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Lockean Propositions

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6.1 Introduction

In the early modern period the word 'proposition' was used in a much more varied way, sometimes referring to sentences, utterances or assertions, sometimes referring to judgments or acts of judging, and sometimes referring to the objects or contents of those acts. Locke's usage does not align perfectly with contemporary usage, but does share enough with it to make sense of the work he was putting them to.

Contemporary theorists who embrace propositions take them to play some or all of the following roles: (a) to be the meanings of sentences, (b) to be the objects of the attitudes, (c) to be the primary bearers of truth and falsity, and (d) to be the referents of *that* clauses.[1] For role (a), propositions are what we point to when we explain how an English speaker who utters the sentence 'the book is red' and a Spanish speaker who utters the sentence 'el libro es rojo' have said the same thing. The proposition is the thing they have both said. And, for role (b), if Angela believes what she said when she uttered the Spanish sentence, and Barry disputes what was said when someone uttered the English sentence, then Barry disputes what Angela believes, and so, the same thing – the proposition that the book is red – is not only the thing that was asserted when the sentences were spoken, but also the thing believed by Angela and disputed/denied/disbelieved by Barry. For role (c), serving as the primary bearers of truth and falsity, the idea is that we assess lots of the things we've been discussing – the sentences, the beliefs, denials, etc. – as true or false. But the truth and falsity of the sentence isn't a free-floating fact in the world, nor is it disconnected from the truth or falsity of the belief, or denial. Rather, according to role (c), all of these other things inherit their truth values from the proposition, which is the original or primary bearer of truth and falsity. So the sentence 'the book is red' is true (let us suppose), because it expresses the proposition predicating redness of the book, and that proposition is true. And so anything inheriting its truth value from that proposition will be true, anything which is a denial of that proposition will be false, and so on. Lastly, for role (d), when one makes an indirect speech attribution ('Angela said that the book is red'), an attitude attribution ('Barry denies that the book is red'), or various other uses of *that*-clauses ('it is true that the book is red'), the proposition will be either the object of the relation indicated or the subject of the predication indicated. While any one of these roles for propositions can be advocated independently of the others, and theorists pick and choose which of the roles they endorse, the four-role package is a fairly attractive and straightforward proposal for what propositions do.

Helpfully, in the *Essay*, Locke gives a compact and clear definition of his use of 'proposition', allowing us to compare:

§5. But to return to the consideration of Truth. We must, I say, observe two sorts of Propositions, that we are capable of making. *First, Mental, wherein* the *Ideas* in our Understandings *are* without the use of Words *put together, or separated* by the Mind, perceiving, or judging of their Agreement, or Disagreement.

Secondly, Verbal Propositions, which *are Words* the signs of our *Ideas put together or separated in affirmative or negative Sentences.* By which way of affirming or denying, these Signs, made by Sounds, are as it were put together or separated one from another. So that Proposition consists in joining, or separating Signs, and Truth consists in the putting together, or separating these Signs, according as the Things, which they stand for, agree or disagree.

Essay, 4.5.5, p. 575–6

Locke defines two types of propositions, *mental* and *verbal*, the former involving the joining or separating of ideas and the latter involving the joining or separating of words. From this definition, Locke's verbal propositions are best understood as sentences or possibly utterances, and bear little resemblance to what we typically mean by 'proposition' now. His mental propositions, on the other hand, are signified by the verbal propositions – role (a) – and are the primary bearers of truth and falsity – role (c) – given that verbal propositions are true or not in virtue of whether the signified mental proposition is true. Interpreters are divided on whether or not Locke's propositions accomplish anything like role (b) for propositions; that is, whether they serve as objects of the attitudes. The divide is between those who read Locke as identifying mental propositions with judgments (the 'Conflationary Reading') and those who read Locke as distinguishing between mental propositions and judgments (the 'Proto-Fregean Reading'). These two readings also differ on how serviceable the propositions are as referents of *that*-clauses (as we will see).[2]

Despite the philosophical virtues of the Proto-Fregean reading, I follow Jennifer Smalligan Marušić (2014) in defending the Conflationary Reading, for reasons of textual fit, and due to the benefits of the Conflationary reading for Locke's account of communication. My goal is to show how the Frege-Geach problem drives the case in favor of the Proto-Fregean reading, present the Communication-based argument for the Conflationary reading, and offer a reply to the Frege-Geach problem that is available to Locke on that reading.

6.2 Propositions and Truth in Locke

As noted, verbal propositions signify mental propositions. Thus, verbal propositions and their constituent elements only derivatively or indirectly signify things in the world. The indirect nature of verbal signification has led to worries about whether Locke can really account for the world-directed nature of our verbal discourse.[3] The brief version of this worry is that when one utters a sentence such as 'Seabiscuit is canine' the verbal proposition will be *about* one's ideas, and so, the standard for truth will be whether one believes Seabiscuit to be a dog, rather than whether the animal publicly named 'Seabiscuit' was in fact a dog. A version of this objection was raised first by John Sergeant (1697) and later (though Locke is not explicitly named as a target) by John Stuart Mill (2011).

