Propositional Attitudes in Modern Philosophy

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RÉSUMÉ : Les philosophes de la période moderne sont souvent présentés comme ayant commis une erreur élémentaire : celle de confondre la force propositionnelle avec le contenu propositionnel. Par l'examen de deux cas saillants, à savoir les philosophes de Port-Royal et John Locke, je montre que l'accusation n'est pas fondée, et que Locke en particulier a les ressources requises pour construire une théorie des attitudes propositionnelles.

Philosophers of the modern period as diverse in metaphysical and epistemological doctrine as John Locke and Antoine Arnauld stand in a broadly Aristotelian tradition that takes propositions to be judgements wherein one idea is affirmed or denied of another. On this view, verbal propositions are the outward signs we give one another of the mental propositions we construct by connecting our ideas.[1]

But at least since the time of J. S. Mill, philosophers have often claimed that this view is vitiated by an inability to account for propositional attitudes other than assent, for at first glance it seems to provide little room for a distinction between the content of a proposition and the attitude one adopts toward it, be it doubt, disbelief, supposition for the sake of argument, or what have you.

Mill offers a sweeping condemnation of "[p]hilosophers, from the time of Descartes downwards, and especially from the era of Leibnitz and Locke," and indeed "almost all writers on Logic in the last two centuries, whether English, German, or French" (1867, p. 59). They have made

their theory of Propositions, from one end to the other, a theory of Judgments. They considered a Proposition, or a Judgment, for they used the two words indiscriminately, to consist in affirming or denying one *idea* of another. To judge was to put two ideas together, or to bring one idea under another, or to perceive the agreement or disagreement between two ideas: and the whole doctrine of Propositions, together with the theory of Reasoning (always necessarily founded upon the theory of Propositions), was stated as if Ideas, or Conceptions, or whatever other term the writer preferred as a name for mental representations generally, constituted essentially the subject matter and substance of those operations. . . . It is, of course, true, that in any case of judgment, as for instance when we judge that gold is yellow, a process takes place in our minds of which some one or other of these theories is a partially correct account. We must have the idea of gold and the idea of yellow, and these two ideas must be brought together in our mind. But in the first place, it is evident that this is only part of what takes place; for we may put two ideas together without any act of belief; as when we merely imagine something, such as a golden mountain; or when we actually disbelieve: for in order even to disbelieve that Mahomet was an apostle of God, we must put the idea of Mahomet and that of an apostle of God together. (ibid., italics in original)

On Mill's view, the ideational treatment of language common to his predecessors led them to account for propositions in terms of the connection of ideas in an act of judging. Mill seems to make two points. First, since we often connect our ideas without thereby making a judgement at all, as when we merely imagine a golden mountain, it cannot be the case that all connection of ideas involves a proposition.[2] Second, Mill argues that if all propositions are judgements, we are left without any way to account for the diverse attitudes one might take up with respect to those propositions, such as doubting, hoping, supposing, etc. To equate propositions with judgements is to turn all propositional thought into belief. Thus, the treatment of propositions common to the post-Cartesians is radically impoverished.

However acute his criticisms, it is not clear that Mill himself succeeds in distinguishing between propositional content and attitude. For he treats propositions and assertions as equivalent (Mill 1867, p. 12).[3] This erases the very distinction he chides the moderns for having failed to recognize.

Frege is the obvious choice to play the hero in this story, for Frege's distinction in *Begriffsschrift* between the content-stroke and the assertion-stroke does sever, once and for all, propositional content from propositional attitude. In their respective works on Frege, Peter Geach (1961) and Anthony Kenny (1995) both present him as overthrowing the "traditional view," whereby all propositions are assertions. (I shall refer to this view without inverted commas even though I doubt whether it is traditional in

any meaningful sense.) On the traditional view, Geach claims, a proposition is a subject/predicate complex, united by the copula; the view conflates this unification with assertoric force, with the result that all propositions make assertions. That the traditional view is wildly mistaken is almost too obvious to need pointing out. For example, some propositions serve as antecedents or consequents and so are not themselves asserted. As Geach says, "[a] predicate may obviously be attached to a subject in a clause that does not serve to make an assertion" (Geach 1961, p. 133). In a similar vein, Kenny writes that "some earlier logicians" had thought that "attaching a predicate to a subject . . . necessarily involve[s] making an assertion about what the subject named" (Kenny 1995, p. 37).[4] Neither Geach nor Kenny names any particular figure who is supposed to have held this view.

