

two roles for propositions: cause for divorce? forthcoming in *Noûs*

Nondescriptivist views in many areas of philosophy have long been associated with the commitment that in contrast to other domains of discourse, there are no propositions in their particular domain. For example, the ‘no truth conditions’ theory of conditionals¹ is understood as the view that conditionals don’t express propositions, noncognitivist expressivism in metaethics is understood as advocating the view that there are not really moral propositions,² and expressivism about epistemic modals is thought of as the view that there is no such thing as the proposition that Jack might be at home, over and above the proposition that Jack is at home.³ Of course, it is nearly always acknowledged that advocates of a nondescriptivist theory need not deny that there are conditional, moral, or modal propositions ‘at the end of the day’ – for if they also endorse a *deflationary* reading of talk about propositions, then they can employ such deflationary talk just as much as the rest of us. They just don’t appeal to propositions to do any of the work in their theories.⁴

It is the aim of this paper to upset this way of thinking about the proper attitude of nondescriptivists toward propositions, and to advocate a more constructive and in some ways more radical alternative. I will begin by introducing and developing a set of problems that are faced by any nondescriptivist theory which tries to do without propositions. All of these problems are easily solved by any view which postulates propositions across the board, but none of them are solved by merely deflationary talk about propositions – their solution requires propositions to do real theoretical work, and therefore the problems themselves illustrate some of the important reasons why it is worth positing propositions in the first place.

The point of considering this set of problems is not to argue that nondescriptivism is hopeless, but rather to illustrate a range of pieces of work that propositions can do which is left undone by views with merely deflationary treatments of ‘proposition’ talk. These problems aren’t just the piece of data that we

¹ Compare Edgington [1995], Bennett [2003].

² Compare Blackburn [1984] and Gibbard [1990].

³ For expressivism about epistemic modals, see Price [1983] and Schnieder [2010].

⁴ See in particular Blackburn [1993] for the canonical development of this deflationary approach.

say things like ‘the proposition as to whether forging a will is wrong has been put before the court’; they are deep and general problems whose solution requires more than being able to *say* that there are propositions – it requires propositions to actually do some theoretical *work*. My aim isn’t to criticize the nondescriptivist views themselves, but to illustrate the breadth of the range of problems that nondescriptivist views face, if they can only make do, at best, with a deflationary treatment of proposition-talk.

In contrast, the primary suggestion of this paper is that nondescriptivist theories should *embrace* the existence of propositions in their domains. The key to making this move and remaining a nondescriptivist, I argue, is distinguishing between two classes of theoretical roles that propositions have traditionally been thought of as playing. According to the first, more central, class of roles, propositions are the objects of attitudes like belief, desire, and assertion, and the bearers of truth and falsity. According to the second class of theoretical roles, propositions play a role in carving up the world at its joints, are associated with metaphysical commitment, and are the appropriate objects of excluded middle. Later I will explain both why I think these two sets of roles have traditionally been thought to be played by the same things, and why it is nevertheless very possible that they are not – that one class of entities plays one role, and a separate class of entities plays the other. What is important to nondescriptivism in each domain, I will be arguing, is the denial of the existence of entities playing the second of these two roles, but the solutions to the problems considered earlier turn only on the existence of entities playing the first role. I’ll go on to provide an abstract picture of the general structure that a nondescriptivist theory of propositions should take, in order to advocate this divorce, and to spell out some of the details of just one example of such a nondescriptivist framework – as an illustration of the way that such a view might work.

I five problems for no-propositions views

In the following five subsections I will be introducing and cataloguing five general problems faced by views that seek to do without appealing to propositions – whether they allow for deflationary talk about propositions or not. In no case do I mean to be criticizing the underlying nondescriptivist theories; as will become clear later, my view is that each of the nondescriptivist views discussed can in principle escape all of these problems. My point is, rather, that these nondescriptivist views should *not* be understood as wedded to the no-propositions view, which plays a key role in creating the problems.

I.1 compositionality

It is a familiar observation that many nondescriptivist theories have a problem accounting compositionally for the meaning of complex sentences, but the nature of this problem is not always tied directly to the rejection of propositions. The advantage of incorporating propositions into semantic theory is that we can think of each operation used to form complex sentences as being semantically associated with an operation on propositions. So, for example, in propositional frameworks, there is an operation which takes us from any proposition to the proposition which is its negation, and an operation which takes us from any two propositions to the proposition which is their conjunction. Once we know what propositions are expressed by ‘P’ and by ‘Q’, we therefore know everything that we need, in order to know what propositions are expressed by more complex sentences, like ‘it is not the case that P’ and by ‘P and Q’. Different propositional frameworks employ different conceptions of what propositions are, and different conceptions of the relevant operations, but the basic idea is the same.

In propositionless frameworks, in contrast, a semantic theory must work differently. Take, for example, the case of metaethical expressivism, according to which the meaning of a sentence, ‘P’, is given by what it is to think that P, and what it is to think that stealing is wrong is not to have any ordinary factual belief about stealing, but rather to have a negative attitude toward it – an attitude that we might without loss of generality call *disapproval*.⁵ In an expressivist semantic framework, in order to know the meaning of ‘stealing is not wrong’, we need to know what it is to think that stealing is not wrong. But despite the fact that negation should be one of the simplest possible constructions to account for, expressivists have had great difficulties in answering just what it is to think that stealing is not wrong – and have certainly not managed to do so in a constructive manner.

The underlying problem was illuminatingly illustrated by Nicholas Unwin by using the following example to draw out the consequences of the fact that in adopting the view that to think that stealing is wrong is to disapprove of stealing, metaethical expressivists are providing an *analysans* that has *less structure* than its *analysandum*:

- w** Jon thinks that stealing is wrong.
- n1** Jon does not think that stealing is wrong.
- n2** Jon thinks that stealing is not wrong.
- n3** Jon thinks that not stealing is wrong.⁶

⁵ Compare Blackburn [1988], Gibbard [1990], [2003], and Horgan and Timmons [2006].

⁶ Unwin [1999], [2001]; see also Schroeder [2008].

Sentences n1-n3 illustrate the structure of sentence w, by showing the three places in which we can insert a ‘not’ – we can negate the whole sentence, we can negate the complement clause, or we can negate the argument of ‘wrong’. But since ‘disapproves of stealing’ has less structure than ‘thinks that stealing is wrong’, the expressivist runs out of possible analyses for all three of n1-n3:

- w* Jon disapproves of stealing.
- n1* Jon does not disapprove of stealing.
- n2* Jon ???.
- n3* Jon disapproves of not stealing.

Since n1* is just the negation of w*, it is clear that it corresponds to n1. And since n3* corresponds to w* simply by substituting ‘not stealing’ for ‘stealing’, it is clear that corresponds to n3. So that leaves the expressivist with no constructive answer to what n2 means – that is, no answer to what it is to think that stealing is not wrong – and hence, since that is precisely the question that we need to answer in order to know what ‘stealing is not wrong’ means, with no account of the meaning of ‘stealing is not wrong’.

