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Are propositions facts?

This paper explores whether Jeffrey King's theory of propositions is committed to an obscure metaphysics which identifies propositions with certain kinds of facts. §1 presents the problem to which King tries to provide a solution, the problem of the unity of the proposition. §2 presents King's doubtful identification of propositions with certain existentially generalized facts over languages, words, speakers, contexts, times and places. §3 sketches a host of objections to the identification made in §2, provided King's identification is taken to be a substantive metaphysical claim. Given the failure of such a metaphysical reading, §4 argues in favor of a deflationist approach according to which we can better understand propositions by attempting to ramsify them – to provide substitutes that do all the explanatory work propositions do but are not metaphysically dubious. I argue King's claim to identify propositions with facts is better interpreted as an example of such a ramsification project, and not in a metaphysically substantive way.

Keywords: Jeffrey King; structured propositions; possible worlds; facts; logical form; Ramsey-sentence; Bertrand Russell; unity of propositions; context of utterance.

§1. Propositional roles and the problem of the unity of propositions¹

Propositions play important roles in linguistic and philosophical theorizing. Some of these roles are the following:² (i) what is truth-apt; (ii) the semantic

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² Roughly the same list of roles propositions are needed to play is present in King (2001: Introduction) and Soames (2010: 2-4). I take the claim that these semantic roles are played by propositions as a *prima facie* plausible claim. Fictionalists about objects of propositional attitudes, or adepts of Russell's multiple relation theory of judgment, will take issue with

information uttered sentences encode; (iii) what translation preserves; (iv) what uttered sentences conversationally imply; (v) what speakers producing those uttered sentences mean;³ (vi) the objects of propositional attitudes such as belief, desire, hope, fear, doubt; (vii) what is susceptible of having modal properties such as being necessary, possible, contingent; (viii) the designations of expressions such as “logicism”, “Goldbach's conjecture” etc.⁴

These are several intuitive roles assigned to propositions, but this gives us no clue as to what the kind or kinds of objects filling in those roles are. An inquiry into which kinds of objects are propositions is an inquiry into the nature of propositions, or into what binds propositional constituents in one and the same unity, a proposition. One way of starting such an inquiry is exhibited by Bertrand Russell, who says:

A proposition, in fact, is essentially a unity, and when analysis has destroyed the unity, no enumeration of constituents will restore the proposition. The verb, when used as a verb, embodies the unity of the proposition, and is thus distinguishable from the verb considered as a term, though I do not know how to give a clear account of the precise nature of the distinction. (Russell 1903: 50)

Owing to the way in which the verb actually relates the terms of a proposition, every proposition has a unity which renders it distinct

affirming the existence of propositions merely on the basis of the claim (not supported by any argument in this Introduction) that propositions play the semantic roles ascribed to them in the text. However, this dispute is beyond the scope of my essay. I plan to assume from the very start that propositions exist and that they play (most of) the roles ascribed to them in the text. On the basis of this assumption (shared by Jeffrey King), I criticize the specific details of King's theory of propositions.

³ This list of roles propositions play in semantics presupposes Salmon's (1986: 58) distinction between information semantically encoded in a sentence and information pragmatically imparted by uttering a sentence.

⁴ Of course, many other roles could be thought of. King (2001: §§2-3) distinguishes between modal and semantic properties propositions have, and, correspondingly, between modal and semantic roles propositions are supposed to play. This essay does not take a stand for or against King's sharp distinction.

from the sum of its constituents. All these points lead to logical problems (*ibidem*: 52)

This is a dense passage, and many of Russell's concerns are not strictly semantic. What are the points that are of specific semantic interest in the text? One answer could be the following. As Jeffrey King (2009: 257) points out, there are at least three questions underlying Russell's metaphysical investigation into the unity of propositions, which may be formulated by taking an example, say, the proposition that Dara swims:

Unity Question 1 (UQ1): What holds the constituents Dara and the property of swimming together and imposes structure on them in the proposition that Dara swims?

