Unfortunately, this precisely reverses what we said was the proper order of explanation mentioned above: the proposition that snow is white is true at w ***because*** w is a certain way."

But this misunderstands the theory.[8] My view is that propositions are properties which are true iff they are instantiated. If a property is instantiated by a possible world, then it is instantiated. Hence if I thought, as King suggests, that a property is true at a world iff it is instantiated by that world, my view would entail the absurd result that truth at some possible world is sufficient for truth — i.e., that possibility entails truth.

Fortunately, it doesn't. As on any (non-necessitarian) view of truth, my view must include separate accounts of truth and truth at a world. The simplest way to extend my account to an account of truth at a world would be to say that a proposition is true at w iff were w actual, the proposition would be instantiated.[9] On this view, some possible worlds will instantiate the property of being such that snow is white without the proposition that snow is white being true at that world. After all, given that being such

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[8] Though, to be fair, it correctly describes a view that I used to hold. See Speaks (unpublished).

[9] See Ch. 5 above, p. XX. Though, as I argue in Speaks (forthcoming), there is good reason, based on the analysis of modal nonexistence claims like "Possibly, Socrates does not exist" to go for a slightly more complicated view of the relation between truth and truth at a world. The issues discussed there are independent of King's criticism.

that snow is white is a property which everything has, every possible world does actually instantiate this property — but not all of those worlds are such that, were they actual, this property would be instantiated.

Now, from this it does follow that a proposition's being true at a world amounts to the world instantiating a certain property: the property of being such that, were that world actual, the property of being such that snow is white would be instantiated. Let's grant for purposes of argument that this is an intrinsic property of the relevant worlds. Then one might wonder whether King's objection can be raised against this view: am I not still committing the error of equating being true at a world with possession of an intrinsic property, and thereby contradicting the plausible principle that what is true at a world must be explained by that world's intrinsic properties, rather than the reverse?

We should distinguish two principles in the vicinity:

> (a) For any proposition p which is true at some world w, $\exists F$ (F is an intrinsic property of w & the fact that w is F explains the fact that p is true at w)
>
> (b) For any proposition p which is true at some world w, $\neg\ \exists F$ (F is an intrinsic property of w & the fact that p is true at w explains the fact that w is F)

Principle (a) seems to me reasonably plausible. But King's argument in the above passage seems to be that my view contradicts principle (b), on the grounds that on my view a proposition's being true at a world is identical to that world's possessing a certain intrinsic property. There are two problems, as I see it, with this line of objection.

The first is that it is invalid. From the fact that a proposition's being true at a world is identical to that world's possessing a certain intrinsic property F, it does not follow that w's being F is explained by p being true at w. Indeed, given the plausible principle that nothing explains itself, the former entails the falsity of the latter.

The second is that, even if it were valid, the fact that a view contradicts principle (b) is not, in the absence of further argument, much of a problem for that view. Why think that (b) is true? (a) does not entail it, even granting that explanatory relations are anti-symmetric — the intrinsic properties which explain p's being true at w may be distinct from the intrinsic properties, if such there be, possession of which p's being true at w explains.

Indeed, abstracting from the details of my view of truth and truth at a world, this sort of argument seems to prove too much. For if it were a good argument, it would be a good argument against any view according to which a proposition's being true at a world is a property of that world. But surely if propositions, like the proposition that snow is white, can be true at worlds, then worlds can have properties like this: the property of having the proposition that snow is white be true at it.

Are propositions structured?

Let's now turn away from the question of whether propositions are representational to the question of whether they are structured.

One might think that despite our disagreement on the first question, Soames, King, and I at least all agree on the answer to the second. Each of us, after all, talks freely about the constituents of propositions — and if propositions have constituents, don't they have to be structured?

However, on closer inspection, I think that matters are a bit less clear. A way to bring this out is by distinguishing between what we might call metaphysically 'lightweight' and 'heavyweight' senses of the claim that propositions are structured.