The now-standard expressivist solution to this problem is to conclude that no constructive answer *can* be given as to what ‘stealing is not wrong’ means, as a function of what ‘stealing is wrong’ means, and to resort to a nonconstructive answer, instead. To think that stealing is not wrong, expressivists say, is to *tolerate* stealing – where toleration is a *sui generis* attitude toward stealing that is simply stipulated to have the primitive property of being rationally inconsistent with disapproving of stealing.⁷

Without getting into a detailed assessment of this strategy here, I do want to highlight the unfavorable contrast with the simple constructive approach of the propositional framework. In the propositional framework, we get a simple, constructive, answer to what it is to think that stealing is not wrong – it is to bear the belief relation to the proposition that stealing is not wrong – where that proposition is just the negation of the proposition that stealing is wrong. In the propositional framework, the belief that stealing is wrong and stealing is not wrong rationally conflict with one another because beliefs in propositions which are the negations of one another *always* rationally conflict with one another. In the expressivist framework, in contrast, the belief that stealing is wrong is disapproval of stealing, and the belief that stealing is not wrong is tolerance of stealing, and the rational conflict between these two states of mind cannot be explained by any more general principles, but must be assumed *ad hoc*.

⁷ Compare, for example, Blackburn [1988] and Horgan and Timmons [2006], for particularly clear statements of this program. It is less obvious that the approach in Gibbard [2003] has this structure, but I have argued elsewhere that it does – see chapter 7 of Schroeder [2010a].

As Unwin's sentences illustrate, the problem that the expressivist faces, here, is due to a lack of *structure*. It derives from the fact that if thinking that stealing is wrong is just bearing a single, unstructured attitude toward stealing, then this thought cannot be divided into the 'thinking' part and the 'that stealing is wrong' part. This reflects the fact that even if such a view accepts a deflationary manner of speaking about propositions, there is no role for the proposition that stealing is wrong to play in the theory. Propositions add precisely the level of structure that Unwin's sentences illustrate that standard expressivist theories lack. The difficulties, here, can therefore be traced to their rejection of moral propositions.⁸

I.2 quantification and identity

If Jack believes that Jill might come to visit this afternoon, and Jill said that she might come to visit this afternoon, then there is something that Jack believes and Jill said – namely, that Jill might come to visit this afternoon. If that is the only thing that Jill said, then Jack believes everything that Jill said. What examples like this illustrate, is that it is unproblematic to quantify into the complement position of complement-taking verbs like 'believes' and 'said', and that we ordinarily have no problem making non-trivial identifications of what we are quantifying into – identifying what Jill said with what Jack believes. The theory of propositions offers an incredibly simple account of what is going on, here – these are real, true-to-life quantifiers, and real, true-to-life identity claims, and they work because complementizer phrases like 'that Jill might come to visit this afternoon' denote propositions, which are what such quantifiers range over, and which are the arguments of the relations denoted by 'believes' and 'said'. According to this theory, what is going on here is no different than what is going on when we infer 'there is something that Jack passed and Jill put on her pancakes' from 'Jack passed the ketchup' and 'Jill put the ketchup on her pancakes'.

But if there is no such thing as the proposition that Jill might come to visit this afternoon, then there is nothing to be quantified over, here, or re-identified across different occurrences. No propositions views cannot take this quantification or identification at face value. Nor does it help to adopt a deflationary treatment of talk about propositions; any deflationary treatment must re-characterize these putative quantifiers and putative identifications as not really quantifiers or identifications. This is because a deflationary treatment of propositions doesn't provide a real domain for quantifiers over propositions to range over; it merely provides a legitimate manner of speaking as if there is something that quantifiers over propositions range over something.

⁸ For further discussion of the compositionality problems facing views like expressivism, see Schroeder [2008].

This is not to say that nondescriptivists who deny the existence of propositions in their domain will not come up with creative deflationary glosses on what is going on, here, or re-interpretations of what look like quantifiers and identifications. It is just to say that data about quantifiers and identifications like these are precisely a central part of what motivates postulating propositions in the first place, and the data provide just as good a motivation for epistemic modals (or conditionals, or moral sentences, or...) as for any other sort of sentence. By far the simplest and most powerful explanation of what is going on, here, is that we have real quantifiers ranging over a domain of propositions.⁹

I.3 the common features of descriptive and nondescriptive belief

According to nondescriptivist views, not all beliefs are the same. Or perhaps, to be more careful, there may be two ways of talking about beliefs – a loose way, and a strict way. For example, according to the metaethical expressivist, there are moral beliefs (which perhaps aren't really beliefs in the strict sense), and then there are the non-moral beliefs (which are). But one important piece of data that few expressivists have paid close attention to until Horgan and Timmons [2006], is that even if moral beliefs and non-moral beliefs belong to two fundamentally different kinds, they nevertheless have a striking array of features in common.

For example, both moral beliefs and non-moral beliefs come in varying levels of confidence – you are probably more confident that murder is wrong, for example, than that cheating on your taxes is wrong, even if you are pretty confident in both.¹⁰ Moral and non-moral beliefs also share the same disagreement properties – believing that murder is wrong *disagrees* with believing that murder is not wrong, just as believing that the Lakers will win disagrees with believing that the Lakers will not win.¹¹ This makes them contrast importantly with a wide range of other attitudes – we would not ordinarily say, for example, that someone who wonders whether the Lakers will win disagrees with someone who wonders whether the Lakers will not win, that someone who assumes for the sake of argument that the Lakers will win disagrees with someone who assumes for the sake of argument that the Lakers will not win, or that someone who desires for the Lakers to win disagrees with someone who desires for the Lakers to not win. Nor do wondering, assuming for the sake of argument, or desiring come in different degrees of confidence – so both of these features that moral beliefs share with non-moral beliefs are distinctive among attitudes more generally.

⁹ See Dunaway [2010] for a particularly enlightening further discussion of the issues in this section.

¹⁰ Compare Smith [2001].

¹¹ Compare Stevenson [1937], Gibbard [2003].

In fact, moral beliefs share many other features with non-moral beliefs. Among them is a common functional role – someone who wants to do something wrong and believes that stealing is wrong will be motivated to steal in a way that she would not be, did she not believe that stealing is wrong. So moral beliefs combine with desires to produce motivation to action in the same way as non-moral beliefs do. In contrast, assuming, hoping, wondering, and so on do not combine with desires to produce motivation in this way – so again, this is a distinctive and striking trait for an attitude to have. Moral beliefs also share much of the same phenomenology of belief as non-moral beliefs – phenomenology that is not shared by hoping, assuming, preferring, wondering, or any of their ilk.¹² So all in all, moral beliefs share quite a striking array of features in common with non-moral beliefs – and not features that are in any way common among attitudes more generally, but features that are only shared by a very limited range of other attitudes, if any.

