

# The Classificatory Conception of Propositional Content

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# Three conceptions of propositional content

## The Fregean conception

Frege, Searle, King, Merricks 2015, and most everyone else

## The Russellian conception

Russell 1903, Speaks, Richard

## The classificatory conception

Me, Soames, Schiffer



# The Fregean conception

<Hesperus is a planet>

<Kepler died in misery>

<Phosphorus is a planet>

<a = b>

<Dr. Lauben was wounded>

<a = a>

<Russell is a logician>

transmission of representational  
features and truth-conditions

entertainment

judgment/belief

Subject

Russell is a logician

assertion

Russell is a logician



# The Fregean conception

- Propositions are the primary bearers of representational features and truth-conditions.

Attitudes and speech acts inherit their representational features from propositions.

- The content-force distinction

Taxonomic: a single kind of truth-conditional content runs through all attitudes and speech acts

Constitutive: propositions are devoid of any aspects of force

- Entertainment

Attitudes and speech acts can be factored into a neutral core of entertainment + non-neutral attitude/force



# The Fregean conception

Problem: the unity of the proposition

Can we explain how propositions have their representational features and truth-conditions?

Merricks: No. It's primitive.  
Philosophically disappointing.

Frege: Yes. Saturation.  
Also philosophically disappointing.

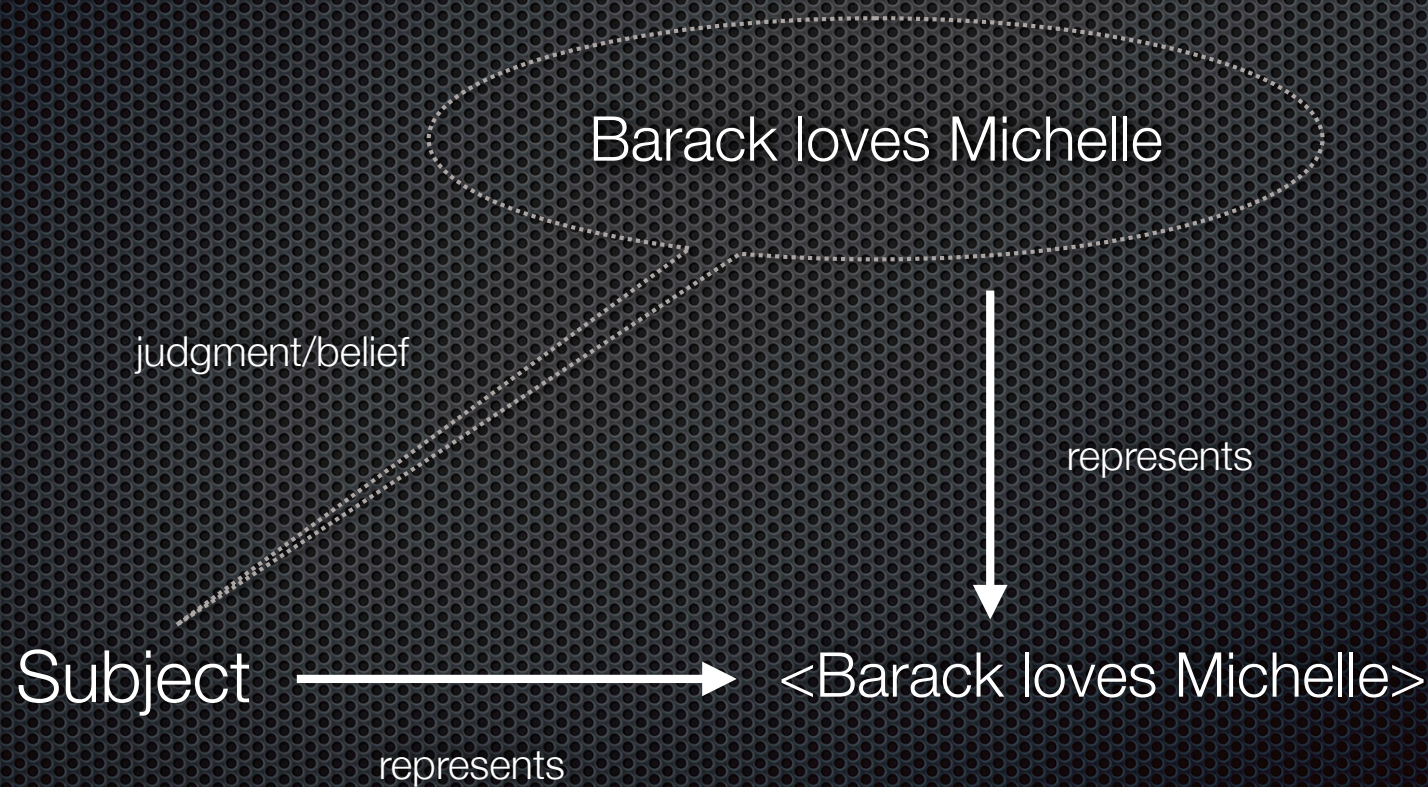
King: Yes. Ascription.  
Undermines explanatory role for propositions