From the definition of truth in the above quote, however, we can see why this objection is not truly a concern for Locke. A verbal proposition is true when the signs it is composed of are put together (or separated) according as the things they are signs of agree (or disagree). In the sentence 'Seabiscuit is canine', the word 'Seabiscuit' is a sign of my idea SEABISCUIT, and 'canine' is a sign of my idea CANINE. The positive copula – 'is' – signifies joining (rather than separating).[4] Thus, the sentence 'Seabiscuit is canine' would be true only if SEABISCUIT and CANINE *agree*, and the question of

whether the sentence is true depends on the question of whether the ideas agree.[5] Those ideas do not agree, though, because the things they signify do not agree.[6] Note that not all agreements and disagreements between ideas will be transparently perceptible to the understanding, simply in virtue of entertaining those ideas. Unlike TRIANGLE and BEING THREE SIDED, the agreement of GOLD and SOLUBILITY IN *AQUA REGIA* can only be known empirically.

So, the analysis of a sentence's truth is independent of whether the person uttering the sentence believes it. Rather, the analysis is dependent upon whether the judgment signified by the sentence would itself be true. The speaker is not *describing* their mental life, they are *publicizing* it. This way of understanding Locke's view makes sense of the indirect path it takes to establish truth conditions for sentences about ordinary external world objects, while also delivering on Locke's claim about what the primary purpose of language is for us:

> §1. GOD having designed Man for a sociable Creature, made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kind; but furnished him also with Language, which was to be the great Instrument, and common Tye of Society. *Man* therefore had by Nature his Organs so fashioned, as to be *fit to frame articulate Sounds*, which we call Words. But this was not enough to produce Language; fur Parrots, and several other Birds, will be taught to make articulate Sounds distinct enough, which yet, by no means, are capable of Language.

> §2. Besides articulate Sounds therefore, it was farther necessary, that he should be *able to use these Sounds, as Signs of internal Conceptions*; and to make them stand as marks for the *Ideas* within his own Mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the Thoughts of Men's Minds be conveyed from one to another.
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> *Essay* 3.1.1–2, p. 402

The primary role of language is to enable human sociality, by allowing our otherwise undisclosed mental states to be evident to each other. Rather than reporting on the contents of our minds, though, it is better to think about a sentence uttered as an exhibition of what is going on in your mind. We can think of the mental state designated as providing *honesty* or *sincerity* conditions rather than *truth* conditions.[7]

6.3 Judgment and Mental Propositions

6.3.1 *The Copula Problem*

Locke's account of the copula runs into trouble when one sentence is a component element of another sentence. When you utter 'Sprinkles is feline' Locke's view is that you are expressing your judgment that FELINE and SPRINKLES agree. If you utter 'Natsumi believes that Sprinkles is feline' the sentence you have uttered includes the sentence 'Sprinkles is feline', and so, prima facie, it still involves expressing your belief that Sprinkles is feline. But of course, someone who doesn't think Sprinkles is a cat should be able to use the larger sentence to attribute a belief to Natsumi, without sharing that belief themselves.

While some complex sentences, like conjunctions, don't raise any trouble, most sentences with logical connectives or *that*-clauses do. For instance: 'Sprinkles is feline or Sprinkles is canine' does not involve asserting that Sprinkles is a cat, nor does it involve asserting that Sprinkles is a dog. Someone who does not affirm the idea FELINE or the idea CANINE of SPRINKLES can still sincerely utter the disjunctive sentence. Similar points can be made about conditionals, other logically complex sentences, including prefixed negations ('It is not true that Sprinkles is feline'), and sentences with *that*-clauses like modal claims and attitude ascriptions.

It seems that Locke's theory wrongly implies that sincere utterances of these complex sentences require belief in the sub-sentences as well. For this discussion, it will be helpful to focus on a single sentence:

S. If Sprinkles is feline, then Natsumi is allergic to Sprinkles.

And here is a more careful presentation of the worry:

1. An utterance of S involves an utterance of 'Sprinkles is feline'.
2. If Locke's theory is correct, then an utterance of 'Sprinkles is feline' signifies the speaker's affirming FELINE of SPRINKLES.
3. So, if Locke's theory is correct, then an utterance of S signifies the speaker's affirming FELINE of SPRINKLES.
4. It is not the case that a sincere utterance of S signifies the speaker's affirming FELINE of SPRINKLES.
5. So, Locke's theory is not correct.

The support for premise (1) is based on the fact that an utterance of (S) is partially composed of an utterance of 'Sprinkles is feline'. Premise (2) is intended to be a statement of the foregoing interpret-ation of Locke's theory of language, as applied to the sentence 'Sprinkles is feline'. On the intended interpretation of 'signification', when an utterance signifies a mental activity, the result is that *in order to be sincere*, the speaker must have performed that activity. In other words, premise (2) indicates that, on Locke's theory, an utterance of 'Sprinkles is feline' is sincere *only if* the speaker affirms FELINE of SPRINKLES. Premise (3) follows from (1) and (2), and premise (4) is supported by the observation that one can sincerely utter sentence S without believing that Sprinkles is feline.