Unity Question 2 (UQ2): How does the “structured complex” that is the proposition that Dara swims manage to have truth conditions and so represent Dara as possessing the property of swimming?

Unity Question 3 (UQ3): Why does it at least seem as though some constituents can be combined to form a proposition (Dara and the property of swimming), whereas others cannot be (George W. Bush and Dick Cheney)?

(UQ1) concerns what holds propositions constituents together in a proposition; (UQ2) concerns how a proposition can be such as to have both a propositional structure and the truth-conditions which determine its representational content; and (UQ3) concerns what makes some structures propositional structures while others not, and what makes some groupings of constituents to be propositions and others not. King's clarification is on the right track, but there are a few additional comments I would like to make. First, it is not completely clear what (UQ1)-(UQ3) aim at, and it should be explicit that (UQ1) is concerned with propositional structure, (UQ2) with truth-conditions and representation, and (UQ3) with the arguments of which that propositional structure is a function. But, with respect to (UQ2), King is hasty in assuming that propositions “have truth conditions and so represent”. Scott Soames (2010: 102) would rather have it that propositions represent, and *so* have truth-conditions.

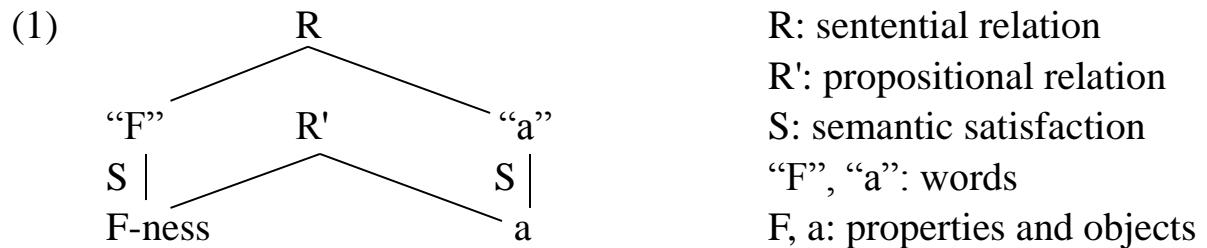
Although both points of view assume there is an essential relation between truth-conditions and representation, neither author fully spells out *why* this is supposed to be so.⁵ Furthermore, the distinction between (UQ1) and (UQ3) is not completely obvious, since we inquire into a structure and its arguments: and finding out what the structure is (UQ1) already constrains what the arguments could be (UQ3), although perhaps not sufficiently.

For the rest of this section, I will present one solution which has been formulated in response to the problem sketched above, Jeffrey King's account of propositions. The rest of this paper will be concerned with a discussion of this solution to the problem. According to King, the propositional relation binding the propositional constituents is the sentential relation⁶ of the sentence expressing it, composed with the relation of semantic satisfaction. Since semantic satisfaction is assumed not to add any structure to the propositional relation, the structure of the proposition and of the sentence expressing it will be identical. For example, the structure of the proposition that Fa is the same as the structure of the sentence "Fa"; the difference between the two is that the relation of semantic satisfaction is added ("F" designates F, "a" designates a), the lexical items being replaced by

⁵ King believes propositions represent because they have truth-conditions, and their representational character is nothing over and above these truth-conditions. By way of contrast, two options may be formulated. For Soames (2010: 102-103), propositions have truth-conditions because they represent; propositions are cognitive event-types and their representational character (which determines their truth conditions) is inherited from the cognitive event-tokens they typify. A completely different stance is taken by McGlone (forthcoming, fn.8), for whom the fact that propositions have truth-conditions (hence represent, just like for King) is a *brute* fact; there is no sensible question to be asked (as Soames would like to ask) about what it is that makes propositions have the truth-conditions that they do. An assessment of these approaches goes beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶ King (2007: 28) identifies the sentential relation with what Robert May (1985/1997: 281-315) calls the logical form of a sentence, or LF. According to May, the logical form of a sentence is obtained by transformations from the surface-structure of that sentence (e.g., by quantifier raising, which makes the scope relations between the expressions composing the sentence explicit). However, King's presentations of his theory of propositions do not always distinguish between LF and surface-structure. King focuses on simple examples such as "Rebecca swims", "Dara swims" etc. which do not exhibit scope ambiguities or other phenomena which could discriminate between surface-structure and LF. Although it is sometimes ambiguous which of the two King refers to when he uses the expression "sentential relation", I take him to be referring to LF, in agreement both with the remarks in (King 2007: 27-28), and with other works of his (King and Stanley 2005: 130, 149).