# The Russellian conception

Russell 1903, Richard, Speaks

Richard: “What is representational and what is true or false in the first instance are mental states and sentence tokens that represent propositions,” (2013, p.702)





# The Russellian conception

- Propositions are what we represent with our mental states and utterances

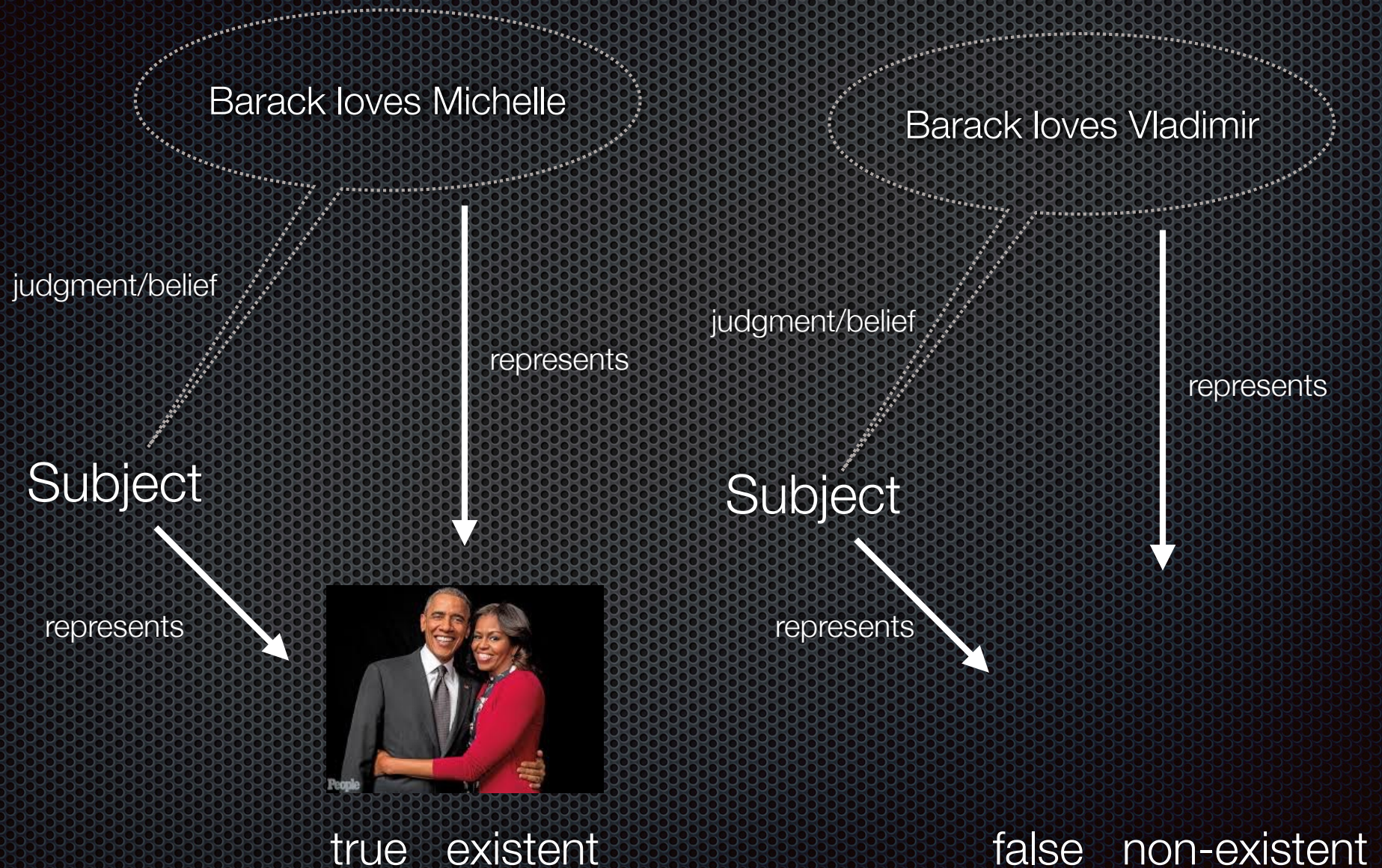
Mental states and utterances do not derive representational features and truth-conditions from propositions.