To briefly survey the options for someone trying to respond to the puzzle on Locke's behalf: One could deny that 'Sprinkles is feline' is a part of sentence S in the sense of parthood relevant to establishing premise (1), could jettison or amend the proposed interpretation, and deny premise (2), or one could maintain that a sincere utterance of S really does signify the speaker's affirming FELINE of SPRINKLES, thereby denying premise (4).

One popular approach is to deny premise (4). This is a surprising choice because it seems that in order to affirm FELINE of SPRINKLES one must believe Sprinkles is a feline, and thus, denying premise (4) would involve denying that you can sincerely utter a conditional without believing the antecedent. However, as we shall see in the next section, the defenders of such an interpretation do not have such an implausible approach in mind. Rather, they seek to question the identification of *affirming FELINE of SPRINKLES* with *believing Sprinkles is feline*. Doing so allows them to admit that sincerely uttering S signifies affirming FELINE of SPRINKLES, while defusing that commitment of its counter-intuitive implications.

6.3.2 Proto-Fregean Readings and the Problem with Conception

The solution pursued by Frege was to carefully distinguish propositional *contents* from propositional *attitudes*, or, as he puts it in 'My Basic Logical Insights':

> Whenever anyone recognizes something to be true, he makes a judgment. What he recognizes to be true is a thought. […] Making a judgement does not alter the thought that is recognized to be true. When something is judged to be the case, we can always cull out the thought that is recognized as true; the act of judgement forms no part of this.
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> Frege and Beaney (1997), p. 322

Here Frege distinguishes judgments from thoughts (or propositions). Despite the name, Frege's 'thoughts' are not to be understood psychologistically. Rather, they are supposed to be mind-independent entities which are grasped by individuals via some sort of psychological intermediaries. However, one need not import the entirety of the Fregean apparatus to adopt the core of his solution.

For Frege, there is an entity, *the thought that Sprinkles is feline*, which a person can grasp or possess without thereby having judged Sprinkles to be feline. A sentence, for Frege, has this as its meaning. What we have then, as the core of the solution, might well be called an appeal to non-judgmental predication: an assembled (or unified) proposition that has not been cognitively endorsed.

Some have proposed interpretations attributing non-judgmental predication to Locke. I term this class of solutions 'Proto-Fregean' interpretations of Locke.[8] Since Locke's theory of language is rooted in the signification of psychological states/activities of speakers, one of the key differences between Frege's solution and the Proto-Fregean counterparts is that the latter need to be given in psychological terms. This means that a Proto-Fregean interpretation of Locke is to be cashed out by reference to a distinction between *believing Sprinkles to be feline* and *affirming FELINE of SPRINKLES* as psychological activities. This means that the solution itself involves an interpretation of some aspects of Locke's philosophy of mind.

Specifically, the Proto-Fregean approach involves the introduction of mental propositions that are merely apprehended, rather than outright judged.[9] Whether Locke has such a resource is a matter of debate. It solves this worry about complex sentences by interpreting Lock as having a solution to a different problem: the problem of propositional conception. This problem for Locke's philosophy of mind concerns his ability to recognize that the objects of our judgment can be entertained without being judged. While this might seem like an easy distinction to capture, it presents a challenge because of the relationship between propositions and judgments for Locke.

Locke defines a mental proposition as the sort of proposition '*wherein* the *Ideas* in our Understandings *are* without the use of Words *put together, or separated* by the Mind, perceiving, or judging of their Agreement, or Disagreement' (Essay, 4.5.5, p. 575). This tracks the account of judgment (or, more broadly, cognitive endorsement, since it includes knowledge in addition to mere judgment), offered by Locke a few chapters later:

> 4. Thus the Mind has two Faculties, conversant about Truth and Falsehood.
>
> *First*, *Knowledge*, whereby it certainly perceives, and is undoubtedly satisfied of the Agreement or Disagreement of any *Ideas*. *Secondly, Judgment*, which is the putting Ideas together, or separating them from one another in the Mind, when their certain Agreement or Disagreement is not perceived, but *presumed* to be so; which is, as the Word imports, taken to be so before it certainly appears. And if it so unites, or separates them, as in Reality Things are, it is *right Judgment*.
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> <div align="right">*Essay,* 4.14.4, p. 653</div>

Note that the foregoing definition of a mental proposition builds in the sort of combining or separating involved in judgment. We can frame the problem of propositional conception this way:

1. If Locke's theory of mental propositions is correct, then one constructs a mental proposition *p* only if one believes *p* to be true.
2. If one constructs a mental proposition *p* only if one believes *p* to be true, then in order for an individual to possess the mental proposition that Sprinkles is feline, one must believe that Sprinkles is feline.
3. If, in order for an individual to possess the mental proposition that Sprinkles is feline, one must believe that Sprinkles is feline, then it is not psychologically possible to merely conceive the proposition that Sprinkles is Feline.

4. So, if Locke's theory of mental propositions is correct, then it is not psychologically possible to merely conceive the proposition that Sprinkles is Feline.
5. It is psychologically possible to conceive that Sprinkles is feline without believing it.
6. So, Locke's theory of mental propositions is not correct.

Proto-Fregean interpretations of Locke have traded in the problem of the copula for this problem. And they respond to this challenge by denying the first premise. That is to say, they deny that judgment (in the sense of cognitive endorsement) is required for the construction of a mental proposition.