I gave an example of a metaphysically lightweight interpretation in §2 of Ch. 5 above. There I suggested that we think of the constituents of the proposition expressed by a sentence S as the contents of the subsentential expressions in S. Now, this sort of use of the word 'constituent' does not make the claim that propositions have constituents wholly trivial — given that propositions are identical only if they have the same constituents, the claim that propositions have constituents in this sense entails that if two sentences S, S^* express the same proposition, then S contains an expression with a certain content iff S^* does. And this will be denied by proponents of 'coarse-grained' conceptions of propositions, like the view that propositions are sets of worlds. For on that view necessarily equivalent sentences will always express the same proposition — but two sentences can be necessarily equivalent even if one contains terms with a content which no expression in the other sentences has. The obvious examples here are mathematical truths — but there are plenty of others.[10]

So there is a substantive debate to be had about whether propositions have constituents in the lightweight sense. But one might reasonably object that this is not really a debate about whether propositions really have *constituents* at all. For surely to say that propositions have constituents must be to say about propositions something at least analogous to what we say about tables and chairs when we say that they have constituents. In this metaphysically heavyweight sense, to say that propositions have constituents is to say that there are entities — typically the contents of subsentential expressions figuring in the sentence which expresses the proposition — to which propositions stand in some relation which either is, or is closely analogous to, the relation between parts and wholes.

There's no obvious contradiction in accepting the claim that propositions have constituents in the metaphysically lightweight sense, but denying that they have constituents in the metaphysically heavyweight sense. One might, after all, adopt the following view about propositions:

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[10] One can adopt the well-known recipe for constructing such cases from Soames (1988) — just pick any sentence expressing a necessary truth, and conjoin it with an arbitrary sentence S. The conjunction and S will be equivalent, and hence according to the view that propositions are sets of worlds, will express the same proposition. But in the standard case our necessary truth will contain some expression which is not synonymous with any expression in S.

> *Primitivism*. Propositions are a *sui generis* category of entity, and hence are not identical to sets of possible worlds. Further, a pair of sentences can be necessarily equivalent despite expressing distinct propositions. Indeed, propositions are much more fine-grained than sets of possible worlds; two sentences can express the same proposition only if those sentences are synonymous, and two sentences can be synonymous only if they are composed of synonymous subsentential expressions. But propositions, like other abstract objects, are simple, and have no parts; hence propositions have (in the metaphysically heavyweight sense) no constituents.[11]

Intuitively, this sort of primitivist agrees with the traditional doctrine of structured propositions about the individuation of propositions — about when, for example, the proposition expressed by one sentence is identical to the proposition expressed by another. So the primitivist can agree that propositions have constituents in the lightweight sense. But they disagree about whether these claims about the individuation of propositions are best explained by attributing genuine complexity — i.e., the having of parts — to propositions.

Do the theories of propositions defended in Part II by Soames, King and I entail that propositions have constituents in the metaphysically heavyweight sense? I don't see that they do. We defend, respectively, the views that propositions are event-types, facts, and properties. But I think that each of our theories leave open the question of whether these event-types, facts, and properties have constituents in the metaphysically heavyweight sense — that is, we leave it open whether event-types, facts, and properties stand in part/whole relations (or some closely analogous relation) to anything.[12]

I think that this openness of our views on this score is in one sense a virtue, and in another sense a vice. It is a strategic virtue because it makes our views consistent with (respectively) various views of the nature of event-types, facts, and properties. And, relatedly, it means that we don't have to confront difficult questions which confront Millians who are also believers in the claim that propositions have constituents in the heavyweight sense. For example: on standard views, part/whole relations are transitive, so that if x is a constituent of y and y is a constituent of z, then x is a constituent of z. But it looks as though Millians will have to deny this principle, since I can be a constituent of a singular proposition about me without every part of me also being a constituent of that

[11] This is the view of, among others, Plantinga (1974), and is defended at length in Juliano Keller (2012).

[12] Though I think that the theories leave this question open, I'm not saying that Soames and King themselves have no views on the matter. King, e.g., expresses sympathy with the idea that the constituents of propositions are parts of those propositions in King (2007), p. 120 note 42.

proposition. One might, after all, be able to entertain singular thoughts about me without thereby being in a position to have singular thoughts about every part of me.[13]

The vice corresponding to this virtue, though, is pretty obvious, and that is just that the above virtue is obtained only by failing to resolve a dilemma about the relationship between propositions and the entities which the three of us all refer to as that proposition's constituents. The dilemma can be put simply like this: are a proposition's constituents parts of that proposition, or not? If they are, then how are we to explain facts, like the failure of transitivity mentioned above, which seem to show that the relationship between propositions and their constituents are quite unlike ordinary part/whole relations? And if they are not, then what exactly is the relation between propositions and their constituents, and how can this relation — given that it is not the part/whole relation — justify the claim that propositions are in some sense complex?

Let's return for a moment to the primitivist view of propositions sketched above. The primitivist agrees with Soames, King, and I that propositions have constituents in the metaphysically lightweight sense, but denies that propositions have constituents in the heavyweight sense. But I've just said that the theories which Soames, King, and I give are consistent with the denial that propositions have constituents in the heavyweight sense. Does that mean that our theories are consistent with this primitivist view?

