

Attitudinal Objects and Mental Events

In this talk I will discuss the ontology of what I call 'attitudinal objects', the kinds of things we refer to with 'John's belief that S', 'John's hope that S', 'John's thought that S', 'John's desire that S', and John's claim that S'. Attitudinal objects are content-bearing entities that unlike propositions are intentional in nature, partly constituted by an attitudinal mode, and depend on an agent. Attitudinal objects intuitively have a propositional content and truth-conditions (or equivalent fulfillment conditions) inherently. Making use of attitudinal objects as the bearers of truth values and carriers of propositional contents avoids a range of problems with abstract propositions, such as the problem of truth-directedness (why should a set or sequence of propositional constituents be true or false?) and the problem of the unity of propositions (why should a sequence of a property and its arguments have particular truth conditions?).

Attitudinal objects I argue are constituted by a multigrade attitudinal relation, an agent, and the propositional constituents. Thus John's belief that Mary is happy is of the form $f(B, \text{John}, \text{HAPPY}, \text{Mary})$, for some form of composition f and the multigrade belief relation B .

Crucially, attitudinal objects are not mental events (or speech acts). Mental events, such as John's believing that S or John's belief state are, intuitively, not true or false, and so for Mary's speech act of claiming that S. Moreover, attitudinal objects have other identity or, better, exact similarity conditions than mental events (or speech acts). John's belief (that Mary is happy) is 'the same as' Joe's belief (that Mary is happy), but John's belief state or John's believing (that S) cannot be 'the same as' Joe's belief state or Joe's believing (that S). John's thought can be the same as Mary's, but John's thinking can never be the same as Mary's thinking; John's claim can be the same as Mary's, but not so for John's claiming and Mary's claiming. Attitudinal objects can be 'shared', mental events (and speech acts) cannot. Finally, attitudinal object appear to have their temporal location only accidentally, unlike mental events (and speech acts). John's thought that S might have occurred to him earlier than it did. But John's thinking that S cannot have happened earlier than it did.

The three differences can be explained if mental events and attitudinal objects are conceived ontologically in the following way:

- Mental events, like all events, are second-level tropes: they are instantiations of temporal transition relations in first-level tropes (cf. Mertz 1996). As such, mental events cannot have truth conditions, they have their temporal properties essentially, and they can be exactly similar only if sharing the same first-level tropes.

- Attitudinal objects are quasi-relational tropes, in the following sense: they are instantiations in an agent of complex one-place properties such as the property of standing in the multigrade belief relation to the property of happiness and Mary. The multigrade attitudinal relation guarantees the 'truth-directedness' of attitudinal objects; the temporal properties of attitudinal objects will be accidental: attitudinal objects are instances of attitudinal relations at whatever time they may instantiate them in a world; finally two attitudinal objects 'are the same' (i.e. are exactly similar) in case they instantiate the same complex attitudinal property (just as two tropes are exactly similar in case they instantiate the same (natural) property).

Making use of quasi-relational tropes solves a long-standing problem with other intentionalist approaches to propositional content, such as speech act-theoretic approaches: speech acts and mental events cannot do the job needed, that is, providing content-bearing truth-directed entities. Attitudinal objects conceived as quasi-relational tropes can.