I will take the interpretation from Chapter 2 of Ott (2003) as a representative example of a Proto-Fregean interpretation. Before delving into Ott's interpretation, it is worth noting a slight difference in terminology between myself and Ott. For reasons to do with the textual basis of his interpretation, Ott refers to both cognitive endorsement of a proposition, and the endorsement-free construction of a proposition, as forms of 'judgment'. Thus, it may seem to be a strained usage when I describe his view as embracing (and appealing) to non-judgmental predication. While I respect Ott's reasons for employing the terminology as he does, from the standpoint of exposition, the dual use of 'judgment' can be confusing. Despite this difference in terminology, I believe that I am correctly capturing the structure of Ott's proposal.

Here is Ott's framing of the situation:

> Call this the 'progressivist' account: discussions of proposition and judgment 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*.

> I wish to undermine the progressivist account. […] [S]ince 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.

> (2003, 44)

Ott seems to concede the challenge as I have outlined it: if Locke cannot distinguish propositions (as predicative contents) from judgments (as acts of cognitive endorsement), he is in trouble. Ott believes that we can find in Locke the resources for such an interpretation, basing it in a reading of the Port Royal logicians:

> Despite their differences, both the Cartesian and Fregean uses of judgment are propositional in that they assume that judgments take propositions as their objects.

> We also find what I shall call the 'sub-propositional' use of 'judgment' in the modern period. It is in this sense that the Port-Royalians use it, or so I shall argue. […] [O]n the Port Royalian account, judgment is not something one does to a proposition, but rather to the *constituents* of propositions. On this view, judgment is a mental act in which one unites two ideas.

> (2003, 45)

Ott's point is that judgment, for the Port Royalians, is an act of propositional construction, not an act of propositional endorsement.[10] Ott's preferred terminology (for reasons having to do with the textual basis for his interpretation) is to use 'judgment' for this act of construction, and reserve 'assertion' for this act of endorsement. But, in detail, it is fundamentally the same view that I am concerned with when I talk about distinguishing non-judgmental predication from cognitive

endorsement. According to Ott, 'Locke, like the Port-Royalians, sees affirmation and negation as sub-propositional' (Ott 2003, p. 48).

Ott concludes this discussion by observing the upshot of his interpretation:

> [I]t should be clear that Locke has not inadvertently made all propositions objects of affirmation or negation, nor has he confounded assertoric 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.
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> Ott (2003), p. 49

So, for Ott, Locke has two distinct mental activities: one of propositional construction, and another that correlates what we would call belief. It is easy to see the appeal of this proposal. We have now populated the Lockean mind with additional mental activities (and byproducts of those activities), which are thus available to be signified by sentences, and since they do not involve cognitive commitment, utterances of sentences containing them as parts don't suggest cognitive commitment to those propositions. Ott's Locke has the resources to solve the Frege-Geach problem, because the interpretation includes a solution to the problem of propositional conception. But, while this looks like a clean solution to our problems, I think it is the wrong way to read Locke.

6.3.3 *The Trade Offs: Charity, Textual Evidence, Theory of Communication*

The straightforward defense of Ott's interpretation appeals to considerations of charity, as we saw above: If we can find an interpretation that avoids saddling Locke with such obvious problems, we should. And I think that if attributing a plausible view to Locke were our overriding concern, Ott's interpretation would be very compelling. However, besides charity, one also needs to be concerned with textual fit. I do not have the space to adequately discuss those considerations in depth, but Marušić (2014) has excellent critical discussion of such interpretations of Locke.[11]

One aspect of Marušić's discussion that is worth rehearsing concerns how Ott's view contrasts with the Conflationary reading as concerns Locke's theory of communication. By 'theory of communication' I mean an account of how uttering a sentence results in speech acts like assertion, where the audience is licensed to conclude that the speaker is in the expressed mental state, and is committed to the truth of the sentence, etc. The Conflationary reading, while struggling to deal with the Frege-Geach problem, has a clean and straightforward story to tell here:

If Angela sincerely says 'Sprinkles is a gerbil', she signifies a mental proposition affirming GERBIL of SPRINKLES. So, Angela has put one of her cognitive commitments on display. She has publicized her belief and put it on the record. If I observe her making that utterance, I will likely conclude that she believes Sprinkles is a gerbil (unless I suspect her of dishonesty or joking, etc.). Anyone taking her utterance to be sincere will be in a position to conclude that she believes Sprinkles is a gerbil. Further, since she has intentionally advertised this belief, her audience not only knows that she believes something with such-and-such truth conditions, but (roughly) that she voluntarily made this belief of hers something other people can engage with, act on, and respond to. Because the mental state signified is a state of cognitive endorsement, publicizing that one is in such a state can serve as a basis for explaining why we would regard Angela as having asserted that Sprinkles is a gerbil, why Angela's claim is false under certain circumstances, why Angela has *said something false* if those circumstances obtain, why someone who says 'Sprinkles is not a gerbil' thereby disagrees with Angela, etc. This last one makes it easiest to see the virtue of this account: there is a conflict between believing Sprinkles is a gerbil and believing Sprinkles is not a gerbil. That conflict is the basis for explaining why people who utter the contrary sentences are disputing with each other.[12]