Propositions are true or false but not representational.

- The content-force distinction  
Taxonomic & Constitutive
- Entertainment



# Russell 1903 *The Principles of Mathematics*

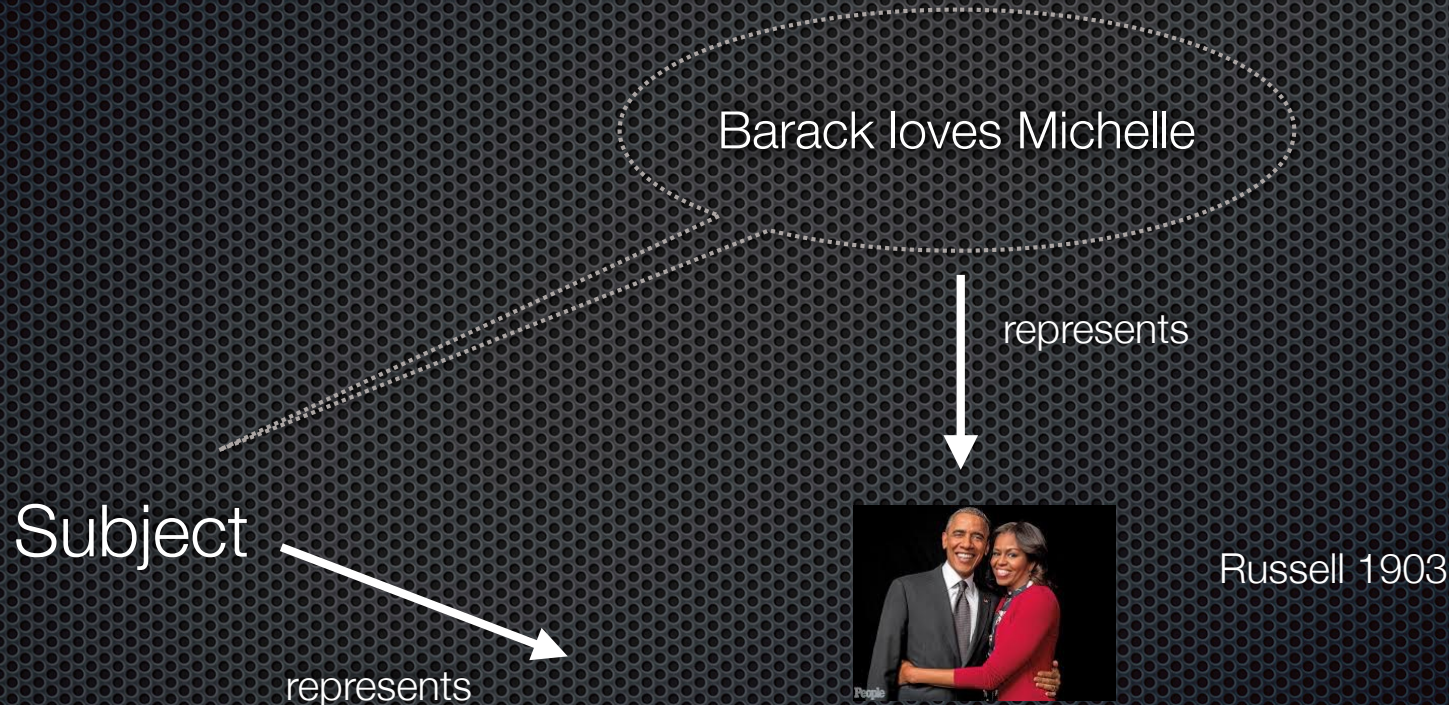




# Speaks and Richard

Speaks: the property of being such that Barack loves Michelle  
- true, instantiated by everything

Richard: the property of being a situation in which Barack loves Michelle  
- true, instantiated by the maximal situation



property of being such that Barack  
loves Michelle/a situation in which  
Barack loves Michelle

Speaks/Richard



# Two kinds of representation

## Object-object representation



represents



## Representation as



represents Obama as riding a giant duck



# The Russellian conception

Richard: “What is representational and what is true or false in the first instance are mental states and sentence tokens *that represent propositions*,” (2013, p.702, my italics)

Russell: S / S’s belief represents



as true / existent.

