XIII—QUESTIONS OF UNITY

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In *The Principles of Mathematics*, Bertrand Russell famously puzzled over something he called the *unity of the proposition*. Echoing Russell, many philosophers have talked over the years about the question or problem of the unity of the proposition. In fact, I believe that there are a number of quite distinct though related questions all of which can plausibly be taken to be questions regarding the unity of propositions. I state three such questions and show how the theory of propositions defended in my recent book *The Nature and Structure of Content* (2007) answers them.

In *The Principles of Mathematics* §54, Russell famously puzzled over something he called *the unity of the proposition*:

> Consider, for example, the proposition "*A* differs from *B*". The constituents of this proposition, if we analyze it, appear to be only *A*, difference, *B*. Yet these constituents, thus placed side by side, do not reconstitute the proposition. The difference which occurs in the proposition actually relates *A* and *B*, whereas the difference after analysis is a notion which has no connection with *A* and *B*. It may be said that we ought, in the analysis, to mention the relations which difference has to *A* and *B*, relations which are expressed by *is* and *from* when we say "*A* is different from *B*". These relations consist in the fact that *A* is referent and *B* relatum with respect to difference. But "*A*, referent, difference, relatum, *B*" is still merely a list of terms, not a proposition. 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, pp. 49–50)

Echoing Russell, many philosophers have talked over the years about the unity of the proposition, the problem of the unity of proposition, and so on. When I have heard philosophers talk this

way, I have often been unsure as to *exactly* what they were talking about and whether they were all even talking about the same thing. In fact, I believe that there are a number of quite distinct though related questions, all of which can plausibly be taken to be questions regarding the unity of propositions. My present purpose is to state three such questions and to show how the theory of propositions defended in my recent book *The Nature and Structure of Content* (2007) answers them. In so doing, I hope to elaborate on certain features of my account of propositions.

I'll begin, as I did in King (2007), by simply assuming that propositions are structured complexes having individuals, properties and relations as constituents. Following the usual practice, I'll call such propositions *structured propositions*. Many philosophers who believe in propositions, as far as I can tell perhaps even most, take them to be of this sort. On such a view, the proposition that Dara swims has Dara and the property of swimming as constituents. This proposition is true iff Dara swims, and so can be said to represent Dara possessing the property of swimming. Having said only this much, we can already state the three 'unity questions' that will occupy us.

> *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?[1]

> *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)?[2]

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[1] Eklund (2008) raises virtually the same question, attributing it to Soames and Sainsbury, and calls it *Representation*. Eklund seems to misunderstand my answer to UQ2/Representation (see note 15 below, p. 267).

[2] Eklund (2008) discusses a closely related question, which he calls *Combinability*. However, Eklund's statement of the question presupposes that Bush and Cheney cannot be combined to form a proposition. In one sense, which I will discuss below, I think this is false. Eklund claims that my view of propositions (obviously?) does not address Combinability (or my UQ3). As we'll see, this is incorrect. Though I think Eklund is mistaken about this and about my answer to UQ2 (see previous note), I have found his discussion stimulating.

I take it as obvious that UQ1 and UQ3 can plausibly be taken to be questions concerning the unity of propositions, since they are precisely questions concerning how or why constituents are united (or not) in propositions. As to UQ2, presumably part of the difference between a proposition and a list is that a proposition has truth conditions.[3] In so far as the question of how a proposition differs from a mere list can plausibly be taken as a question about the unity of the proposition (see the Russell quotation above), UQ2 can plausibly be so taken. For in asking how or why a proposition has truth conditions we are asking how or why (at least in part) it differs from a list.