Now consider what the Proto-Fregean account says about the signification of such sentences. It says that the sentence 'Sprinkles is a gerbil' signifies the construction (without endorsement) of the proposition that Sprinkles is a gerbil, and the sentence 'Sprinkles is not a gerbil' signifies the construction (without endorsement) of the proposition that Sprinkles is not a gerbil. But why would simply signifying the construction of a proposition result in its assertion? If uttering 'Sprinkles is a gerbil' merely advertises that Angela has undertaken the process needed to contemplate the claim that Sprinkles is a gerbil, then when she utters it, the audience would not come away with the conclusion that Angela believes it, or wants them to believe it, or that if they believe that Sprinkles is not a gerbil, that they are in disagreement with Angela, etc. And since there is no conflict between the activity of constructing (without endorsing) the proposition that Sprinkles is a gerbil and the activity of constructing (without endorsing) the proposition that Sprinkles is not a gerbil, it would make sense that advertising one's undertaking of the former does not put one at odds with someone advertising an undertaking of the latter.

None of this is to say that Fregean approaches to language are unable to offer a theory of communication, nor even that Proto-Fregean interpretations of Locke are unable to offer a theory of communication. But, to do so, they have to offer an independent account of communication that bridges the signification of the sentence with a more robust account of what happens when complete sentences are uttered, to explain why saying something whose signification is mere conception would thereby come to be regarded as having a commitment to the truth of the sentence. What's important to appreciate about such interpretations of Locke is that the precise move involved in resolving the Frege-Geach problem, so that 'Sprinkles is a gerbil' *doesn't* commit you to anything when it occurs in a conditional, undermines the story baked into Locke's picture for why it *does* commit you to something when it occurs on its own. And as Locke offers no independent account of communication, this is a major textual challenge. This might be something we could claim Locke simply neglected, but for Locke's intense focus on communication as the primary purpose of language. To be charitable, we should not read Locke as having nothing to say about this.

Importantly, *even if* we take Locke to have a robust range of non-endorsed contents available to be signified by these sentences, there are still significant difficulties for viewing Locke as adopting the Proto-Fregean view. One cannot solve the Frege-Geach problem for Locke simply by offering a solution to the problem of propositional conception.

6.4 Ideas of Judgments and Higher Order Judgments

Marušić recognizes that many difficulties remain for the Conflationary reading, and identifies a handful of strategies available for responding to them. In this section I explore one of those strategies – the use of higher order judgments – evaluate how well it addresses the problem of propositional conception, and the Frege-Geach problem, assess how compelling it is as an interpretation of Locke, and identify some remaining challenges for the Conflationary reading.

One appeal of the strategy that I explore in this section is that it is very conservative with respect to attributing additional resources to Locke. This strategy, as Marušić identifies it, involves *ideas of propositions* doing the work of mere conception. Marušić's proposal is summarized nicely here:

> A similar move might be made to solve the problem of ascribing judgments or beliefs to others, as in judging, for example, that John believes that childhood vaccines cause autism. Here we might claim that the phrase 'childhood vaccines cause autism' functions to signify *the idea of the judgment or proposition*, rather than the proposition itself. In other words, someone who judges that John believes that vaccines cause autism affirms of John the complex attribute of believing that vaccines cause autism; the idea of this attribute will include *an idea of the proposition or judgment* that vaccines cause autism, but not any actual act of affirmation, nor any actual proposition or judgment. (2014, 273–4)

It is important for us to separate two questions that Marušić raises in this discussion of scenarios where one person forms a judgment about the judgments of another person. When Angela judges that Natsumi believes that Sprinkles is a gerbil, and utters 'Natsumi believes that Sprinkles is a gerbil' there are two things we can ask:

a. What are the elements of the judgment that Angela is making?
b. What does the sentence 'Natsumi believes that Sprinkles is a gerbil' signify?

The former is a question about Locke's philosophy of mind, which is fairly directly related to the problem of propositional conception. The latter is a question about Locke's philosophy of language, which relates instead to the Frege-Geach problem. The important constraints on answering (a) are that the judgment in question be constructed from the sorts of mental resources available to Locke, and that Angela be able to form that judgment without taking on any commitments of her own about whether Sprinkles is a gerbil. The important constraints on answering (b) are that the signification of the whole sentence is constructed out of the significations of the parts, and that uttering it doesn't express commitment from the speaker to the belief that Sprinkles is a gerbil (or in other words, someone who doesn't think Sprinkles is a gerbil can utter the sentence sincerely). Because Locke takes sentences to express judgments, it is natural to think that these answers are related. Ideally, if one has a good answer to (a), that should be the belief signified for (b). But the questions are nevertheless distinct. The challenge for answering (a), on the Conflationary reading, is that the proposition that Sprinkles is a gerbil is the judgment that Sprinkles is a gerbil, so it *seems* that Angela can't conceive of it without endorsing it. The Proto-Fregean reading seems to have a ready-made response here, since, by having unendorsed propositions, these propositions can be deployed in Angela's judgment without Angela taking a stance on whether Sprinkles is a gerbil.