their semantic values. In tree-form:⁷



A view along the lines of (1) has the resources requisite to answer the three questions (UQ1)-(UQ3). What holds propositional constituents together (UQ1) is the propositional relation, which is the result of functionally composing the sentential relation (or logical form, cf. fn.6) with the relation of semantic satisfaction. How does the propositional relation manage to have truth-conditions? (UQ2) This is due to the second component of the propositional relation, semantic satisfaction (defined as is customary in possible-worlds semantics), which assigns referents to the expressions composing the sentence. The conditions in which the sentence in question will be true will simply be garden-variety instances of the T Convention (Tarski 1944: 343-345): “S is true if and only if p,” where “S” names the proposition that p. Why it is that some objects are or come to be propositional constituents, while others not (UQ3) is dictated by the constraints which the sentential relation imposes. The sentential relation holds among linguistic expressions, and obeys subcategorization rules among categories of expressions,⁸ and other properties specified in the lexicon had by the expressions making up the sentence (Chomsky 1965: 90-127).

One thing is worth emphasizing, since it has consequences in the division of labour: if propositional structure is sentence structure, then which structure that turns out to be is no longer a metaphysical question, but one to be settled not by

⁷ In presenting King's account of propositions, I have abstracted away from King's commitment to Chomsky's Minimalist Program, in order to allow for a reformulation of King's view of propositions which is compatible with syntactic frameworks alternative to Chomsky's, such as categorial grammar.

⁸ E.g., a transitive verb subcategorizes for a direct object, a proper name does not; this is why Bush and Cheney could not be the only propositional constituents of a proposition, to answer the example King suggested in (UQ3).

philosophers, but by linguists.

§2. Identifying propositions with certain facts

King's main book, *The Nature and Structure of Content* (2007), complements the account of the structure of propositions sketched above with an account of the nature of propositions. (King 2007: 25-26) aims at a naturalistic account of propositions, according to which we should have good reasons to believe propositions exist, independently of any semantic theorizing. To this end, he identifies a proposition “Fa” with the following fact: there is a language L , lexical items “F” and “a”, a context of utterance, a speaker, a time and a place, such that: F is the semantic value of “F”, a is the semantic value of “a”, “F” is the leftmost node of the sentential relation of “Fa” and “a” is the rightmost node of the sentential relation of “Fa”. To provide a telling illustration of what he means, King (2009: 270) says:

the following fact is the proposition that Dara swims, where we include as part of the fact/proposition that the propositional relation in it encodes ascription: *there is a language L , a context c and lexical items a and b of L such that a and b occur at the left and right terminal nodes (respectively) of the sentential relation R that in L encodes ascription and Dara is the semantic value of a in c and the property of swimming is the semantic value of b in c .*

Here is one way of cashing out what King says about Dara's swimming. Consider the sentence “Dara swims”. This sentence expresses either the proposition that Dara swims at the time of the utterance or the proposition that she can swim. For simplicity, let us assume it expressed the proposition that Dara swims at the time of the utterance. What would the sort of fact with which that proposition is identified with be? It would be the following fact:

-there is a language L (here English), such that L includes the lexical items a_1 (“Dara”), and a_2 (“swims”) and there is a context c , speaker s , time t and place p such that:

- (i) the semantic value of a_1 relative to c, s, t and p is Dara;
- (ii) the semantic value of a_2 relative to c, s, t and p is the property of swimming
- (iii) the ntuple $\langle a_1, a_2 \rangle$ satisfies the sentential relation $[[_]_{NP} [_]_{VP}]_s$, and the result is the sentence $[[a_1]_{NP} [a_2]_{VP}]_s$
- (iv) speaker s could have uttered the sentence obtained by concatenating a_1 and a_2 in context c , at time t and place p .