From the point of view of the theory of propositions, this is no mystery; according to this view, the verb ‘believes’ makes a uniform semantic contribution to ‘believes that stealing is wrong’ and to ‘believes that grass is green’. The proposition theory does not entail that there cannot be important – even deep – differences between believing that stealing is wrong and believing that grass is green, but it does require that such differences are a consequence of the differences between the proposition that stealing is wrong and the proposition that grass is green. But these two states also share a common core – a core that is contributed by the semantic value of ‘believes’ – the common attitude of *belief* that merely takes different contents between the belief that stealing is wrong and the belief that grass is green. It is no wonder, according to the theory of propositions, that believing that stealing is wrong and believing that grass is green have so much in common – it derives from their common core.

Expressivists who deny the existence of moral propositions, or who allow only for a deflationary way of talking about propositions, cannot accept any such explanation of how it is that moral and non-moral beliefs turn out to have so much in common. According to such theories, it is essentially a coincidence that two states which are fundamentally so different turn out to share so many of the same features. It is not, perhaps, a coincidence that we call them both ‘beliefs’ – for the theorist might propose that we wouldn’t call both ‘beliefs’ unless they did have a lot in common.¹³ But it is a coincidence that two so different states should turn out to have so much in common, in the first place, that they would merit both being called ‘beliefs’. This coincidence, which the theory of propositions can treat as no coincidence at all, turns out to be part of a much bigger coincidence, in fact, as we’ll observe in the next subsection.

¹² Compare Horgan and Timmons [2006].

¹³ I take it that this is the view, for example, of Horgan and Timmons [2006].

I.4 the many propositional attitudes

Belief is only one of many propositional attitudes. Just as there are both moral and nonmoral beliefs (conditional and non-conditional beliefs, epistemic modal and non-epistemic modal beliefs...), there are both moral and nonmoral desires, moral and nonmoral hopes, moral and nonmoral assumptions, moral and nonmoral wonderings, and so on down the line – for any propositional attitude verb whatsoever, it can take moral complements just as easily as it can take nonmoral complements, and just as intelligibly (and similarly for conditionals or whatever other topic one’s nondescriptivism focuses on).

So not only do nondescriptivists need to give us a story about what it is to believe that stealing is wrong – if it is not just to bear the ordinary belief relation to the proposition that stealing is wrong – they need to give us an alternative story about each and every propositional attitude.¹⁴ And not only do they need to give us an alternative story about each and every propositional attitude, for each attitude it will turn out that both the moral and the non-moral versions share many significant features that are rare among attitudes more generally. For example, both moral and nonmoral desires share the same basic functional role and have the same sort of phenomenological profile – and similarly for each and every other attitude.

What this means, is that the problem raised in the last section about beliefs is just one case of a very general problem; for each attitude verb, the theory of propositions will say that all attitudes of that kind share a common core which is denoted by the verb – and hence it is no wonder that they will share many important features. But the nondescriptivist theorist will say, instead, that there are really two different attitudes which go under the heading of ‘desire’ – moral desires and nonmoral desires – and it is really a coincidence that they turn out to have so many of the same features. As with belief, she will not need to say that it is a coincidence that they are both called ‘desires’ – for they wouldn’t both be called ‘desires’ unless they did have so much in common. But she will be forced to take it as a coincidence that there are two attitudes at all, which share so many of the same characteristics.

Moreover, on top of all of these coincidences, there is the super-coincidence that a match between the features of moral and non-moral *belief* seems to be automatically matched by a coincidence between the features of moral and non-moral desire, moral and non-moral intention, moral and non-moral supposing, and so on for every one of the other attitudes. In a nondescriptivist framework without propositions, there is no *a priori* reason to be confident that some of these attitudes simply won’t happen to exist, or will not turn out to share the right features with their non-moral counterparts. In contrast, the theory of propositions offers the most elegant explanation possible about why all of these attitudes exist and the

¹⁴ This is what in chapter 5 of Schroeder [2010 a] I call the *Many Attitudes Problem*.

moral and nonmoral pairs always have so much in common, without needing to posit any coincidences: it is that so long as there are such things as the proposition that stealing is wrong and the proposition that grass is green, those propositions may be taken as the objects of any of the attitudes, and any attitude toward the proposition that stealing is wrong will have as much in common with the same attitude toward the proposition that grass is green as is contributed by the meaning of the corresponding attitude verb – the underlying attitude that merely takes different contents in each case.

1.5 modals

The last problem that I want to look at arises when we look at how the target discourse of a nondescriptivist theory embeds under modals. Modals – whether epistemic, deontic, or alethic – require propositional arguments, and doing without propositions in some particular domain can have drastic consequences. Rather than turning to general arguments about the semantics of modals, in this section I'll illustrate this point through two examples from the literature of views that run into deep trouble in their treatment of modals by not allowing for moral propositions. First I'll look at a problem for the treatment of epistemic modals that is implied by some of Simon Blackburn's work, and then I'll turn to look at the deontic 'ought' in the framework of Horgan and Timmons [2006].

A general way of putting the problem about modals, is that since a nondescriptivist theory about morality (for example) does not identify the meaning of any moral sentence, 'M', with that of any nonmoral sentence, 'D', it should not identify the meaning of any modal applied to a moral sentence, as in 'it might be that M' with the meaning of the same modal applied to any nonmoral sentence, as in 'it might be that D'. In order to make all of the right distinctions among sentences of the form, 'it might be that M', therefore, the nondescriptivist needs to allow modals like 'might' to generate different results when applied to moral sentences as compared to nonmoral sentences.

As Andy Egan [2007] has pointed out, Simon Blackburn offers an account of certain epistemic modal sentences which fails this criterion, and it leads him into several pressing problems. Blackburn is led into considering how moral sentences embed under epistemic modals in the course of trying to explain why it makes sense to think that one might be wrong, about some of one's moral views. So this leads him to consider sentences like:

fallible One of my moral views might be false.

The most promising way of trying to figure out whether expressivists like Blackburn are committed to accepting or denying fallible, it seems to me, is to start by figuring out how their semantics for ‘might’ works. Any account of what it is to accept fallible should fall out, after all, from a general story about the meaning of ‘might’.