In an interesting article on the *Port-Royal Logic* of Arnauld and Nicole, Jill Vance Buroker (1993) provides the best statement of the view I take to be natural to someone persuaded by this narrative. Antoine Arnauld collaborated with Claude Lancelot and Pierre Nicole, in turn, to write *La Grammaire générale et raisonnée* (1660) and *La Logique, ou L'art de Penser* (1662), respectively. These works were to have enormous influence, particularly on figures such as Locke and Leibniz. The *Logique* was perhaps the most influential textbook in its field until the nineteenth century.[5] Buroker writes,

> According to [the Port-Royalians], every time one connects a subject and a predicate, one is *ipso facto* judging. Thus there is no room for thinking propositions and suspending judgment, as Descartes advocated in his method of doubt. In fact the Port-Royal view of the copula would make this process impossible; for this reason Arnauld and Nicole use the terms "judgment" and "proposition" interchangeably. . . . [Kant] takes the first step toward distinguishing judgment from proposition by treating the categories of modality—possibility, actuality, and necessity—as ways in which the proposition is held by the thinker. On Kant's view, problematic propositions express only logical possibility (A75/B101). Frege carries out the solution in the *Begriffsschrift* by distinguishing the content-stroke from the assertion-stroke, thereby removing assertive force entirely from the propositional content of the judgment. (Buroker 1993, p. 462)

Call this the "progressivist" account: discussions of proposition and judgement in the modern period are benighted because of their inability to distinguish propositional content from attitude. Kant comes closer to the truth, but a robust distinction had to wait until Frege's *Begriffsschrift*.

In this article, I wish to undermine the progressivist account. I am not contesting the obvious fact that Frege represents a tremendous gain in clarity on these issues. What I *do* contest is the claim that, with the possi-

ble exception of Kant, Frege's modern predecessors were committed to the traditional view. Let me be clear about what my arguments must show. The progressivist need not, of course, claim that any figure explicitly made the error in question; more often, the suggestion seems to be that the error is entailed by other of the philosopher's commitments. Now, since the conflation of predication with assent or assertion is so obviously a confusion, it seems to me enough to show that a particular figure *need not* be read as making this conflation. If the argument for attributing this view to the figure in question is a poor one, only a minimal degree of charity is required to allow us to refrain from making the attribution. In this vein, I shall argue that the analysis of verbs and, in particular, the copula, in the figures I examine is an attempt to account for the unity of the proposition and says nothing at all about propositional attitudes. We can slight these figures for their comparative neglect of contemporary issues about propositional attitudes, but we cannot accuse them of holding the disastrous traditional view. In the case of Locke, I argue that his text presents an embryonic account of propositional attitudes that not merely allows but compels us to refrain from foisting the traditional view on him.

At this point I wish to enter some caveats. First, I shall say almost nothing about the hoary tradition in which the moderns stand. This has already been well chronicled.[6] It should also be obvious that a careful analysis of each and every thinker in the modern period with something to say about these issues is beyond my scope, for reasons of space. Thus, I focus mainly on the Port-Royalians and Locke, not only because their accounts were so influential, but also because they are most often the targets of abuse.

Before beginning, a word of caution is in order about "judgement." The ambiguity of this word has caused much confusion. For my purposes, the most important distinction lies between the propositional and the sub-propositional senses. In the former use, judgement involves an attitude toward a proposition. Thus, for Descartes, judgement always takes a proposition as its object: one judges *that* something is or is not the case (see e.g. 1984, Vol.1, pp. 45, 207; Vol. 2, pp. 26, 105). This point is sometimes obscured by Descartes's use of "idea" to refer both to representations and propositions, although he says that only in the former sense is the term really appropriate (1984, Vol. 2, p. 25). On Descartes's view, intellectual perception provides us with an awareness of the proposition to be considered, while "various modes of willing," such as "desire, aversion, assertion, and denial" must be brought in to account for the attitude we adopt regarding the proposition (1984, Vol. 1, p. 204). Frege's use of "judgement" (*Urtheil*) clearly belongs in the propositional category as well. In his *Begriffsschrift*, a judgement is signified by a vertical stroke to the left of the content stroke. Removing the vertical stroke not only indicates that the content is not asserted, but also that the content is no longer a judgement but "*a mere complex of ideas*" (Frege 1997, p. 52). A content

preceded by a horizontal stroke alone "will not express this judgment [that opposite magnetic poles attract one another], but should merely arouse in the reader the idea of the mutual attraction of magnetic poles, in order, say, to draw conclusions from it" (ibid., p. 53). Obviously, such "ideas" can be propositions, and can figure in deductions.[7] Despite their differences, both the Cartesian and Fregean uses of judgement are propositional in that they assume that judgements take propositions as their objects.

