

SCOTT SOAMES: *Cognitive propositions: objections and responses*

I will assume familiarity with the conception of propositions as purely representational cognitive acts that I have presented elsewhere. After summarizing it, I will address the most serious objections to it that I am aware of. The first objection is that propositions can't be cognitive acts because they aren't things we do; to think otherwise is to make a category mistake. The second objection is that cognitive can't be representational, because to represent is to do something, while acts are not merely the things done. The third objection is that the cognitive conception of propositions is incorrect because it wrongly takes propositions to be the meanings of certain sentences, which they cannot be. The fourth objection is that even if cognitive acts are propositions, and hence objects of some attitudes – like believe, assert, affirm, assume, and posit, they are not the objects of other attitudes – like think, say, judge, hypothesize, and suppose – which can't take noun phrase objects like the proposition that S. The fifth objection is that cognitive propositions can be the contents of declarative sentences only if something very like them are the contents of interrogative and imperative sentences. But it is not clear how to extend the cognitive approach to cover these cases. The sixth objection is that the cognitive approach can't explain agents' ability to entertain negations and other truth functional compounds without making unrealistic cognitive assumptions. The seventh objection is a semantic theory based on the cognitive conception of propositions can't explain the truth and meaning of some sentences containing empty names. The final objection is that the cognitive conception can't be correct because it is incoherent to suppose, as I do, that acts of predication have truth conditions, if they are forceless, and so do not commit one to an object's having the predicated property. I will argue that these objections can be rebutted in a way that illuminates the role of propositions in our theories of language and mind.