Speaks: S / S’s belief represents the property of being such that Barack loves Michelle as true / instantiated by everything.

Richard: S / S’s belief represents the property of being a situation in which Barack loves Michelle as true / instantiated by the maximal situation



# The Russellian conception



S / S's belief represents *Barack as loving Michelle*.

The Russellian conception makes this representational fact indirect:

S / S's belief represents Barack as loving Michelle indirectly *by* representing a proposition as true.



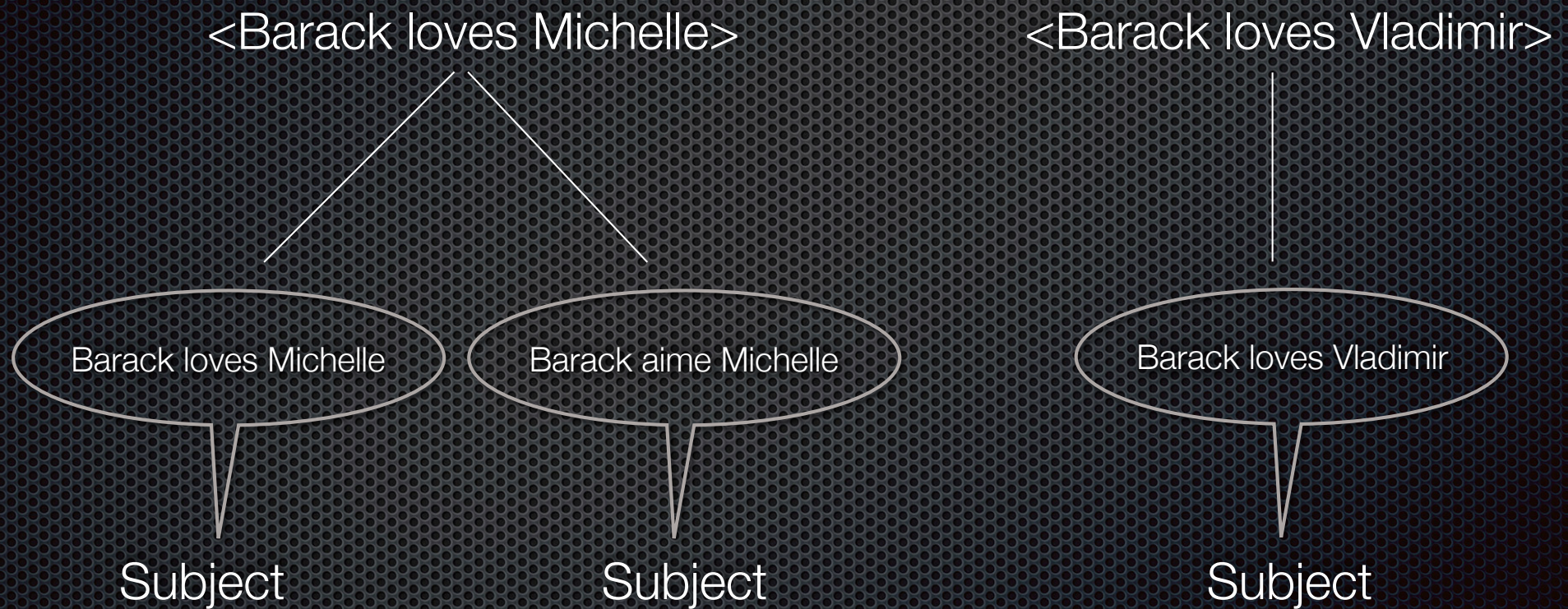
# The Russellian conception

## Two problems

1. Non-representational concepts of truth
2. Indirectness: propositional intermediaries between us & the objects of our beliefs



# The classificatory conception





# The classificatory conception

Analogy with measurement sentences

‘Joe weighs 200 pounds’

Classifies Joe according to weight by relating Joe to a node on a weight scale.