We also find what I shall call the sub-propositional use of "judgement" in the modern period. It is in this sense that the Port-Royalians use it, or so I shall argue below. Buroker is quite right to say that on their view, every time one entertains a proposition one is making a judgement. If they meant "judgement" in the propositional sense, they would obviously be open to refutation along Mill's lines, but, if the progressivist takes for granted that propositional judgement is meant, she begs the question. This is something to be argued for, not assumed from the outset. In fact, on the Port-Royalian account, judgement is not something one does to a proposition, but rather to the *constituents* of propositions. On this view, judgement is a mental act in which one unites or separates two ideas.

In discussing each text, then, it will be important to be clear about just what "judgement" means. Unless otherwise stated, I use "judgement" to mean the sub-propositional activity of uniting one's ideas. I shall now argue that this is the sense intended by the Port-Royalians.

The Port-Royal *Logic* maintains that words "are distinct and articulated sounds that people have made into signs to indicate what takes place in the mind" (Arnauld and Nicole 1996, p. 74; see also p. 37).[8] Since the actions of our minds are not immediately observable by others, we offer sounds that allow them to infer what we are thinking. The greatest distinction we can draw among that which passes in the mind lies between objects of thought and the form or manner in which we think them (Arnauld and Lancelot 1980, p. 47). Correspondingly, in addition to words that indicate that we are thinking of a given thing, we must have words that indicate the manner in which we think of it.

A verb "is nothing other than *a word whose principal function is to signify an affirmation*" (Arnauld and Nicole 1996, p. 79).[9] Although affirmation is the principal mode of our thought, it is only the verb "to be"—and that only in the third person—that works in this limited way; verbs other than the copula also express ideas. The suggestion here is that other verbs signify not only affirmation (since they can always be construed as involving the copula, e.g., "Peter lives" says the same thing as "Peter is living"), but also attributes (as "is living" expresses the attribute of living as well as affirmation). And, although

> [N]ot all our judgments are affirmative, since there are also negative judgments, verbs nonetheless always signify in themselves only affirmations, negations being indicated only by the particles "not" and "no," or by nouns including them, *nullus, nemo,* "none," "no one." When joined to verbs, these words change them from affirmations to negations. (Arnauld and Nicole 1996, p. 82)

On this view, negation is signified by adding a negative particle or noun to a verb that by itself signifies affirmation. It is crucial that verbs indicate the *activity* of affirmation, and not the idea of it; it is an act, not another object of thought alongside the others. In Scholastic terms, we might say that affirmation and negation are operations of judgement, while the concepts or ideas *affirmation* and *negation* are "second intentions" that have as their objects these first-order operations.[10] The case of interjections provides a parallel. There is a great difference between "yahoo" and "joy," even though in a sense they signify the same feeling. A sincere utterer of the former expresses an emotion he is actually having, while an utterer of the latter is signalling that he is thinking of joy and obviously need not be in the grip of that emotion.[11]

"*Affirmer,*" then, refers to a mental act whereby we combine our ideas and so produce a judgement or proposition (Arnauld and Nicole 1996). To say that I affirm x of y is simply to say that I am thinking of x and y in a particular manner: this is what it is to make a judgement. Affirmation, negation, and their genus, judgement, are clearly sub-propositional acts and not acts that one performs upon a complete proposition. We are not entitled to infer from this that all judgements are asserted, for assertion, unlike judgement in the Port-Royalian sense, must have a proposition as its object: one asserts propositions. But one does not *judge* propositions, in the sense Arnauld et al. specify. Their account so far says nothing at all about the assertive force of the resulting proposition. It is instead a view about how propositions are generated in the first place.

This is a key point in my argument. Let us pause to consider how Buroker goes wrong in reading the Port-Royalians as imbuing the copula with assertoric force. She attributes this mistake to them on the grounds of the following passage: "After conceiving things by our ideas, we compare these ideas and, finding that some belong together and others do not, we unite or separate them. This is called *affirming* or *denying,* and in general *judging*" (Arnauld and Nicole 1996, p. 82). From this she deduces that "the copula has two functions in a judgment: it relates the subject and the predicate, and it signifies *affirmation* or *denial*" (Buroker 1993, p. 460). But, in order for this to support her reading, Buroker must read "affirming" and "denying" as carrying assertoric force. Have the Port-Royalians committed themselves to this? On the contrary, in the text quoted above, they are using those terms to refer to the sub-propositional act, and not the propositional attitude or the assertion of a proposition.

Buroker goes on to claim, quite rightly, that to give the copula assertive force is to make it impossible to consider a proposition without assenting to it (1993, p. 461). But the Port-Royalians are claiming that the copula signifies a sub-propositional act; to withhold assent is instead to adopt a propositional attitude. For all the texts Buroker quotes, we have been told nothing at all about propositional attitudes. We cannot deduce simply from their discussion of the copula that all affirmation is assertion, and thus that every proposition must of its own nature be asserted.