However, the appearance of a significant advantage for the Proto-Fregean is somewhat illusory. Because, regardless of whether one opts for the Proto-Fregean or the Conflationary reading, the answer to (a) will not involve the proposition itself, it will involve the idea of the proposition. If Angela believes that Natsumi owns horses, horses are not part of Angela's belief; *the idea of horses* is. In general, Judgments, regardless of whether we are Proto-Fregeans or Conflationists, are constructed from ideas.[13] The Proto-Fregean will maintain that Angela's judgment is composed of the ideas NATSUMI, BELIEF, THE PROPOSITION THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL (where this last idea does not include endorsement). And since Angela can construct the proposition that Sprinkles is a gerbil, without endorsing it, she can then *form an idea of it*, and then use that idea in constructing the proposition about Natsumi's belief, answering (a). And Angela can signify *the idea of that proposition* by 'that Sprinkles is a gerbil', answering (b). The Conflationist will have a similar story as answer to (a), but the judgment will be constructed from the ideas NATSUMI and BELIEVING THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL. It differs from the Proto-Fregean proposal by doing away with the distinction between the belief and the proposition, but, like the Proto-Fregean proposal, invokes *an idea of* the relevant mental act, rather than the mental act itself.

Since there are reasons to invoke these ideas of complex mental activities independently of which reading we adopt, the only real question for the Conflationist answer to (a) is whether there is a story about how Angela could acquire the idea BELIEVING THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL without believing that Sprinkles is a gerbil and reflecting on that mental activity. We can still see why the Proto-Fregean has an easy story to offer here; they are in a position to explain where the idea of the proposition comes from, without invoking any step where Angela herself judges that Sprinkles is a gerbil. She forms the proposition, then reflects on that mental activity to acquire an idea of it. So the challenge for the Conflationist is to offer an account of the acquisition of the idea BELIEVING THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL that doesn't involve, at any stage, believing that Sprinkles is a gerbil.

The primary resources we need to really pursue this proposal are ideas of mental activities, and the capacity to form novel complex ideas using those ideas. Neither of these is a controversial element to

ascribe to Locke. Ideas of mental activities are something that Locke clearly and explicitly commits himself to throughout the essay, and in a number of places in book two, particularly. First, Locke tells us that this is just what ideas of reflection are:

> The other Fountain, from which Experience furnisheth the Understanding with *Ideas*, is the *Perception of the Operations of our own Minds* within us, as it is employ'd about the *Ideas* it has got; which Operations, when the Soul comes to reflect on, and consider, do furnish the Understanding with another set of Ideas, which could not be had from things without: and such are, *Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing*, and all the different actings of our own Minds; which we being conscious of, and observing in our-selves, do from these receive into our Understandings, as distinct *Ideas*, as we do from Bodies affecting our Senses. This Source of *Ideas*, every Man has wholly in himself: And though it be not Sense, as having nothing to do with external Objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be call'd internal Sense. But as I call the other *Sensation*, so I call this *REFLECTION*, the *Ideas* it affords being such only, as the Mind gets by reflecting on its own Operations within itself.
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> *Essay,* 2.1.4, p. 105

Several chapters enumerate some of our ideas of mental operations: perception/sensation (2.9); reten-tion (2.10); discernment, comparison, composition, abstraction, and reflection (2.11); volition (2.21). He also makes some remarks about various modes of thinking more generally (2.19). So, it should not be controversial to attribute to Locke ideas of our mental activities.[14] I will not belabor this point, as Locke's explicit enumeration above includes believing as one of the mental activities that we acquire an idea of through reflection.

It is also not hard to find textual support from Locke for our capacity to form new complex ideas from ideas we already possess: 'The next Operation we may observe in the Mind about its *Ideas*, is *COMPOSITION*; whereby it puts together several of those simple ones it has received from sensa-tion and reflection, and combines them into complex ones' (2.10.5, p. 157–8). This is a key difference between our simple ideas and our complex ideas. The simple ideas must always originate directly in sen-sation or reflection and we lack the power to create new simple ideas, whereas we can manipulate and combine the simple ideas we have received, and fashion new complex ideas. This is important because it means there is a way for us to form the idea *BELIEVING SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL* other than by experiencing it directly. And this is crucial for the conflationary view, because it is a route to possess an idea of a specific mental activity without having to perform that specific mental activity yourself. I can't form the idea *SENSING A BLUE TIGER* without having the idea *SENSING*, but I need not have sensed a blue tiger; I could well get the simple idea SENSING from reflecting on sensing a green tree, and combine it with my ideas BLUE and TIGER.

With these two resources independently established, we can now see how Locke would construct the idea BELIEVING THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL. Having reflected on any of our beliefs would give us the idea BELIEVING. Provided we have the idea SPRINKLES and GERBIL already, we can combine those three together – without having affirmed GERBIL of SPRINKLES – to acquire the idea BELIEVING THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL.[15]

And Angela can then affirm that idea of NATSUMI, forming the judgment that Natsumi believes Sprinkles is a gerbil. This answers question (a) for the Conflationary reading, and the answer is no weaker than the Proto-Fregean answer. Both views invoke a complex idea of a mental activity, and have a way for the person to possess that idea without taking a stand on whether Sprinkles is a gerbil.