Joe’s weighing 200 lbs is not constituted by his bearing a relation to a node on a weight scale. Joe’s relation to this node won’t figure in an explanation of what it is for him to weigh 200 lbs.

The point of relating Joe to a node on a weight scale is purely classificatory. It’s to provide information about the underlying facts that constitute his weight.



# The classificatory conception

Analogy with measurement sentences

‘Joe believes that Barack loves Michelle’

Classifies Joe’s mental state by relating Joe to a proposition.

Joe’s believing that Barack loves Michelle is not constituted by his bearing a relation to a proposition. Joe’s relation to this proposition won’t figure in an explanation of what it is for him to believe that Barack loves Michelle.

Beliefs don’t derive their representational features from propositions, nor do they represent propositions



# The classificatory conception

Me: types of acts of predication, asking, ordering

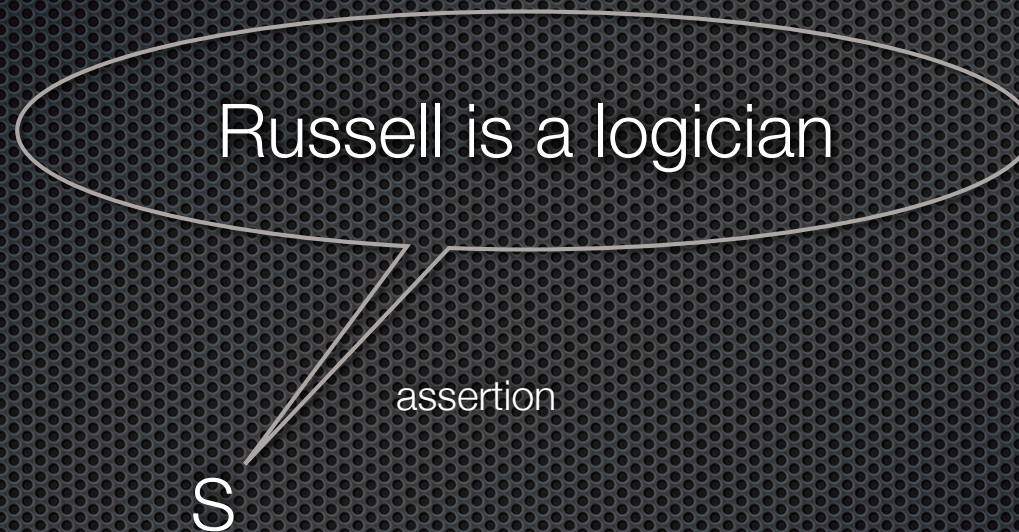
Soames: types of acts of predication

Schiffer: simple, sui generis, very finely grained abstract objects that have truth-conditions essentially and absolutely



# Propositions as types

$\vdash \langle \underline{\text{Russell}}, \text{logician} \rangle$  type



S refers to Russell  
expresses the property of being a logician  
predicates this property of Russell



# Three kinds of propositions

$\vdash \langle \underline{\text{Russell}}, \text{logician} \rangle$

$? \langle \underline{\text{Russell}}, \text{logician} \rangle$

$! \langle \underline{\text{Russell}}, \text{logician} \rangle$



Russell is a logician

assertion



Is Russell a logician?

question



Russell, be a logician!

command



# Three kinds of propositions

Type	satisfaction conditions	direction of fit	sentence mood	embedded clauses
┊	truth-conditions	word-to-world	declarative	that-clauses
?	answer-hood conditions	word-to-word	interrogative	whether- and wh-clauses
!	fulfillment conditions	world-to-word	imperative	infinitive clauses



# The classificatory conception

- Propositions are types we use to classify and individuate our mental states and speech acts
  - Mental states and speech acts do not derive representational features from propositions.
  - Mental states and speech acts do not represent propositions.
- No content-force distinction
  - Taxonomic: 3 kinds of propositions
  - Constitutive: propositions have force elements ( $\vdash$ ,  $?$ ,  $!$ )
- No entertainment
  - No factoring into neutral & non-neutral components



# Language and thought

Propositions are given to us in the first instance as types of linguistic utterances.

Once these types are in hand, we use them to classify and individuate our mental acts and states. These acts of classification take the form of attitude reports.

To classify a mental state under a proposition is to impose structure on that mental state and thereby bring it into rational contact with other utterances and mental states.

Helps with 2 problems:

- first-person authority
- the problem of animal minds



# King