The first existential quantifier “there is” takes scope over all the clauses (i)-(iv) mentioned above. The fact that there exists a language with certain words (which have certain contents across possible worlds) which are conjoined and uttered comes to be seen, for King, as being identical to the proposition expressed by the sentence thus formed.

§3. Which facts are propositions?

This section will explore several problems with the metaphysical reading of King's association of propositions with certain existential facts.

Failure of the indiscernibility of identicals. In identifying propositions with facts, King (2007: 26-27) draws on the work of Russell and Wittgenstein. But then perhaps all three authors are subject to the following objection: a simple and basic intuition is that propositions *aren't* any kind of facts (Speaks 2009: fn.26). Propositions differ from facts because there are properties facts have and propositions don't (facts obtain or not, propositions cannot be said either to obtain or not to obtain); and there are properties propositions have but facts don't (propositions represent the world, and have truth-conditions, while facts simply are or are not, they don't represent what there is, nor do they have truth conditions).

Failure of substitution of the words “proposition” and “fact”, regardless of how “fact” may be further modified. Where do these powerful commonsensical intuitions that propositions aren't facts come from? One plausible answer is that it is a matter of language: more often than not, “proposition” and “fact” cannot be substituted one for the other *salva veritate*.⁹

⁹ The examples given in the text parallel examples given by Frederike Moltmann (2003: 82-

- (2a) It is a fact that France is not a monarchy.
- (2b) ? It is a proposition that France is not a monarchy.
- (3a) John was unaware of the fact that Mary had left.
- (3b) * John was unaware of the proposition that Mary had left.
- (4a) The district attorney needs hard facts to prove her case.
- (4b) * The district attorney needs hard propositions to prove her case.
- (5a) Carnap denied the existence of facts.
- (5b) Carnap denied the existence of propositions.

These examples share a common pattern: all (a) sentences are grammatical, a fact which competent speakers of English could testify for, while (b) sentences either are ungrammatical ((3)-(5)), or are of doubtful grammaticality – (2). Substitution of “fact” for “proposition” fails in idiomatic expressions - “it is a fact that” (1a), “needs hard facts” (4a) - , pleonastic expressions (“unaware of the fact that” instead of “unaware that” in (3a)), and in belief contexts (Carnap was free to extend or not his ontological suspicions from facts to propositions, this is not something a semantics for English could decide). The examples could be multiplied, and Moltmann (2003: 88-94) discusses important additional cases.

Avoiding objections merely by denying ordinary language intuitions the role of data. Both the commonsensical objection that propositions are not facts (because they have different properties than facts) and the linguistic intuitions that “proposition” and “fact” have different distributional contexts are nothing more than ordinary language platitudes; they do not amount to a fully worked out argument against, nor an alternative theory to, the theories of Russell, Wittgenstein and King, who claim propositions are facts. Speaking from the standpoint of such theories, King disposes of our pretheoretical intuitions about propositions, saying they have no bearing on semantic theorizing.

The notion of proposition expressed by a sentence is a theoretical one. But that means we just don't have pretheoretical intuitions about which sentences express the same propositions. (King 2007: 101)

Thus there is no reason to think that the ordinary use of 'proposition'

84). I use “*” to indicate ungrammaticality, and “?” to indicate questionable grammaticality.

outside philosophy [...] tracks the theoretical notion in philosophy.”
(ibidem: fn. 82)

Nevertheless, if these platitudes can be given satisfaction by being kept as part of an overall theory of language, methodological considerations of conservatism suggest they should be kept. Rejecting the platitudes would be coherent, but it would take semantic theorizing further away from the semantic intuitions which serve as its main source of evidence. Saying that the theory works would no longer seem satisfactory from the layman's viewpoint; one should also prove no better theory, one incorporating the platitudes, is available.