Rather than proceeding in a principled way, from a general account of the meaning of ‘might’, however, Blackburn [1998] chooses to proceed in a piecemeal, *ad hoc* fashion, offering a gloss on what it is to accept fallible that is not derived from any general account of what it is to accept a sentence involving ‘might’. What he says, is that to accept fallible, is equivalent to accepting the following:

improvable One of my moral views might change if I were to reflect better.¹⁵

As Egan notes, this account leads Blackburn into all manner of difficulties.¹⁶ Egan suggests that the problem is one with expressivism in general, and implies that any expressivist should have similar problems. But I think, in contrast, that it’s pretty clear that the problem stems from Blackburn’s *ad hoc* analysis of fallible, which fails the constraint articulated above, by essentially treating ‘stealing might not be wrong’ as meaning the same as ‘I might not disapprove of stealing if I reflected better’. But since Blackburn himself would point out that it is a mistake to identify the meaning of ‘stealing is not wrong’ with that of ‘I would not disapprove of stealing if I reflected better’, he should not be identifying the meanings of ‘stealing might not be wrong’ and ‘I might not disapprove of stealing if I reflected better’, either.

So the problems that arise from Blackburn’s analysis of fallible aren’t general problems for expressivism; they’re predictable problems that arise because his treatment of epistemic modals doesn’t provide a distinct meaning for epistemic modals with moral prejacent. An adequate explanation of why expressivists can allow for the possibility of fundamental moral error needs to proceed from an account of the way that moral sentences embed under epistemic modals that isn’t riddled with problems of its own from the start. Any view which allows for both moral and nonmoral propositions can easily generate the right distinctions and avoid collapsing the meaning of ‘stealing might not be wrong’ into that of any non-moral sentence: if the proposition that M and the proposition that D are different propositions, then the

¹⁵ Here is Blackburn: ‘The problem comes with thinking of myself. . . that I may be mistaken. How can I make sense of my own fears of fallibility? Well, there are a number of things that I admire: for instance, information, sensitivity, maturity, imagination, coherence. I know that other people show defects in these respects, and that these defects lead to bad opinions. But can I exempt myself from the same possibility? Of course not (that would be unpardonably smug). So I can think that perhaps some of my opinions are due to defects of information, sensitivity, maturity, imagination, and coherence. If I really set out to investigate whether this is true, I stand on one part of the (Neurath) boat and inspect the others’ Blackburn [1998], p 318.

¹⁶ In particular, it forces him to deny the possibility of a certain sort of *fundamental moral error*, which is Egan’s central argument. Egan also argues that this view commits Blackburn to subjectivism after all – unsurprisingly, for the view essentially consists in endorsing a subjectivist reading of moral sentences within the scope of epistemic modals.

proposition that it might be that M and the proposition that it might be that D will be different propositions, too. It is the lack of moral propositions as possible arguments for ‘might’ that leads Blackburn to desperately substitute a nonmoral proposition as the argument of ‘might’, in order to generate a reading of sentences like fallible. If we only had moral propositions to appeal to, we wouldn’t have that problem.

Related problems arise for deontic and alethic modals, and some of the issues for deontic modals can be illustrated by looking at Horgan and Timmons’ [2006] detailed semantics for the ‘ought’ of ‘it ought to be the case that’. On Horgan and Timmons’ view, ‘ought’ takes propositions – but since there are only descriptive propositions, and not any moral propositions – sentences applying ‘ought’ to moral complements are not well-formed. So Horgan and Timmons’ semantics has no way of accounting for sentences like ‘it ought to be that murder is wrong’ or ‘it ought to be that everything that ought to be the case is the case’. If only ‘murder is wrong’ and ‘everything that ought to be the case is the case’ expressed (moral) propositions, we would have no trouble accounting for the meanings of sentences like these – they result from applying the meaning of ‘it ought to be the case that’ to these sentences.

2 nondescriptivism with non-deflationary propositions?

So far, I’ve been outlining a set of problems which are well-served by postulating a class of entities to play the role of propositions – a set of motivations which are much deeper than any observation that we sometimes say things like ‘consider the proposition that stealing is wrong’, and which look like they provide equally good motivations for positing a proposition for any declarative sentence of English.¹⁷ In the following subsections I will distinguish these theoretical roles for propositions from a distinct class of theoretical roles that propositions are sometimes thought to play, and will argue that it is possible to divorce these two classes of theoretical roles, by holding that they are played by distinct kinds of entity. This opens room for sophisticated nondescriptivists not only to talk as if there are propositions in their domains, but to take advantage of the theoretical work that propositions do.

¹⁷ *Ipsa facto*, these motivations are much deeper than Simon Blackburn’s sometimes implied motivation that Quasi-Realism should make sense of proposition-talk specifically because *philosophical theorists who accept realism* talk that way, and the idea is to ‘mimic’ what realists say, rather than to make sense of ordinary discourse. Compare Blackburn [1993] and later discussions of the so-called problem of *Creeping Minimalism*, especially in Dreier [2006].

2.1 two roles propositions play

The problems outlined in part I illustrate some of the most important reasons why philosophers sometimes postulate propositions, which are typically said to be the objects of the attitudes and the bearers of truth and falsity. Propositions are what we quantify over when we quantify into the complement place of attitude verbs, and what we identify across different cases, when we identify what Jill said with what Jack believes. They are consequently the arguments of attitude verbs – which we put by calling them the ‘objects of the attitudes’. Relatedly, they are the arguments of modals and of the truth predicate. And because any declarative sentence of English can figure in the complement of an attitude verb, they are associated with declarative sentences of English more generally, and hence can serve as the semantic values of declarative sentences, relative to contexts or assignments.

This motivation for believing in propositions does not directly tell us very much about what propositions are – these objects of the attitudes and bearers of truth and falsity. But it does suggest that this class of theoretical roles for propositions goes together – the things that Jill said and Jack believes are the very same things that are true or false and which might have been otherwise. But this class of theoretical roles for propositions is distinct from another idea that is often expressed about propositions: that they serve to carve up the world, that they correspond to distinctions in reality, that they are associated with metaphysical commitment of some kind, and that they are the appropriate objects of excluded middle. It is often assumed that the same class of entities plays both of these classes of theoretical roles, but what I will be arguing in what follows, is that this is not at all obvious, and that nondescriptivists would do well to reject this idea, and advocate a divorce between these two classes of theoretical roles for propositions.

2.2 arguments that the same things play both roles

There are several routes from the conception of propositions as the objects of the attitudes and the bearers of truth and falsity, to the idea that propositions also serve to carve up the world – that is, that they correspond to distinctions in reality. The first one starts with the idea that propositions are the objects of belief. It is a truism that paradigmatic beliefs, such as the belief that grass is green, that Peet’s Coffee is next door to the UPS store, and that Macy’s is having a sale, allow us to navigate in the world, by keeping track of which way the world is, in contrast to other ways that, so far as we could have known, it could have been. In believing that grass is green, we know what to expect when we look across the lawn and can distinguish painted landscapes as realistic or fantasy; in believing that Peet’s Coffee is next door to the UPS store, we know how to find our way to Peet’s, even though getting to Peet’s would have required a different

path, had it been next to Carl's Junior, instead. And in believing that Macy's is having a sale, we keep track of what the charge will be for our purchases. So far, so truistic.