The Conflationist has slightly more work to do in using this to answer question (b). The real advan-tage for the Proto-Fregean is to have 'Sprinkles is a gerbil' signify the same thing (the non-endorsed proposition) in all of its occurrences. But the Conflationist can't say that 'Sprinkles is a gerbil' is doing the same thing in 'Natsumi believes that Sprinkles is a gerbil'. A case can be made, however, that the

appearance of sentential overlap here is somewhat misleading. After all the following two sentences appear to be synonymous:

B1) Natsumi believes that Sprinkles is a gerbil.
B2) Natsumi believes Sprinkles to be a gerbil.

‘Sprinkles is a gerbil’ isn’t a part of B2. And if Locke can satisfyingly offer a view on which ‘believes Sprinkles to be a gerbil’ signifies the higher order idea BELIEVING THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL, it is possible for Locke to add some nuance to his view of how the copula works in different linguistic contexts to preserve the synonymy of B1 and B2, and avoid the problematic commitment to B1 signifying the affirmation of GERBIL of SPRINKLES by the speaker. This will also help with ‘It is not the case that Sprinkles is a gerbil’ remaining synonymous with ‘Sprinkles is not a gerbil’, and so on. But it does involve giving up on the flat-footed reading of Locke’s philosophy of language where ‘is’ signifies the same thing in all of its occurrences.

I do not argue that Locke explicitly endorses this in the text. Rather, I argue that this is the way to address the Frege-Geach problem that is most consonant with Locke’s existing resources and approach. To see why this accords with existing commitments of Locke’s, we should turn our attention to his discussion of particles:

§1. 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 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 Falshood, 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.

Essay, 3.7.1, p. 471

In this section, we see that Locke recognizes that there are words which don’t indicate ideas themselves, but instead indicate connections among ideas and connections between propositions in a discourse. The rest of the very short chapter includes a brief case study of ‘But’, describing several different ways it can be used, including sub-sentential uses as well as uses as a connective. He ends the case study and the chapter with this:

§6. To these, I doubt not, might be added a great many other significations of this Particle, if it were my business to examine it in its full latitude, and consider it in all the places it is to be found: which if one should do, I doubt, whether in all those manners it is made use of, it would deserve the title of *Discretive*, which Grammarians give to it. But I intend not here a full explication of this sort of Signs. The instances I have given in this one, may give occasion to reflect upon their use and force in Language, and lead us into the contemplation of several Actions of our Minds in discoursing, which it has found a way to intimate to others by these Particles, some whereof constantly, and others in certain constructions, have the sense of a whole Sentence contain’d in them.

Essay, 3.7.6, p. 473

The key things to appreciate here is that Locke leaves things very open ended as far as how particles can function, and recognizes that particles often have different significations in different circumstances. So while Locke nowhere says that ‘is’ signifies differently when it occurs in *that*-clauses, or when it occurs

in a sentence with other particles like 'if … then … ' or 'or', he certainly has nothing stopping him from amending the view to take this into account. If we grant this, Locke can solve the Frege-Geach problem so that these logically complex sentences don't suggest that the speaker endorses the subsentences.

S. If Sprinkles is feline, then Natsumi is allergic to Sprinkles.

On this proposal, sentence S could express the speaker's affirmation of BELIEVING THAT NATSUMI IS ALLERGIC TO SPRINKLES of BELIEVING SPRINKLES IS FELINE, or in other words, a higher order belief about a relationship between believing Natsumi is allergic to Sprinkles and believing Sprinkles is feline. And someone can believe that those two beliefs go together, without endorsing either of them individually.[16] This is not the only possible story one could tell, as the key man-euver here is to suggest that 'is' doesn't uniformly signify the Speaker's act of affirming. But the point is that the Conflationist has resources for responding to the Frege-Geach problem and the problem of propositional conception.

6.5 Conclusion: Remaining Challenges

The problem of Propositional Conception relates not just to giving an account of forming beliefs about others' beliefs, but also to understanding what they say (without believing it), and accounting for the subject of inquiry (without prejudging the outcome of the inquiry).[17] Ideas of propositions can straight-forwardly resolve the problem of understanding others; when we come to understand them, know which idea of a judgment to attribute to them (assuming sincerity, etc.). Setting the subject matter for inquiry is more difficult. On the one hand, we often think about inquiry as trying to settle the question of what to believe, or what is true, so the idea of a belief could play that role. On the other hand, our actual approach to inquiry is very often presented at the object level: Are dogs colorblind? Does hydrogen peroxide combust in these conditions?, etc. This is further complicated by Locke's remarks on the difference between inquiry and dispute in 4.11.7, where dispute involves parties uttering conflicting verbal propositions, and inquiry involves 'those that acknowledged themselves to have but imperfect *Ideas*' signified by their terms. So, it is not clear that Locke takes inquiry to involve a clear conception of the proposition (in any sense of 'proposition').