Outright rejection of pretheoretical intuitions is a non-reply King gives to the platitude that propositions aren't facts (because they have different properties). A second attempted reply King has against the platitude is a curious one: King (2007: 52) seems to accept the literal falsity of the identity he upholds: he says that when we view the same things one way, we view them as propositions, and when we view *those same things* another way, we view them as facts (about languages, contexts and speakers). I believe this reply is incoherent. The only rephrasing I can fathom would have it that propositions are mysterious in nature, so it would perhaps be theoretically parsimonious if we could have some kinds of facts play all the roles we take propositions to play. But I will argue that the sort of facts King would like to be surrogates of propositions are themselves ontologically obscure, and of little explanatory value.

Compound facts. I would like to begin by addressing an ontological worry: how can an existential generalization generally be a fact? In particular, how can the existential generalization over languages, words, contexts and speakers which King proposes to identify propositions with count as a fact? Do truth-functional compounds denote truth-functional facts? Consider (6) and (7):

(6) $(\exists x) (A_1x \vee A_2x \vee A_3x \vee \dots \vee A_nx)$, where A_1, \dots, A_n are all the words defined in the enlarged Webster dictionary.

(7) $(\exists x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n)(A_1x_1 \vee A_2x_2 \vee \dots \vee A_nx_n)$, where A_1, \dots, A_n are any complex predicates.

Do (6) and (7) designate facts? If the answer is yes, then, in reply, the complexity of the examples could be increased *ad libitum*. As Mulligan and

Correia (2007: §1) point out, this bloated ontology of facts is “simply incredible”. Only a thoroughgoing realist about facts will accept the challenge. But the thoroughgoing realist will have to answer the following objections.

What is the fact in (7) about? It predicates A_1 of x_1 or ... or A_n of x_n . How could this be spelled out more clearly? Wouldn't we say there is a disjunction, in which either A_1 is predicated of x_1 , or A_2 is predicated of x_2 or...; is there a separate disjunctive predication, over and above these atomic ones? Which would the predication be? It can't be $A_1 \vee A_2 \vee A_3 \dots$ predicated of $\langle x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots \rangle$, because A_2 is only predicated of x_2 , not of x_1 or x_3 . An elegant solution out of these qualms is offered by Russell (1918/2007: 191-192), who accepted that $A_n x_n$ is a fact, but thought atomic facts are sufficient for the purposes of connecting language and reality. For Russell, complex facts were not needed; was he wrong in believing compound facts are not needed? If so, why, and how could the remaining difficulties connected with highly disjunctive predication be solved?

The ontological issue is at least twofold. First, there is the issue of the ontological status of composed facts: King would simply have it that (6) and (7) express truth-functional facts over and above the facts being compound by means of truth-functions. Here I have suggested Russell differs from King. Second, there an ontological problem which surfaces even at the level of atomic facts, because the facts identical to the propositions expressed by (6) and (7) would be highly disjunctive: not only over A_1, \dots, A_n , but also over all spoken languages spoken on Earth, all speakers, all contexts, all space-time regions.

One sentence, infinitely many facts. In order to focus on variation in contexts and speakers, consider (6) and pretend it did not have any faithful translations in any natural language. Moreover, suppose it did not have any suitable paraphrase in English, so that the only way of expressing the proposition that snow is white by means of an English sentence would be by uttering (6). Given that the language and the lexical items in (6) are fixed, the proposition that snow is white would then boil down, on King's view, to an existential generalization over contexts, speakers, places and times; and if this existential generalization were not properly speaking a fact, but a generalization over atomic facts, what would those atomic facts be? There are (denumerably) infinitely many possible speakers of English, and a continuum of space-time points to make up a continuum of possible contexts of uttering (6). Are we to understand King as

claiming that a proposition is identical to an existential generalization over a continuum of facts about contexts? Then we have a dilemma. If the proposition in question is highly sensitive to a particular context, then there will be continuum-many other contexts which will be superfluously quantified over. If the proposition is context-insensitive, then why bother quantify over contexts at all, in addition to quantification over languages and their lexical items?