The progressivist might reply that even though affirmation and denial are sub-propositional, they still commit one to the resulting proposition, for in the text just quoted, Arnauld and Nicole claim that we compare our ideas and unite them in a proposition when we *find that* they agree or disagree. Does this not suggest that whenever we form a proposition, we also assent to it? We must keep in mind, however, that at this stage of their *Logic* (II, iii, p. 82), the authors have not dealt with complex propositions. Among the latter are conditionals and counterfactuals. On the Port-Royalian view, in evaluating the truth of a proposition such as "if a creature's will can obstruct the absolute will of God, God is not omnipotent," "we consider only the truth of the inference" (Arnauld and Nicole 1996, p. 100). In constructing the antecedent, we must unite our ideas; but we certainly cannot *find* that they agree, since—or so the Port-Royalians would presumably maintain—it is false that a creature's will can obstruct the will of God. But we nevertheless perform an affirmation as part of an inference. Why should we think that Arnauld et al. hold, absurdly, that the affirmation contained in the antecedent has assertive force? To be sure, in order to entertain the antecedent, I must perform the mental act of combining these ideas. This is to say nothing about the status of the proposition so formed.

Just as we cannot assume that every judgement containing an affirmation is asserted, so we cannot, *pace* Buroker (1993, p. 461), assume that every judgement containing a negation is a denial. This, of course, would be disastrous: it would, for example, make it impossible to grasp a counterfactual, which has a false proposition as its antecedent. But again, there is no way to infer simply from a position about sub-propositional entities and acts to a position about propositional attitudes.

This is not to say that the Port-Royalians offer an adequate account of propositional attitudes. What I have done, at most, is undermine the quick inference from sub-propositional act to propositional attitude. It remains to be seen whether the Port-Royalians have a satisfactory positive account.[12] Rather than pursue this issue, I shall address a natural objection: if the Port-Royal discussion of affirmation and negation is not an attempt to account for—and entails nothing with regard to—propositional attitude and assertive force, what is its purpose? I want to suggest that it is intended to account for what Peter Hylton has called "the unity of the

proposition. This problem was felt acutely by the Russell of the early years of the century, as Hylton argues, as well as by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*.[13] Here is Russell's statement of the problem:

> Consider, for example, the proposition "A differs from B." The constituents of this proposition, if we analyze it, appear to be only A, difference, B. Yet these constituents, thus placed side by side, do not reconstitute the proposition. The difference which occurs in the proposition actually relates A and B, whereas the difference after analysis is a notion which has no connection with A and B. It may be that we ought, in the analysis, to mention the relations which difference has to A and B, relations expressed by *is* and *from* when we say "A is different from B." These relations consist in the fact that A is referent and B relatum with respect to difference. But "A, referent, difference, relatum, B" is still merely a list of terms, not a proposition. (Russell 1937b, §54; quoted in Hylton 1984, p. 376).

Russell's difficulties in accounting for the unity of the proposition have been thoroughly explored by Hylton, and I have no wish to rehash his account here. It is enough to see that the problem Russell points to arises for the moderns if we replace "A, difference, B," with the ideas of these things. That is, a broadly mentalistic account of the meaning of categorematic terms does not obviate the need for an answer to the problem of propositional unity. Instead, it makes particularly attractive the solution proposed by the Port-Royalians, viz., that it is a mental act that accounts for propositional unity. On their view, the copula signifies the act of affirmation, which makes the difference between merely conceiving of a subject and a predicate on one hand and combining or separating them in a proposition on the other. The nature of affirmation "is to unite and identify, so to speak, the subject with the attribute, since this is what is signified by the word 'is'" (Arnauld and Nicole 1996, p. 129).

A similar concern with propositional unity is to be found in Hobbes. In his *De Corpore*, Hobbes claims that there is no necessity that a proposition be composed of subject, copula, and predicate. It is possible to get by without the copula with sufficient conventions which accomplish the same task by, say, the order of the words (Hobbes 1839-45, esp. *De Corpore* I, iii, 2, p. 31, and *Leviathan* IV, 46, p. 672).[14] Remarking on this position, Peter Geach writes, "Hobbes . . . held that the copula was superfluous; but we might very well object that on the contrary it is necessary, because a pair of names is not a proposition but a list" (Geach 1980, p. 60). This comment of Geach's is useful, even if it misses the point of Hobbes's declaration of the superfluity of the copula, for Hobbes's idea is simply that, while the job of the copula must be done, it need not be done by "is," "est," or what have you. His point here is surely sound. We could in principle accomplish the same task by writing the name of the subject

above the name of the predicate on the page, or by clearing our throats before speaking the two words; we would be "not a jot lesse capable of Inferring, Concluding, and of all kinds of Reasoning" (Hobbes 1839-45, *Leviathan* IV, 46, p. 673). So, far from making a proposition into a list by analyzing each of its members as categorematic terms, Hobbes explicitly states that the copula is not a name at all (ibid., p. 672). This becomes clearer if we examine Hobbes's view of the proposition:

> *A* Proposition *is a speech consisting of two names copulated, by which he that speaketh signifies he conceives the latter name to be the name of the same thing whereof the former is the name; or* (which is all one) *that the former name is comprehended by the latter.* (Hobbes 1839-45, *De Corpore* I, iii, 2, p. 30; also see *Leviathan* IV, 46, and *Human Nature* I, v)

For Hobbes, the copula's function is to indicate that the speaker is conceiving of things in a certain manner. This accords well with the primacy of the mental over the linguistic: the function of the verbal proposition is to serve as a spoken sign of internal conceptions, and one important aspect of this is to signify the *way* in which the speaker is having those conceptions. A true proposition is one whose predicate names those things named by the subject (Hobbes 1839-45, *De Corpore* I, iii, 7, p. 35). Thus, "charity is a virtue" is true just in case the extension of "virtue" includes that of "charity."

Despite differences at the level of detail, Hobbes and the Port-Royalians share the view that a proposition consists of two things considered by the mind in a certain way. This last fact accounts for the combination of categorematic items without which a proposition would be a mere list. It is in this tradition that Locke's discussion of particles in Book III of the *Essay* must be located. Locke claims that words primarily signify ideas in the mind of the speaker (Locke 1975, *Essay*, III, ii, pp. 405-408).[15] We thus have two levels of proposition: verbal, in which words are combined in affirmative and negative sentences, and mental, in which *ideas* are combined or separated. The meaning of a verbal proposition is parasitic on that of a mental one. In a mental proposition, the mind, "either by perceiving or supposing the Agreement or Disagreement of any of its *Ideas*, does tacitly within it self put them into a kind of Proposition affirmative or negative . . . " (ibid., IV, v, 6, p. 576). Among other things, particles serve to indicate these acts of the mind. These acts, which Locke "has endeavoured to express by the terms *Putting together* and *Separating*" (ibid.), are responsible for introducing propositional content and distinguishing between a mere concatenation of ideas and a proposition, wherein ideas are related in a complex that admits of a truth-value. Locke echoes *La Grammaire* II, xvii,[16] when he writes,

> Besides Words, which are names of *Ideas* in the Mind, there are a great many others that are made use of, to signify the *connexion* that the Mind gives to *Ideas, or Propositions, one with another.* The Mind, in communicating its thought to others, does not only need signs of the *Ideas* it has then before it, but others also, to shew or intimate some particular action of its own, at that time, relating to those *Ideas.* This it does in several ways; as, *Is,* and *Is not,* are the general marks of the Mind, affirming or denying. But besides affirmation, or negation, without which, there is in Words no Truth or Falsehood, the Mind does, in declaring its Sentiments to others, connect, not only the parts of Propositions, but whole Sentences one to another, with their several Relations and Dependencies, to make a coherent Discourse. (Locke 1975, *Essay*, III, vii, 1, p. 471)

Like Hobbes and the Port-Royalians, Locke insists that the copula does not function as categorematic words do, for, instead of signifying an idea, it signifies an act of the mind, which is responsible for connecting ideas and forming a proposition. Through reflection, one gains an idea of affirmation; but this idea is not what is signified by the copula.

But here, as with the Port-Royalians, a problem arises. Locke speaks of "perceiving, or judging" (ibid., IV, v, 5, p. 575) that two ideas agree or disagree. Although this act is sub-propositional, it also seems to commit one to the resulting proposition. After all, if one perceives or judges the agreement of two ideas and so combines them in a proposition, how can one withhold assent? First we must recall that Locke allows for "intuitive" propositions, which are such that the mind immediately perceives the agreement or disagreement of the constitutive ideas, "as the Eye doth light" (ibid., IV, ii, 1, p. 531). Here it is impossible to withhold assent; obviously, not all propositions are like this. This is only part of the answer, however, since judging in Locke's sense also seems to commit one, to some degree, to the proposition in question.[17] A little later on, Locke is more careful: he says that "whenever he [the thinker] *perceives, believes, or supposes*" (IV, v, 6, p. 576; my italics) that his ideas agree or disagree, he combines or separates those ideas and so produces a proposition. This allows for combining or separating our ideas even when we doubt the resulting proposition, or know it to be false.