But if propositions are the objects of belief, and belief is a state whose job is to map out the world in which we live, then it would seem that propositions must correspond to distinctions in reality – the very distinctions that we keep track of, by having beliefs about how things are (in reality). So just that easily, we can get from the idea that propositions are the objects of belief, to the idea that propositions serve to demarcate distinctions in reality – to carve up the world.

A similar line of reasoning starts with desire, instead of belief, and the idea that propositions are the objects of desire. It is a truism that paradigmatic desires, such as the desire for a cup of coffee, the desire to be promoted to Full Professor, and the desire for the Green Bay Packers to make it to the playoffs, mark out the goals that we will act to accomplish, insofar as we believe ourselves to be able, and whose realization would please us. Moreover, it is only the realization of having a cup of coffee *in reality* that will satisfy someone who desires a cup of coffee, and only the realization of being promoted to Full Professor *in reality* that will do, for someone who desires to be promoted to Full Professor. Since desires, therefore, delineate goals for how reality is to be shaped or molded, insofar as we are able, if propositions are their objects, then propositions must serve to delineate distinctions in reality – distinctions which matter to us, and to one side of which we aim to steer the course of reality, insofar as we are able.

Similar lines of reasoning may go for the other attitudes – paradigmatic assertion aims to communicate information about the world, paradigmatic wondering constitutes uncertainty about the contours of the world, paradigmatic suspicion is suspicion about how things are in the world, and paradigmatic doubt is doubt about how things are in the world. For each of the 'propositional' attitudes, as well as the acts of telling, asserting, warning, asking, and so on, we could give the same general lines of argument: in paradigmatic cases, these attitudes are specifically attitudes about the world, so if propositions are the objects of these attitudes, then propositions serve to mark out distinctions in how the world is.

Moreover, these lines of argument are mutually supporting, for the functional roles of the attitudes militate in favor of the assumption that the different attitudes have the same sort of object as one another. It is not just that we *say* things like that Jack said the very thing that he believes; it also seems that the *point* of assertion is to say what we believe – the very same thing that we believe, not something else. Similarly, questions are useful so that we can ask precisely what we are wondering. Moreover, it is plausible that believing that Macy's is having a sale is incompatible with wondering whether Macy's is having a sale

because they have the same sort of content,¹⁸ and it is because Malcolm's belief that he will not graduate has the same sort of object as his desire to graduate, that these states 'hook up' in the right sort of way to motivate him to try to pass his class.

The same reasoning can also, though more controversially, be further supported by consideration of the case of truth, and starts from the assumption that propositions are the objects of truth and falsity. It is a truism, after all, that it is true that grass is green because of how things are in reality – the truth or falsity of whether grass is green depends on whether grass is green, which is part of how grass is, which is (an insignificant) part of how the world is. The correspondence theory of truth extends this truism and codifies it into a theory of the nature of truth, and if we accept this extension, then we will be led to the conclusion that each proposition must correspond to some distinction in reality – the distinction which determines whether that proposition is true or false, accordingly as reality falls on one side of it or the other.

The idea that propositions map out distinctions in reality is taken to its logical conclusion by the variety of so-called modal ersatzists who hold that possible worlds – the maximally specific ways that the world could possibly be – simply *are* maximally consistent propositions. This picture simply codifies the view that each proposition marks out a distinction in reality into a theory of what the possible distinctions in reality are – they are the ones that you can get by consistent recombinations of propositions.

But the identification of these two sets of theoretical roles for propositions is also visible in many conceptions of the kind of thing that propositions *are* – for example, in the conception that propositions are sets of possible worlds, as well as in conceptions according to which propositions are more fine-grained, but *determine* sets of possible worlds. These conceptions exhibit the identification of the two sets of theoretical roles for propositions, because they suit propositions to play both sorts of role.

Now, if propositions mark out distinctions in reality, in ways the world might or might not be, then it is natural for that conclusion to bring others in its wake. For example, we should expect, if this much is right, that propositions are going to be associated with metaphysical commitment; for if propositions mark out distinctions in reality, and there are moral propositions, then there will be moral distinctions in reality. Similarly, if there are epistemic modal propositions, then there will be distinctions in reality corresponding to epistemic modal propositions, and if there are conditional propositions, then there will be distinctions in reality corresponding to conditional propositions. So the idea that

¹⁸ Anyone who follows the common proposal in linguistic semantics that the semantic values of questions are *sets* of possible answers (sets of propositions) rather than propositions will of course not endorse both the identification of the objects of wondering with the objects of questions and the identification of the objects of wondering with the objects of belief. See, for example, Hamblin [1973].

propositions mark out distinctions in reality naturally goes hand-in-hand with the idea that they are associated with metaphysical commitment, and conversely, it is unclear why they would be associated with metaphysical commitment, if they did not correspond to any distinctions in reality.

Likewise, the idea that propositions mark out distinctions in reality, between ways that the world might be, brings naturally in its wake the idea that propositions are the appropriate objects of excluded middle. After all, it is natural to think, the world has to *be* some way or another, and refusing to take a stand on which way it is only guarantees that there is some question about the world about which you don't know the answer.

So starting with the identification of propositions as the objects of the attitudes and bearers of truth and falsity, it is relatively easy to be led to a picture on which they also correspond to distinctions in reality, are associated with metaphysical commitment, and are the appropriate objects of excluded middle. But as it will be the purpose of the remainder of this paper to demonstrate, it is worth keeping these two groups of theoretical roles for propositions separate, and to treat the thesis that the same class of entities fills both roles as a substantive philosophical thesis in its own right. In what follows I will therefore reserve 'proposition' as a name for the entities which are the objects of the attitudes and the bearers of truth and falsity, and will use 'representational content' for the entities, whatever they are, which mark out distinctions in reality, are associated with metaphysical commitment, and are the appropriate objects of excluded middle. It may yet turn out, as the arguments considered in this section would suggest, that representational contents simply *are* propositions, but that is a substantive thesis, and in what follows I will be exploring what things would look like, if we rejected it.