Explanatory value? If facts abound and obtain for cheap, as (6)-(7) and examples of increasing complexity might suggest, then one may wonder what the explanatory value of these facts is. In what context could (6) or (7) be usefully appealed to as explanations? The genuine concern is that propositions could not be the facts that King identifies them with, precisely because propositions have explanatory value. I have mentioned some of the important theoretical roles propositions play in the Introduction. If propositions could not fulfill most of these roles, their theoretical utility would be doubtful; this is why the theoretician of propositions is committed to saying propositions are notions which have explanatory value, and why there is an embarrassment in identifying explanatory propositions with non-explanatory facts, as King does.

This suggests another dilemma for King's view of propositions. On the one hand, if the proposition expressed by the sentence "Amelia talks" is identified with a specific fact about a specific language, lexical items and context of utterance, then that same proposition could not be expressed using different words or on different occasions. But this is precisely why propositions were mostly needed in semantics: to be communicable pieces of information which can remain unchanged even when languages and contexts of utterance are changed (Salmon 1986: 11-18). If, on the other hand, the proposition expressed by "Amelia talks" is identified with an *existential generalization* over facts about specific languages, contexts and speakers, then there is the ontological worry that an existential generalization is not a fact, and the explanatory worry that such an existential generalization will be of little value in semantic explanation, whereas the proposition it is identified with has a theoretical existence accepted precisely because of the fruitfulness of propositions in semantic explanations. On both horns of the dilemma, there are problems with identifying propositions with kinds of facts, and the natural conclusion seems to be that propositions aren't any kind of

facts.¹⁰

§4. Ramsifying propositions away

Section §3 presented a case against associating a metaphysics of facts about language to propositions. The objections mentioned in §3 may be debated, and some of them may be finally rejected. But an adequate theory of propositions does not only have to withstand objections (and it is difficult to see how it can withstand all objections), but also to be explanatorily satisfactory. The identification of propositions with existentially generalized facts seems to bring more metaphysical obscurity than clarification of the “nature and structure” of propositions.

Why not to renounce King's main account. Other than this identification, King's account of propositions seems to be a good candidate for explaining propositions. It tries to build a compromise between the traditions involving structured propositions and the traditions identifying a proposition with the set of possible worlds at which it is true. The Russellian tradition of structured propositions has the advantage of higher psychological plausibility: it is not a set of worlds, or a set of situations, that humans represent when they think. Provided human thought could be represented as events which instantiate attitude types captured by predicates such as “_knows that_”, “_believes that_” and “_desires that_”, and provided the second argument in these predicates is always a proposition, while the first argument is the agent having the attitude, then it is plausible to assume that cognitive representation of a proposition involves, *inter alia*, grasp of a certain propositional structure, giving weight to Russellian

¹⁰ The worry remains that if facts cannot play the roles proposition play, we are left with mysterious entities at a fundamental level of semantic. How it is that these entities come to constitute the meanings of sentences in contexts is something which has to be explained, and should be labeled not merely as metasemantics and as sociological explanation of semantic data, but as a proper part of semantics (Garcia-Carpintero 2004: 136-143); had there not been a connection between language-users and the objects in their environment, lexical items would not have been endowed with the meanings they have. I believe this worry is genuine and, like Garcia-Carpintero (2004: 160-164), I see the answer in a reevaluation of the relation between language-games, which do duty as institutional settings for speech acts, and the propositions expressed in contexts in which one or another language-game is played.

considerations. On the other hand, the possible-worlds account of propositions well explains how propositions have truth conditions and representational content with respect to the actual world, while the Russellians will have a hard time explaining failure of substitution in belief contexts, or empty names. Any attempt to compromise between the two, and to extract their benefits while avoiding, if possible, their shortcomings, is welcome.