Let us turn now to Mill's two objections and see how Locke's account fares. Mill's first objection was that to connect our ideas is not thereby to make a judgement since we might think of two ideas without making any judgement at all. This point is easily handled by Locke, Hobbes, and the Port-Royalians, for none claims that any act of connecting one's ideas whatsoever constitutes a judgement. It should be clear that, for Locke, not all separation of ideas is negation, for example, since at least one kind of abstraction is a process by which ideas are separated, and yet no proposition, mental or otherwise, is involved.[18]

What of Mill's second objection, viz., that in analyzing the connection the mind gives to its ideas in terms of negation and affirmation, this account makes all propositional thought assertoric? Part of the response to this objection has already been given: Locke, like the Port-Royalians, sees affirmation and negation as sub-propositional. But a stronger defence can be made if we consider non-copulative particles such as "if" and "and." These signify relations between propositions and allow us to link propositions in chains of dependence and support. Such particles, then, can take as their objects propositions, which of necessity involve acts of combination and separation.[19]

Already we have the materials to deal with negation as it occurs in counterfactuals, for, on Locke's account, one constructs the antecedent, which is itself a proposition, by linking two signs of ideas with "is not," the sign of negation. When this proposition occurs after an "if" and is followed by another proposition, we have a third proposition which has as one of its constituents a proposition containing a negation. "If" signifies the connection one takes to obtain between the antecedent and the consequent. This alone should prevent us from thinking that Lockean negation is always denial, where this is understood as an attitude toward or operation on a proposition.[20]

The logical connectives do not exhaust the different ways in which the mind might consider propositions. Locke says that we give propositions "such different Entertainment, as we call *Belief, Conjecture, Guess, Doubt, Wavering, Distrust, Disbelief,* etc." (1975, *Essay,* IV, xvi, 9, p. 663). But what are these "entertainments"?

Locke seems to give two different answers. At the start of Book II, he declares them to be acts of the mind. His examples of the operations of the mind of which we have ideas of reflection are almost entirely made up of such attitudes: "*Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing*" (1975, II, i, 4, p. 105). On this view, propositional attitudes are second-order acts having as their object propositions which themselves involve first-order acts (affirmation and negation).

But a little later on, Locke lists "Believing, Doubting, Intending, Fearing, [and] Hoping" under the heading of "the several modes of Thinking" (1975, II, xxiii, 30, p. 313; see II, xix, 1-4, pp. 226-29). In calling propositional attitudes modes of thinking, Locke is making two points: that they are parasitic on the act of thinking a given proposition, which involves holding two ideas in mind and combining or separating them; and that they are ways in which one thinks of those propositions. If this is Locke's view, then there is no need for a second-order act of the mind whose object is a proposition. Instead, if one is to think a proposition, there must be a *way* in which one thinks it; these different ways just are the propositional attitudes.

However that may be, it should be clear that Locke has not inadvertently made all propositions objects of affirmation or negation, nor has he confounded assertive force and propositional content. Propositions must *contain* such acts of the mind if they are to be propositions at all; but, *contra* the progressivist, assent does not exhaust the attitudes one might take up with regard to those propositions. The progressivist's objections stem from conflating affirmation with assertion or assent in a way Locke would find puzzling.[21]

Part of the progressivist's claim, although not an essential one, is that Kant represents a vast improvement over the moderns and a significant step on the road to Frege. Let us turn now, however briefly and inadequately, to Kant's account, and test how far this progressivist story holds true.

Kant's table of judgements in the *Critique of Pure Reason* includes four sets of three moments each under the headings of quantity, quality, relation, and modality. Under the last of these headings, Kant makes a set of distinctions that shows his sensitivity to the difference between propositional content and attitude.

It is crucial to see that what determines the modality of a judgement is the attitude of the judger; it is a matter of how one thinks of a given proposition.[22] "Problematic judgments are those in which affirmation or negation is taken as merely possible (optional). In assertoric judgments affirmation or negation is viewed as real (true), and in apodeictic judgments as necessary" (A 74/B100, in Kant 1958, pp. 109-10). What counts, then, is the status one assigns to the judgement, which itself contains an affirmation or a negation. Kant claims that the modality of judgements "is a quite peculiar function" in that "it contributes nothing to the content of the judgment . . . but concerns only the value of the copula in relation to thought in general" (B 99-100/A 74, in Kant 1958, p. 109). Whether a judgement is problematic, assertoric, or apodeictic, it has precisely the same content. What one takes to be its relation to the laws of thought determines whether one considers a judgement as necessarily true, i.e., as following from the laws of thought, as simply true, or as possible.[23]

On Kant's view, the possibility of problematic judgements explains our ability to use false judgements as constituents of hypothetical judgements. In a proposition such as "if there is a perfect justice, the obstinately wicked are punished," the antecedent "is not stated assertorically, but is thought only as an optional judgment, which it is possible to assume; it is only the logical consequence which is assertoric . . . such judgments may therefore be obviously false, and yet, taken problematically, may be conditions of the knowledge of truth" (A75/B100, in Kant 1958, p. 110).