Not quite. The primitivist says something which each of us deny, namely that propositions are a *sui generis* category of entities, and hence rules out the sorts of theories that each of us try to provide by, respectively, assimilating propositions to cognitive event-types, facts, and properties. This brings out the fact that we should distinguish three different questions on which a theory of propositions should take a stand.

The first is a question about whether propositions have constituents in a lightweight sense, which boils down to questions about the individuation of propositions — e.g., questions about the conditions under which a pair of sentences express the same proposition, or a pair of subjects believe the same proposition.

The second is a question about whether propositions have constituents in the heavyweight sense, which is just the question of whether propositions are simple (lack parts) or complex (have parts).

The third is a question about what sorts of things propositions are. Are propositions a basic category of our ontology, or are they a subclass of some other more fundamental category of thing?

The independence of these three questions deserves some emphasis. Occasionally the first two are implicitly conflated, as when one infers from the falsity of the possible worlds view of propositions (and the falsity of the claim that propositions lack constituents in the lightweight sense) that propositions must be structured (and hence have constituents in the heavyweight sense).[14] And occasionally the second two are conflated, as when the

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[13] See for discussion Gilmore (2011). For a more wide-ranging discussion of the problems with assimilating talk about the constituents of propositions to standard theories of part/whole relations, see Juliano Keller (2012).

[14] See, for discussion, Juliano Keller (2012).

view that propositions are simple (and hence lack constituents in the heavyweight sense) is taken to imply the claim that propositions are irreducible to any other category of entity.

The focus of this book has been overwhelmingly on the third of the above questions. (Though, in each case, our answers to this third question plausibly entail answers to the first.) We've managed, by contrast, mainly to ignore the second. In a way, this emphasis makes sense. The question about whether propositions have parts has corresponding questions about properties, facts, and other categories of abstracta; and, plausibly, whatever considerations lead us to say that propositions are or are not complex will lead us to the same conclusion about properties and facts.[15] Hence one might well think that our second question is not really a question about propositions in particular, but rather a question about abstract objects more generally.

This doesn't change the fact that the second question is one to which any complete theory of propositions, especially ones which are expressed using talk about structure and constituents, owes an answer. But I wonder whether the pervasive use of structure-talk has made this second question seem more fundamental than it really is.

Here's a thought-experiment. Imagine being presented with a compelling argument for the conclusion that no abstract objects, and in particular no properties, facts, or cognitive event types, have parts. Now ask yourself: would this affect any of the claims made in the essays in Part II of this book, or help us to decide which of those theories was most likely to be true? I am not sure that it would. Of course, we'd now have to understand the use of 'constituent' in those essays in a metaphysically less-than-serious way, as a useful term for specifying just which properties, facts, or cognitive event-types propositions are supposed to be, but not as implying that there's any genuine complexity in the entities so specified. But, other than that, it doesn't seem as though anything would be different.

This suggests two things. First, that debates about the nature of propositions, like the one in Parts II & III of this book, can largely be carried on independently of the question of whether propositions are structured. And second, that the explanatory value of the attribution of structure to propositions has been, perhaps, a bit under-explained.

A natural response to this second worry is to say that structure explains representational properties; we can explain what it is for a proposition to be about Socrates by saying that the proposition contains Socrates as a constituent.[16] We can set aside in the present context the fact that I don't think that propositions have representational properties; we might still think that we can explain the representational properties of beliefs and sentences in part in terms of the constituents of the propositions that they have as their content.

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[15] Of course, I think that propositions are properties, and King thinks that they are facts. But both of us think that there are properties and facts which are not propositions, and questions about complexity will arise for these as well.

[16] For versions of this thought, see, among many other places, King (2007), 6, and Braun (1993), (461).

But, as Juliano-Keller (2012) convincingly argues, this sort of explanatory claim is problematic. One might put her point like this: either constituency is parthood, or it isn't. If it is, then we can't explain aboutness in terms of constituency, for many things have parts without being in any sense 'about' those parts. And if it isn't, then, absent a theory of the constituency relation, we've just replaced one primitive — aboutness — with another. Where's the explanatory gain there?

While I still find the view that propositions are structured attractive, I'm less and less sure exactly what is explained by adding to one's theory of propositions the claim that they have parts.[17]

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[17] Thanks to Lorraine Juliano-Keller for engendering the skeptical worries just voiced. Discussion of these topics with Lorraine, along with a reading of her excellent dissertation, *Whence Structured Propositions?*, have prevented me from making at least some of the metaphysically irresponsible claims which I would otherwise have made in this book.