King's account of propositions seems to do this. On the one hand, given that propositional structure is identified with sentential structure, Russellian concerns are appeased. Furthermore, the identification of propositional structure with sentence structure (i.e., with logical form) has the advantage of bringing theories of natural language syntax to bear on the abstruse topic of the metaphysics of propositions. On the other hand, keeping the semantic values of the propositional constituents to be the possible-worlds contents (or intensions) associates with the constituents of the sentence expressing the proposition has the advantage of accounting for representation conditions. Furthermore, although a proposition is not identified with a set of possible worlds, each proposition (understood *a la* King) can be uniquely associated with a set of possible worlds, thus accounting for truth conditions as well. In sum, it seems requirements (UQ1)-(UQ3) are satisfied by this account in a better way than they are satisfied by either Russellian propositions or sets of possible-worlds.

What does it mean to identify propositions with facts? Notice that King's identification of propositions with facts plays no role in the argument made in the preceding paragraph in favor of it. The purpose such a fact-proposition identification is supposed to achieve is ontological and explanatory clarification, and it fails at that, as §3 tries to show. The issue seems to be complicated by the fact that King seems to be pushing a metaphysical point: he seems to wish to account for the “nature and structure of content”, and *not* for an adequately explanatory substitute for propositions. In what follows, I propose to renounce this claim to metaphysical truth or insight into the nature of propositions. How can this be achieved?

§1 has presented a list of explanatory roles propositions play in a theory of language. These explanatory roles themselves seem to be accounted for whatever abstract entities satisfy (UQ1)-(UQ3), i.e., by whatever abstract have structure, truth conditions, and representationality (though perhaps, on elaboration,

additional restrictions may need to be imposed further). The deflationist route is the following: find whatever does the job you wish propositions to do, and label those as the adequate *ersatz* propositions your theory of language will work with. The most convenient way to express this formally is a modified Ramsey-sentence for propositions (Ramsey 1929, Lewis 1970):

(8a) $(\exists_1 x)(c_1(x) \ \& \ c_2(x) \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ c_n(x))$, or, more explicitly,

(8b) $(\exists x)(c_1(x) \ \& \ c_2(x) \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ c_n(x) \ \& \ (\forall y)((c_1(y) \ \& \ c_2(y) \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ c_n(y)) \rightarrow y = x))$

In (8a-8b), c_1, \dots, c_n are the constraints the entities have to satisfy in order to count as surrogate propositions. In the simplified version above, there are only three constraints (structure, truth conditions, and representationality). The unique existence claim is meant to impose the further constraint that, once you choose a set of entities that play the role of propositions in your theory, you should consistently use that set of entities throughout.

Is there any philosophical justification for these technicalities? Yes. An obvious philosophical justification is clarifying one's ontology. This is precisely the deflationist line taken in Ramsey's "Facts and Propositions" (1927: 157-159). For Ramsey, propositions, true propositions, facts, facts that propositions are not false, etc. all come down to the same thing, namely, interpreting as true a sentential formula. But there is a second philosophical justification, apt to appeal philosophers not moved by ontological parsimony or sweeping pronouncements of eliminating entities. In his *Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (1918: 187-188, 192), Russell's reasoning seems to be the following: if the only reason why we believe propositions as abstract entities exist is because we have posited them to fill certain semantic roles, then there is no loss of either information or function in constructing the Ramsey-sentence for propositions, and then saying there may be values of the variable quantified over which are not, intuitively, what we had thought propositions are. Our intuitive conception of propositions was mistaken because it assumed entities which were not only redundant (this much was clear from Ramsey's parallel point highlighted above), but obscure as well. If the only thing which made us think propositions exist were the functions they fulfilled, then having some set of entities fulfill those functions is quite enough for having what we wanted from propositions. Saying that propositions are thereby

eliminated or that they are thereby identified with the new entities is a terminological issue.