There is a non-trivial point of agreement here between Kant and Locke. On Kant's account, the modality of a judgement reflects the attitude one adopts toward a sub-propositional act of affirmation or negation; simi-

larly, Locke holds that the objects of propositional attitudes are mental propositions which of necessity contain acts of affirmation or negation. This is true whether Locke thinks that propositional attitudes are second-order acts or simply ways in which first-order acts (combination and separation) are performed.

There is also a significant difference between Kant and his predecessors. One difficulty with the mental act or manner account proposed by the early moderns is that it places no constraints on what can be judged; to use Hylton's example, nothing rules out judging "that this table pen-holders the book" (1984, pp. 386-87). Kant, by contrast, claims that the synthesis responsible for the unity of a judgement must be performed according to the categories.[24] Indeed, the categories just are the logical functions of judgement brought to bear on the manifold of representations (B 143; Kant 1958, p. 160). Since experience for Kant is shot through with judgement, as it were, this claim has an idealist upshot: our experiences could not be structured other than they are, simply because the categories constrain us in judgement, and experience is generated not by the impression of objects upon a passive understanding but by the understanding's actively structuring appearance in accordance with the categories, i.e., performing its characteristic function, judgement. It was in large measure Russell's wish to avoid the idealism implicit in so constraining judgement that led him to construct his own theories and to declare that "all sound philosophy should begin with an analysis of propositions" (1937a, p. 8).[25]

Obviously, Kant's account raises many issues I have no space to explore here.[26] For our purposes, the crucial point is that the same features of his account that prevent Kant from being landed with the traditional account are also to be found in his modern predecessors.

Although I of course do not pretend to have made a full survey of these issues in modern philosophy, I hope to have shown that the progressivist view is false. It is unfair to accuse the Port-Royalians of conflating affirmation (negation) with assertion or assent (denial). Locke's account provides a clear basis for marking off content from attitude, a basis on which Kant, whether knowingly or not, builds. I do not claim that the moderns' account of the proposition is defensible. My claim is only that these figures cannot be convicted of subscribing to the traditional view. If I am right, the cleavage between the modern view and the proto-Fregean account of Kant is not so great as it at first seems. And this is precisely what one should expect.

Notes

1 This is not to say, of course, that Locke and Arnauld use "idea" in the same sense. Although this is controversial, it seems fairly clear that Locke most

often uses it to refer to a mental object, Arnauld to a mental act. Nothing turns on this for the purposes of this article.

2 Cp. Leibniz, who criticizes Locke by saying that "'l'homme sage' does not express a proposition and is yet a joining of two terms, or, if one prefers, of the two ideas signified by those terms" (*Nouveaux essais*, IV, v, 2, in Leibniz 1996, p. 311).

3 See Skorupski 1989, chap. 2.

4 There is a potential confusion here between assertion, which seems to be a performance, and assent, which involves the ascription of an attitude. (To see the difference, recall that one may assert a proposition without assenting to it.) Nothing much turns on the issue, for my purposes.

5 Buroker (1993, p. 456) tells us that between its first date of publication and the end of the nineteenth century, at least sixty-three editions were published in French and ten in English, while the English edition of 1818 served as the text for courses at Oxford and Cambridge.

6 See Gabriel Nuchelmans 1983 and 1998.

7 Mitchell Green has suggested to me that Fregean assertion/judgement requires not only that one genuinely hold that the asserted proposition is true, but that it actually be true. Indeed, Frege often describes judgement as the recognition (*Anerkennen*) of a thought's truth (see, e.g, 1979, pp. 2, 139, 145, 149, 185; 1980, pp. 20, 22; and 1984, p. 164). It seems, then, that to assert a false thought is only to seem to assert it, and to infer from a false thought is merely to make a "pseudo-inference" or a "purely formal deduction" (see Frege 1980, p. 17). If this is correct, Buroker's reading of the purpose of Frege's assertion sign is mistaken, for it does not mark what we ordinarily call asserted propositions off from unasserted ones, simply because Frege also requires the content of an assertion to be a true thought. This is a difficult issue I do not pretend to settle here.

8 Translations follow Buroker's edition of the *Logic* (Arnauld and Nicole 1996).

9 By contrast, Dickoff and James translate this definition thus: "a verb is nothing else but a word whose principal function is to indicate *assertion*" (Arnauld and Nicole 1964, p. 104; my italics). But this is to elide the distinction between assertion and affirmation, and Dickoff and James are simply wrong to translate *affirmer* as they do.