2.3 what a divorce would look like

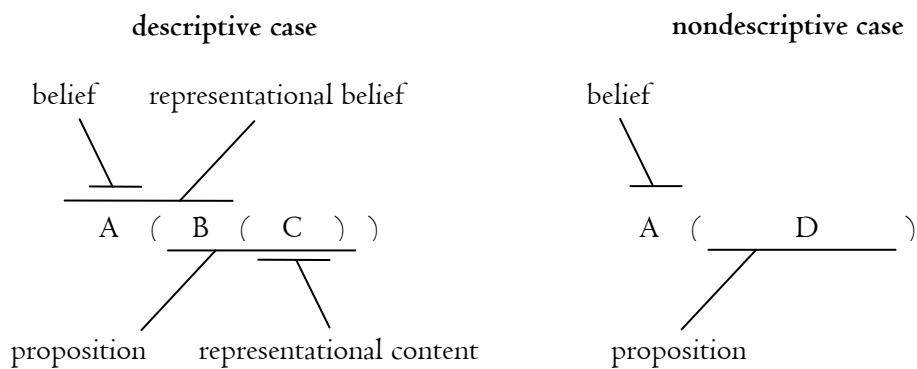
So how could it be that propositions and representational contents are two different sorts of thing? The line of reasoning from the last section which identifies them points out that belief, desire, and the other attitudes in paradigmatic cases need to be understood as relating us to real divisions in the world – either the divisions that we are trying to keep track of, or the ones that we are seeking to accomplish. So if propositions are the objects of the attitudes, and representational contents are the things that belief, desire, and the other attitudes have to be understood, at least in paradigmatic cases, as relating us to, then how can we avoid the conclusion that propositions are representational contents? In this section I'll offer what I take to be the most general answer to this question – an answer that is general enough to be implemented

in a variety of different ways, in different theoretical frameworks. To streamline discussion, I will begin by focusing on belief; subsequently I'll show how the same considerations generalize to the other attitudes.

If propositions are the objects of the attitudes, including of belief, then belief is a relation to propositions. And if belief, at least in certain paradigmatic cases, also needs to be understood as relating us to real divisions in the world – to representational contents – then belief must also be a relation to representational contents, at least in those cases. But we can accept both of these things without being forced to the conclusion that propositions *are* representational contents, so long as we do not hold that belief is the *same* relation to propositions as it is to representational contents.

How could the very same belief simultaneously consist in one relation to a proposition, and a different relation to a representational content? Well, for comparison, take the state of being about to go to Paris. Being in this state consists in bearing a certain relation to the action of going to Paris – the relation of being about to do it. But it also consists in bearing a certain *different* relation to Paris – the relation of being about to go there. The same state can consist in both of these relations to different objects, because it does so when carved up at different levels. Since the relational action of *going to* is part of both the action of *going to Paris*, and of the relation of being *about to go to*, and since Paris figures in the action of *going to Paris*, there is no puzzle about how the state of being about to go to Paris can be carved up in each of these distinct ways.

This is how paradigmatic beliefs, such as the belief that grass is green, could be simultaneously relations to propositions and to representational contents. They could be so, if they have the following structure:



The preceding picture not only makes sense of how paradigmatic beliefs such as the belief that grass is green, that Peet's Coffee is next door to the UPS store, and that Macy's is having a sale can be understood as being both relations to propositions and relations to representational contents, even though propositions

are distinct from representation contents; it also explains both why this is something that we could easily have failed to notice, and how it is possible for there to be beliefs which do not involve any relation to representational contents at all. I will take each of these three points in turn.

First point: in paradigmatic cases of belief – cases that from here forward I will refer to as *representational beliefs* – the foregoing picture allows us to make sense of how these beliefs consist both in a relation to propositions and a relation to representational contents. When we carve the belief up as a relation to a proposition, the relation is $A(_)$, and the proposition is $B(C)$. When we carve the belief up as a relation to a representational content, the relation is $A(B(_))$, and the representational content is C . This is made possible by the hypothesis that propositions which are the objects of representational belief, such as the proposition that grass is green or the proposition that Macy's is having a sale, themselves consist in a relation to a representational content – much as the action of going to Paris itself consists in a relation to Paris.

Second point: if this picture is correct, the picture itself explains why it would have been easy to overlook. If representational beliefs are the paradigms of belief, and include such ordinary beliefs as the belief that grass is green, that Peet's Coffee is next door to the UPS store, and that Macy's is having a sale, and if representational beliefs can be alternately (and correctly) carved up either as a relation to propositions or as a relation to representational contents, it is easy to see how we could have failed to realize that our different purposes required carving up belief in these two different ways. The mistake that we would have made, is the very natural one that is exhibited by the reasoning in section 2.I.

Third point: the foregoing picture also makes room for beliefs which, like representational beliefs, are relations to propositions, but which, unlike representational beliefs, do not involve any relation to representational contents – call these *non-representational beliefs*. On this picture, the variety among representational beliefs is like the variety among places that one might be about to go – one might be about to go to Paris, or one might be about to go to Madrid, but there are other things that one might be about to do, which do not involve there being someplace where one is about to go – for example, one might be about to sneeze, or about to order a cup of coffee, or about to get bored with reading this paper. On the picture being presented here, the variety among beliefs in general is like the variety among things that one is about to do – among which places one is about to go constitute a distinctive and interesting class, but are far from exhaustive. Similarly, representational beliefs, which consist in bearing the relation $A(B(_))$ to something, constitute an interesting and special class among beliefs in general – which consist in bearing the relation $A(_)$ to something – but are far from exhaustive.

It should now be easy to see that this very same picture can also explain how desire, in paradigmatic cases, could be constituted both by a relation to a proposition, and by a relation to a representational content – simply by replacing the relation $A(__)$, which corresponds to belief, with the relation $A^*(__)$, which corresponds to desire. And similar points go for the other propositional attitudes. If their objects – propositions – are the kind of thing to sometimes consist in a certain relation to a representational content, but not always consist in such a relation, then each of the lines of reasoning from section 2.I which seeks to identify propositions with representational contents will go wrong in precisely the same way.

The foregoing picture is a highly abstract one, and consequently can be developed in a variety of different ways, depending on what we take the relations $A(__)$, $A^*(__)$, and so on to be, and which sort of relation to representational contents we take B to be. You can think of propositions as Fregean senses, if you like, and representational contents as (possibly unrealized) states of affairs. To make sense of the idea that there are non-representational beliefs, you then need only make sense of the idea that not every Fregean sense determines a state of affairs.¹⁹ Or you can think of propositions as instructions for how to update context sets, as in a dynamic semantic framework, and think of representational contents as the pieces of information that are eligible to belong to the context set – what dynamic semanticists might otherwise call ‘propositions’.²⁰ To make sense of the idea that there are non-representational beliefs, you need only hold that some, but not all, instructions for how to update the context set consist in the instruction to supplement it with certain additional information. The instructions which instruct that the context set be supplemented with certain additional information will be the representational propositions, and other instructions will be the non-representational propositions. On this view, belief, desire, and the other attitudes should be thought of as relations to instructions for updating contexts, and ‘true’ and ‘false’ should be thought of as predicates of such instructions.

In part 3 of this paper, I will use yet a different framework in order to illustrate the picture; one which I think makes intuitively very clear both why a view of this sort should be thought of as genuinely believing in propositions, and why it is intuitively correctly classified as squarely within the nondescriptivist tradition. The framework that I will employ is a development of what I call *biforcated attitude semantics*, which was originally developed as a kind of expressivist semantic theory, in my book, *Being For: Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism*. In this paper the expressivist genesis of this semantic framework will be set

¹⁹ This is *not* to say that it is straightforward how to make sense of the idea that not every Fregean sense determines a state of affairs for applications like conditionals, epistemic modals, and in metaethics.