What I want to claim is that King's attempt to identify propositions with existentially generalized facts is an unfortunate result of good intentions. The result is unfortunate because it brings metaphysical and explanatory obscurity, as suggested in §3. But the two good intentions are the following. First, to ramsify propositions away. King may not have actually had this intention, since this hardly explains his insistence is revealing the (true) “nature” of propositions. But King can certainly be reinterpreted as proposing a ramsification of propositions, and the uniqueness existence constraint of the modified Ramsey (8a) made explicit in (8b) would replace the uncomfortable idiom of existentially generalized facts. Moreover, the modified Ramsey-sentence quantifies over those objects that will substitute propositions (hence over designations of sentences), and so (8a) is a second-order sentence. This explains King's insistence that the existentially generalized fact with which propositions were to be identified is a fact generalizing over languages and words.

The second good intention lying behind King's metaphysical identification of propositions with facts is this. The fact identified with a proposition also generalizes over contexts, speakers, times and places. This is evidence of the fact that King is sensitive to criticism coming from pragmatic quarters, and suggesting that which proposition a given uttered sentence expresses may largely be determined by context of utterance. King's own take on this issue is presented at length in (King and Stanley 2005), but it is important to see that, at least in a general fashion, context enters into what a proposition is. One could then further add a fourth constraint, c_4 , in (8a), to the effect that there is a speaker which *could* utter in context (and at a given place and time) the sentence which *would* then express the proposition. It is important to notice that this constraint does not limit the number of propositions to those expressed so far in the conversational history of mankind. All propositions are allowed into existence, as long as they could have been expressed by an uttered sentence at one point or another.

A feature of the view under consideration is that it leaves it open what a context is, as well as what a speaker is. One could, for instance, argue that a future computer passing Turing's test would qualify as a speaker, in spite of not grasping any proposition. But perhaps a proposition would be expressed by the sentence

produced by the computer, in spite of the computer's incapacity to grasp that proposition. What a context is may also be controversial. Are contexts the formal constructions presented in Montague, Kaplan or Stalnaker, or are they real-life situations belonging to the external environment? Notice King's account of propositions, as amended by the ramsification of propositions suggested above, remains neutral on all these important questions. On the one hand, this may seem disadvantageous, as it clearly leaves much work to be done. On the other hand, it seems advantageous, as it tries to separate which parts in semantic and pragmatic theorizing are relevant to a general characterization of what all propositions are (and, sketchily, this issue is addressed), and which parts are relevant to finding out which particular proposition is expressed in which particular context (the suggestion being that such an enterprise lies beyond a general theory of propositions).

Conclusion

The topic of this essay has been Jeffrey King's theory of propositions. In §1, I have presented Russell's problem of the unity of proposition, and how this problem ramifies into accounting for why propositions have structure, truth conditions, and representationality. I have further presented King's theory of propositions as an attempt to answer Russell's problem. In §2, I have formulated King's claim that propositions are identical to certain kinds of facts, existentially generalized ones, where what is being generalized over are languages, words, speakers and contexts of utterance, several of these subject to further requirements. In §3 I have argued that the identificatory claim presented in §2 is metaphysically obscure, and that it fails to satisfy the explanatory demands placed on propositions. As a way of rescuing King's theory as an attempt to compromise between structured propositions and possible-worlds semantics, I have suggested, in §4, how one may avoid King's metaphysical commitments by viewing the existential generalization as a ramsification of the predicate “_ is a proposition”, i.e. a second-order claim placing restrictions on what entities may count as propositions, and then identifying those entities with surrogate propositions. The account seems be compatible with plugging in alternative notions of context and speaker in the

Ramsey-sentence, thus clearly pointing out where a general theory of propositions might depend on the notions of context or speaker, and where it might not.

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