10 For another treatment of these issues, see Nuchelmans 1983, p. 76.

11 For a discussion of the distinction between interjections and categoremata as it was found in the medieval literature, see Nuchelmans 1983, pp. 55ff.

12 Arnauld et al. attempt to deal with at least some of the other attitudes one might take toward a proposition by means of inflection and mood: "I have said that the *principal* use of the verb is to signify affirmation, because we will see below that it is also used to signify other movements of our soul, such as *to desire, to pray, to command*, etc. But this is only to change the inflexion and the mood: and therefore we will consider the verb in this chapter only in its principal signification, which is the one which it has in the indicative"

(Arnauld and Lancelot 1980, p. 109). Whatever these other movements of the soul might be, the verb's principal use is still to signify affirmation. In a later chapter in the *Grammaire* on the "moods or manners of verbs," the authors (Arnauld and Lancelot 1980, p. 121) argue that "beyond simple affirmations" such as "he loves," "there [are] some conditioned and some modified affirmations, such as *although he would have loved, when he would love*." To accommodate these acts of the mind, people doubled the inflections of some verbs in some tenses. But the authors do not provide any discussion of how this relates to the copula, beyond saying that they are "modified" affirmations.

13 See Wittgenstein 1974, p. 12, Proposition 3.141ff.

14 References to Hobbes are in this format: book, chapter, section, and page number in the appropriate volume of Hobbes 1839-45.

15 References to the *Essay* are given in the standard format: book, chapter, section, page number in Locke 1975.

16 "Les hommes . . . n'ont pas eu moins besoin d'inventer des mots qui marquassent l'affirmation . . . que d'inventer qui marquassant les objets de nos pensées" (Arnauld and Lancelot 1980, p. 175).

17 Lockean "judgement" is the act of taking two ideas to agree or disagree when this is mediated by one or more other ideas, "whose certain Agreement, or Disagreement with them [the mind] does not perceive, but hath observed to be frequent or usual" (1975 IV, xvii, 17, p. 685).

18 This is the model of abstraction to be found at, e.g., II, xi, 9, p. 159. Whether Book III presents a different manner of abstraction or not is an issue on which I need not now take a position.

19 Note that, unlike the Port-Royalians, Locke does not hold that the copula is always a sign of affirmation. Instead, "is" is given a different treatment as it occurs in affirmation and negation. Thus, instead of claiming that "is" by itself signifies affirmation, which is then somehow deflected into negation with the addition of a particle, we have two separate acts of the mind; affirmation is not a constituent of the mental act signified by "is not."

20 Note that Locke himself in the passage quoted does not use denial in this technical sense. On his view, one can say both that an idea is denied of another idea, and that a proposition is denied. In the text I am using "denial" only in the latter sense.

21 It also seems clear that Descartes is sensitive to these distinctions. On his account, the intellect presents ideas, which in this sense are propositions (see above), toward which the will then adopts an attitude such as doubt or assent.

22 T. K. Swing writes, "[t]he problematic judgment is one whose truth is unknown or undetermined; the assertoric judgment is one whose truth is known or verified; and the apodeictic judgment is one whose truth is guaranteed by the laws of thought alone" (1969, pp. 17-18; also quoted in Mattey 1986, p. 425, n.10). Even this needs some correction, however, for Swing's characterization of apodeictic judgements omits the crucial feature that they are *taken* to be necessary truths. It is how judgements are viewed, not whether

or not they in fact follow from any laws, that is at issue. Buroker also misses this point when she maintains for Kant problematic propositions "express only logical possibility" (1993, p. 462).

23 Here arises a difficulty, for in what sense is a problematic judgement "merely possible"? There are two ways of taking this: first, as seems intended in the *Critique*, that an affirmation or negation is performed, but the act is regarded as optional, or alternatively, that no act of affirmation or negation is performed at all. The second view of problematic judgements seems to be adopted by Kant in the *Logic*, where he identifies assertoric judgements with propositions. (This, of course, is the very mistake Buroker lauds him for avoiding.) Kant (1974, p. 116) declares a "problematic proposition" to be a "*contradictio in adjecto*." This is because "[b]efore I have a proposition I must indeed first judge" (ibid.) The difficulty is that if a problematic judgement is one in which no affirmation or negation is performed at all, then there will be no way to introduce propositional content. But in the *Critique*, the point is that the judger sees the act of affirmation or negation *which he has already performed* as optional, i.e., as not compelled by the laws of thought. For further discussion, see Mattey 1986, pp. 430-31.

24 Hylton (1984) argues for this claim in greater depth. See esp. pp. 378-92.

25 This is also quoted in Hylton 1984, p. 375.

26 For further discussion of Kant, see Allison 1983, Mattey 1986, and Swing 1969, as cited above.

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