²⁰ Compare Kamp [1981] and Groenendijk and Stokhof [1991].

aside, and we may think of biforcated attitude semantics as essentially consisting in a theory about the nature of propositions and about the structure of belief which makes good in a precise and well-developed way on the picture articulated in this section. Unlike the hand-wavy suggestion that not all Fregean senses determine a state of affairs, the framework to be developed in part 3 makes a range of genuine predictions, makes the contrast with the deflationist strategy vivid, and places important constraints on the development of particular nondescriptivist theories about particular areas of discourse. It illustrates, in a very concrete way, the primary lesson of this paper that the differences between descriptivist and nondescriptivist semantics can be fruitfully thought of not as a dispute between very different ways of doing semantic theory (one with propositions and one without), but rather as a dispute about what propositions – the objects of the attitudes and bearers of truth and falsity – are *like*.

3 biforcated attitude semantics

So far in this paper what I have done is to articulate a set of problems which motivate the postulation of propositions associated with every declarative sentence of English, and argued that rather than treating these as objections or challenges, nondescriptivists can and should embrace propositions and employ them to play these roles – they should merely distinguish propositions from representational contents. They can do this, if their theory of propositions and theory of ordinary descriptive belief has the right *structure*. In the following subsections I further illustrate how such a view can be recognizably nondescriptivist, by filling in some of the details of biforcated attitude semantics, originally developed in my *Being For*. The point is not that this is necessarily the *right* way of developing the ideas in section 2.3; on the contrary, I suspect that there will ultimately be better ways of implementing the agenda of section 2.3. The point is merely to give an example of a framework that has the features discussed in section 2.3 in the abstract, which might serve as a model for any improvements, and to make good on my overall claim that the dispute between descriptivists and nondescriptivists can be fruitfully framed as a dispute about what propositions are *like*, rather than about *whether* there are propositions in one or another domain.

3.1 biforcated attitudes

The basic building block of biforcated attitude semantics is a postulated attitude which I call *being for*. Being for is conceived of as an attitude toward properties that an agent might have – for example, the property of disapproving of murder, or the property of performing an inference. I find it helpful to think of being for a certain property as a state whose functional role is to lead one to acquire that property, other

things being equal – so that someone who is for disapproving of murder will tend to disapprove of murder, other things being equal – but this is not essential to the theory. The essential assumption that we require about the attitude of being for, is that two states of being for *disagree* with one another just in case their objects are incompatible properties.

The relevant notion of disagreement in play, here, comes from Gibbard [2003]. Two states of mind are said to *disagree* just in case it is a sufficient condition for any two thinkers to disagree with one another, that one is in the one of the states, and the other is in the other. Belief is the paradigm state which admits of disagreement – for example, it is a sufficient condition for any two thinkers to disagree with one another, that one believes that p and the other believes that $\sim p$. But as Stevenson [1937] argued, belief is not the only state that gives rise to disagreements; it is a sufficient condition for us to disagree with one another, that you intend for us to go to the cinema tonight, and I intend for us to go instead to the symphony. The basic idea of biforcated attitude semantics is that beliefs with inconsistent contents disagree with one another *because* they involve states of being for with incompatible objects.

With these assumptions about being for in tow, we can introduce propositions as pairs of properties such that one is at least as strong as the other (from now on, pairs of *entailing properties*). Any such pair of properties, we will say, is a proposition. If P is a proposition consisting of the pair $\langle \pi_1, \pi_2 \rangle$, with π_1 entailing π_2 , then $\neg \pi_2$ entails $\neg \pi_1$, so the pair $\langle \neg \pi_2, \neg \pi_1 \rangle$ is also a proposition. We will define it to be the negation of P . Similarly, if P and Q are propositions consisting of the pairs $\langle \pi_1, \pi_2 \rangle$ and $\langle \theta_1, \theta_2 \rangle$, with π_1 entailing π_2 and θ_1 entailing θ_2 , then $\pi_1 \wedge \theta_1$ entails $\pi_2 \wedge \theta_2$, and so the pair, $\langle \pi_1 \wedge \theta_1, \pi_2 \wedge \theta_2 \rangle$ is also a proposition. We will define it to be the conjunction of P and Q . Finally, we will say that to believe a proposition is to be for each of its properties. The assumption that beliefs consist in two states of being for is what merits them the title of *biforcated attitudes*, whence the name of this semantic framework.²¹

The chief virtue of biforcated attitude semantics is that it allows us to maintain the distinction between propositions and representational contents. According to this theory, all beliefs consist in two states of being for, which have the functional role of leading the agent to acquire some property – that is, in the broadest sense, to do something. So to think about what properties are involved in the proposition that grass is green, that murder is wrong, that Max might be in Albuquerque, or that if she says yes, we’ll be engaged, we have to think about what someone who believes that grass is green, that murder is wrong, that

²¹ Note: here as in *Being For* I assume only that one property is at least as strong as the other. In ‘How to Be an Expressivist About Truth’ (Schroeder [2010 b]) I employ the stronger assumption that one property is *strictly* stronger. The relaxed assumption makes room for the treatment of epistemic modals discussed in section 3.2.

Max might be in Albuquerque, or that if she says yes, we'll be engaged, is motivated to do, other things being equal.

The traditional noncognitivist expressivist answers to the second question, include that someone who believes that murder is wrong is *ipso facto* motivated not to murder – that is, to avoid murdering – or perhaps to disapprove of murder, or of murderers. Well, it's easy to construct a plausible pair of entailing properties out of this; let it be the pair, $\langle \lambda z(\text{avoiding}(z, \text{murder}) \& \text{disapproving-of}(z, \text{murder})), \lambda z(\text{disapproving-of}(z, \text{murder})) \rangle$. If this is the proposition that murder is wrong, then someone who believes that murder is wrong will be motivated to both avoid it and disapprove of it, and someone who believes that murder is not wrong will be motivated to not disapprove of it – but not necessarily to not avoid it. This makes sense, because you might avoid murder for other reasons than that you think it is wrong.

On this view about the proposition that murder is wrong, it fits the non-representational paradigm, because this proposition does not involve any further relation to a corresponding representational content. In contrast, ordinary representational propositions like the proposition that grass is green, in order to fit the representational paradigm, must themselves consist in a further relation to the representational content of grass's being green. So here is the question that we must ask, in order to see what the proposition that grass is green is: what relation to the representational content that grass is green do we expect someone to be motivated to have, other things being equal, if they believe that grass is green? The simplest answer that I have come up with, is that we expect someone who believes that grass is green to take that fact as settled in deciding what to do – as we noted in section 2.1, ordinary representational beliefs are what we use to steer our way through the world. I call the notion of taking a representational content as settled in deciding what to do the relation of *proceeding as if*, and will sometimes abbreviate it as 'pai', for brevity's sake. Wherever 'pai' or 'proceeding as if' appears, it is simply a shorthand for the general relation of taking something as settled in one's deliberative activity.

