

## “Predication, the Content-Force Distinction, and the Frege-Geach Problem”

Both Peter Hanks and Scott Soames think that predication is what grounds both our capacity to represent and creates structured propositions. Yet, they disagree over the nature of predication.

Hanks thinks that predication is a committal or *forceful* act and that to perform a basic sequence of mental acts like thinking of an object *O* in way *W*, thinking of a property *F*, and predicating *F* of *O* results in a similarly committal or forceful act of *judging* that *O* is *F*.<sup>1</sup>

Soames thinks that predication is a neutral or *forceless* act and that to perform a basic sequence of mental acts like the above results in the similarly neutral or forceless act of *entertaining* the proposition that *O* is *F*.

Both have powerful reasons in favor of their views. Hanks’s reason for his approach is that predication is what’s supposed to explain representation and generate truth-conditions and for my predicating *F* of *O* to amount to representing *O* as *F* and generate truth-conditions it has to be the sort of thing that is performed either truly or falsely. Thus, when I predicate, I do something that’s done truly or falsely. But then I must’ve done something that is committal or forceful in this sense.

The cost of getting to say this is that Hanks is forced to reject the Content-Force distinction and therefore is subject to the Frege-Geach problem. On the classical Fregean view we can separate the act of judging from the act of grasping a proposition. Thus, when we judge a disjunctive proposition like the proposition that *p* or *q*, what happens is that we first grasp the disjunctive proposition and then judge it to be the case.

However, on Hanks’s view we can’t separate the act of judging from the act of grasping the proposition. Thus, when we judge a disjunctive proposition like the proposition that *p* or *q* what happens is that we first judge both and then disjoin them. But now we’re facing the Frege-Geach problem because it’s simply false that judging that *p* or *q* involves judging that *p* and judging that *q*.

Hanks has suggestions as to how to solve the Frege-Geach problem in terms of the notion of cancellation. One thing that I will do in this presentation is to argue that they don’t work.<sup>2</sup> However, this is not my main aim.

Soames’s reason for his forceless approach is simply that it preserves the Content-Force distinction and therefore avoids the Frege-Geach problem (Soames, in conversation). When we judge a disjunctive proposition like the proposition that *p* or *q*, what happens is that we first entertain each proposition and then disjoin them, entertaining the disjunctive

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<sup>1</sup> Hanks himself has a language-first picture and prefers to talk of assertion. However, I will conveniently disregard this aspect of his view for the sake of convenience. Fortunately it won’t matter for the purposes of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For criticism of the view of cancellation presented in Hanks 2011, see Reiland 2012. Here I will criticize the newer proposal presented in Hanks 2015.

proposition, and then judge it to be the case. And here there's no Frege-Geach problem because it's unproblematic to think that judging that p or q involves entertaining the proposition that p and entertaining the proposition that q.

But the cost of getting to say this seems to be giving up on the idea that predication is what explains representing and generates truth-conditions. As we saw above, for my predicating *F* of *O* to amount to representing *O* as *F* it has to be performed either truly or falsely. But predication thought of as neutral is not performed truly or falsely (Hanks 2015).

Hanks is right that we need to think of predication as forceful. Yet, I think that Soames is right that we need to preserve the Content-Force distinction and avoid the Frege-Geach problem rather than having to solve it. My main aim in this presentation/paper is to show how we can do both.

The basic idea is as follows. We start with a predication thought of as forceful. We make a basic range of judgments. Propositions are judgment-types. And once we've made a basic range of judgments, we can entertain or think of the propositions qua judgment-types the same way we can think of objects. Entertaining is the "thinking-of" analogue for propositions, an *objectual* attitude with a proposition as an object. ((This is supported by the fact that attitude verbs like 'judge' take that-clauses like 'that p' and thus *have* contents. But 'entertain' and 'grasp' are similar to 'think of' in taking noun phrases like 'the proposition that p' and thus don't have contents, but *have* objects. (Forbes 2015)). This means that when we judge a disjunctive proposition like the proposition that p or q we first think of p, think of q, and then disjoin them, which amounts to judging the disjunctive proposition. Here, like on Soames approach, there is no problem in thinking that judging that p or q involves thinking of the proposition that p and thinking of the proposition that q.

In the presentation I will spell this basic idea out in more depth, show that it's not inconsistent with anything that motivates Hanks and Soames, and answer the following worry: if judging is supposed to ground our ability to think of propositions, how can we think of propositions we've never judged before?

## References

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