Then we have the philosophy of language problems, including not only attitude ascriptions and logically complex propositions, but also modal propositions. The maneuver presented about the sig-nification of particles can do a great deal to address these varied sentence constructions, but they leave something to be desired when it comes to logically complex sentences in particular. A good account of 'If Sprinkles is feline, then Natsumi is allergic to Sprinkles' doesn't merely offer a way to utter it without being committed to the antecedent and consequent. Ideally it would also explain why endorsing that conditional, combined with endorsing the antecedent, is incompatible with denying the consequent. Here we have some resources provided, the 'if … then … ' is supposed to show a connection the mind gives to the other sentences, and if we have a story about how the conditional involves signifying ideas of judgments rather than the judgments themselves, we have options at our disposal for developing such an account, but it is not clear that there is a straightforward, functional way to do so.[18] And Locke's own disparagement of formal reasoning and syllogism (4.17.4) complicate attempts to develop a functional, complete account of the logical connectives.

Nevertheless, the Conflationary Reading is on much stronger footing than it first seemed. Philosophically speaking, doing without the judgment/content distinction is an uphill battle, but the resulting view has a great deal to recommend it as an interpretation of Locke, has intriguing resources for responding to the Frege-Geach problem, and overall, the Conflation of judgments and propositions merits a more sympathetic, detailed investigation.

Notes

1 McGrath and Frank (2018).
2 Some contemporary theorists have views of propositions reminiscent of Locke's, though differing in a great many particulars. See Davis (2002).
3 There is an interesting parallel here to the way that Locke's indirect or mediated account of sensible perception gives rise to concerns about his epistemology of the external world, but I do not have the space to explore this parallel here.
4 This account is given by Locke in Essay 3.7.1, as one of three exceptions to his general principle that words signify ideas. The other two are negative terms (which signify the absence of an idea) and particles like 'but', 'or', or 'hence', which signify a connection between the ideas or propositions composing a discourse.
5 For Locke's view to have the alleged consequence, he would have to maintain that verbal truth depends not on whether the ideas signified agree or disagree, but instead depend on whether the speaker has joined or separated them. For a more thorough discussion of this topic, see Powell (2017).
6 I am currently glossing over an issue that remains for Locke concerning public vs. private language. If, for instance, you use the word 'dog' to stand for the idea of the animals that cowboys ride and that most people call 'horses', Locke may well say that your utterance is true, but suffers from other defects (such as obscurity of meaning). See Brykman (1992), Dawson (2003), and Powell (2021) for more extensive discussions of this issue.
7 This notion of sincerity correlates with Locke's conception of *moral truth* (roughly: honesty), which he defines (4.5.11) as 'speaking Things according to the perswasion of our own Minds'.
8 We could instead term the approach 'post-Buridanian' or 'neo-Ockhamite', if we wish to do away with the suggestion of anachronism.
9 A prominent defender of this interpretation is Walter Ott (2003), whose interpretation will be covered in some detail below. See also Newman (2007).
10 Those of us who resist Ott's reading can permit that judgment is the construction of a proposition. The difference is that, on the Conflationary Reading, constructing a proposition is the same act as coming to cognitively endorse it.
11 One thing I will note regarding the textual considerations is that the 4.14.4 discussion clearly indicates cognitive endorsement for both knowledge and judgment, and the description of these activities matches the 'joining'/'separating' terminology of the 4.5.5 definition of mental propositions. So even though I concede Ott's contention that such views predate Frege, and were, in some sense, available, the two passages seem to be positively at odds with that interpretation, rather than neutral between them.
12 Marušić's discussion of this aspect also brings to bear some powerful evidence in support of the Conflationary reading over the Proto-Fregean reading.
13 For good discussion of some potential exceptions to this, see Weinberg (2016).
14 Locke's discussions in these chapters typically focus more on the activities themselves than on our ideas of them. Nevertheless, the chapters occur because Locke is enumerating our ideas of reflection, and given his views on the role of ideas in knowing about the things they are ideas of, this is not a surprising way for the chapters to proceed.
15 I don't think this account is entirely complete, because my idea BELIEVING THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL is *not* formed from my idea BELIEF, my idea SPRINKLES and my idea GERBIL. When one affirms that Sprinkles is a gerbil, one performs a mental activity on the ideas SPRINKLES and GERBIL. So, the *idea* AFFIRMING THAT SPRINKLES IS A GERBIL, needs to signify an act involving two ideas. Which means that it ought to be constructed from something that signifies affirmation, something that signifies the idea SPRINKLES, and something that signifies the idea GERBIL. So, the recipe for that complex idea is the idea of AFFIRMING, the idea of THE IDEA SPRINKLES, and the idea of THE IDEA GERBIL. To make this work, Locke will need to have higher order ideas. I believe that there is good reason to allow that Locke has this resource, and will omit this complication for the sake of space and clarity.
16 Integrating this into Locke's account of agreement may require some additional work.
17 I do not follow Marušić's (2014) categorization of the problems here, in part because my approach to dividing the challenges up crosscuts her division of the problem in complicated ways. Nevertheless, my discussion here is indebted to her work.
18 On the proposal alluded to above, one who accepts the premises of a modus ponens argument but denies the conclusion is, at best, doing something Moore Paradoxical (Sorensen 2018), rather than outright inconsistent.

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