It takes only one assumption about the relation of proceeding as if, in order to see how to construct the proposition that grass is green. This is the assumption that proceeding as if p is incompatible with proceeding as if $\neg p$. This is a plausible assumption, because it is hard to see how someone could take both p and $\neg p$ as settled in deciding what to do. If it is right, then proceeding as if p entails proceeding as

if $\neg p$, and hence the pair, $\langle \text{pai } p, \neg \text{pai } \neg p \rangle$ is a proposition. For any representational content p , we will therefore say that the corresponding representational proposition is the pair, $\langle \text{pai } p, \neg \text{pai } \neg p \rangle$.²²

3.2 getting the advantages of propositions

We are now in a position to see how biforcated attitude semantics counts as an implementation of the abstract ideas of section 2.3. According to biforcated attitude semantics, there is an important distinction between propositions and representational contents, and while all beliefs are relations to propositions, only some beliefs are thereby relations to corresponding representational contents – others, like the belief that murder is wrong, are not relations to representational contents at all. The general attitude of belief – ‘A’ in the diagram from section 2.3 – is the relation of being for each of the two members of, and it is a relation toward pairs of entailing properties. Some pairs of entailing properties have the structure $\langle \text{pai } p, \neg \text{pai } \neg p \rangle$, and they are representational propositions which are constituted by a further relation toward the representational content p – the relation of both taking it as settled in deciding what to do and not taking its negation as settled in deciding what to do. So the framework makes good both on the level of description at which representational beliefs are distinctive, and on the level of description at which they are not.

We are now also in a position to see why this framework allows propositions to play all of the roles required in order to solve the problems discussed in part I. Starting with compositionality, our semantics works by associating every sentence with a proposition – it has an unconventional view about what propositions are, of course, but that doesn’t affect anything materially. We defined a simple operation, moreover, which takes us from any proposition to its negation, and another simple operation which takes us from any two propositions to their conjunction. The operations allow us straightforwardly to compositionally and constructively derive the proposition expressed by complex sentences formed by negation and conjunction, and similar rules suffice for other connectives like disjunction and unary quantifiers, which only require relativization to assignments. What makes composition straightforward, is that it happens at the level of propositions.

It’s also straightforward why biforcated attitude semantics allows for quantification into the complement places of attitude verbs – it treats complementizer phrases as denoting propositions, just as

²² Biforcated attitude semantics doesn’t take a stand on exactly what representational contents are, but they can be thought of alternatively as sets of metaphysically possible worlds, or as structured ‘Russellian’ propositions – it matters not for the purposes of biforcated attitude semantics. Still, since some of the key arguments that propositions are structured turns on the assumption that they are the objects of belief and of assertion, once we distinguish propositions from representational contents, it *may* be easier to identify representational contents with sets of worlds.

any other proposition-based theory can do.²³ And hence it is straightforward how biforcated attitude semantics explains the features that moral and nonmoral beliefs have in common – they will be explained by their common core – the fact that they are both biforcated attitudes. At the same time, it’s clear why biforcated attitude semantics is consistent with the idea that thinking that stealing is wrong is not a matter of having any ordinary descriptive belief about a matter of fact, but is rather a motivating state – this derives from the important differences between the proposition that grass is green, and the proposition that stealing is wrong. Someone who believes the former will be motivated to take some fact as settled in reasoning, and someone who believes the latter will be motivated to avoid murdering and to disapprove of it.

So far, I haven’t said what biforcated attitude semantics understands attitudes other than belief to be, so this isn’t a complete solution to the general problem about propositional attitudes other than belief. But the general outline of an answer is in place – each attitude verb will be understood as contributing some relation to propositions – that is, to pairs of entailing properties. These attitudes will turn out to have importantly different properties when they are held to moral propositions as opposed to nonmoral propositions, but they will also turn out to have much in common – and what they have in common will derive, as with beliefs, from their common core.

Finally, biforcated attitude semantics offers a candidate for the argument of ‘stealing might not be wrong’ that is distinct from any nonmoral proposition – it is the proposition that stealing is not wrong. The recipe for the biforcated attitude semanticist to provide an account of modals – whether epistemic, deontic, or alethic – is to treat them as operating on the propositions that are expressed by their complements. In the appendix to chapter I2 of *Being For* I introduced one possible such account of ‘might’, according to which if ‘P’ expresses the proposition $\langle \pi_1, \pi_2 \rangle$, where π_1 entails π_2 , then ‘it might be that P’ expresses the proposition $\langle \pi_2, \pi_2 \rangle$. This account has at least some plausible initial virtues; for example, it explains why even though ‘P’ and ‘it must be that P’ carry equally strong commitments, their negations are not equally strong – if you negate ‘P’ you get ‘it is not the case that P’ and if you negate ‘it must be that P’ you get ‘it might be that it is not the case that P’. This account can make the distinctions required to avoid the problems we observed earlier for Blackburn’s *ad hoc* treatment of epistemic modals with moral complements.²⁴

²³ See chapter II of Schroeder [2008] for further discussion.

²⁴ It does face other problems, however. In particular, it rules out the possibility of consistently thinking that $P \vee Q$, that it might be that $\sim P$, and that it might be that $\sim Q$. This is because the weaker state of being for associated with believing that P is more like *rejecting* $\sim P$ than it is like being open to P. So I make no claim for the adequacy of the treatment of epistemic modals

3.3 where we are

Throughout this paper I've been trying to emphasize that the reasons to believe in propositions are much deeper and more general than the mere fact that we sometimes talk about them; there are explanatory roles that propositions play which cannot be played by merely deflationary talk about propositions. But my main agenda has been to suggest that nondescriptivists can embrace this, provided that they distinguish between propositions – the objects of the attitudes and bearers of truth and falsity – and representational contents. They can do this, provided that they have the right view about the nature and structure of propositions and of ordinary descriptive belief. The bottom line of the paper is to offer an abstract framework for developing a new class of more sophisticated nondescriptivist theories, which share the general structure outlined in section 2.3, and biforcated attitude semantics, described in part 3, is just one example of such a theory. Such theories are recognizably nondescriptivist, and can be advanced at least in principle in any domain in which philosophers might find a nondescriptive treatment tempting.²⁵

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mentioned in the main text, only to the way in which it illustrates the kinds of resources available to a view which divorces the two roles for propositions.

²⁵ Special thanks to Jamie Dreier, Billy Dunaway, and Andrew Alwood, and to audiences at the University of Maryland College Park, Rutgers University, and the University of Leeds, Gothenburg University, and Stockholm University.

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