Let me begin by discussing constraints on acceptable answers to UQ1 and UQ2. Taking UQ1 first, let me begin with a caveat. In talking of the constituents of a proposition being 'held together', I don't mean anything too heavy handed. Presumably the constituents of a proposition are related somehow in that proposition, with the relation imposing a structure on them. I'll put this by saying the relation *holds the constituents together*. Answering UQ1 requires saying which relations hold the constituents of propositions together. Now, for an answer to UQ1 to be acceptable, whatever relations we claim hold the constituents of propositions together and impose structure on them should be such that we have good independent reason for thinking that constituents of propositions really do stand in these relations. For this amounts to saying that in answering UQ1 and saying what relations hold the constituents of propositions together, it would be desirable to have good independent reason for thinking propositions so construed exist. Surely that would be desirable.

As to UQ2, there is one sort of answer to this question that, though it has probably been given (if only implicitly) by everyone who believes in structured propositions except me and Soames (2008), I cannot accept. The sort of answer I have in mind is any answer according to which propositions *by their very natures and independently of all minds and languages* represent the world as being a certain way and so have truth conditions. Though this is part of how propositions have been classically conceived, I cannot accept that propositions are like this. I find this idea unacceptable

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[3] I am not sure if the English term 'list' designates sentence-like entities or, so to speak, their semantic contents. In comparing lists to propositions, I am comparing the (presumably 'list-like') semantic content (whatever it is) of the sentence-like syntactic entity, e.g. '*A*, difference, *B*', which lacks truth conditions, to the proposition that *A* differs from *B*, which has them.

for two reasons. First, and most importantly, I just can't see how propositions or anything else could represent the world as being a certain way *by their very natures and independently of minds and languages*. Consider the abstract complex that is the proposition that Dara swims and that allegedly represents Dara swimming by its very nature and independently of minds and languages. It will have Dara and the property of swimming as constituents. These constituents will be held together by some relation. But however these constituents are held together in the proposition, I just can't see how the proposition, by its very nature and independently of minds and languages, could represent Dara as *possessing* the property of swimming. What feature of this abstract complex containing Dara and the property of swimming as constituents—by its very nature—makes it the case that the proposition represents Dara *possessing* the property? The most plausible answer is that the relation between Dara and the property of swimming in the proposition represents the *possession* relation. But how could a relation, by its very nature and independently of minds and languages, do that?[4] I can't see that there is any answer to this question. But that just means that I can't see how a proposition, by its very nature and independently of minds and languages, could have truth conditions and so represent something as being the case. Second, and for the reason just given, it seems to me likely that any theory of propositions that holds that propositions represent things being a certain way by their very natures and independently of minds and languages will be unable to give any explanation of how this representation occurs and so will have to take it as primitive that propositions do this. I suppose it is a matter of taste whether this or that is appropriately taken as primitive, but to my mind taking any kind of representation as primitive is a paradigm example of misplacing one's primitives.

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[4] Couldn't Dara stand in the *is represented as* relation to the property of swimming in the proposition that Dara swims? Wouldn't this allow the proposition to have truth conditions by its very nature and independently of minds and languages? The problem is that I don't think there is any *is represented as* relation that is independent of minds and languages. A two-place relation between Dara and the property of swimming, for example, could be interpreted by us as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara and in this sense be *interpreted* as representing Dara as swimming. But I don't see how a two-place relation between Dara and the property of swimming could by its very nature and independently of minds and languages represent Dara as swimming: see below. Thanks to Josh Dever for helpful discussion.

In summary, any answer to UQ2 according to which propositions represent things as being a certain way and so have truth conditions in virtue of their very natures and independently of minds and languages is in the end completely mysterious and so unacceptable.[5] But then it seems that the answer to UQ2 must have to do with something about us. As we'll see, I'll claim that it is something we speakers of languages do that results in propositions representing things as being a certain way and so having truth conditions. This is the most provocative and novel feature of the view of propositions defended in King (2007).[6] Because of this feature, I call my account of propositions an account of *naturalized propositions*.

Having discussed a few constraints on proper answers to UQ1 and UQ2, let's try to answer UQ1. The easiest way to do this is simply to sketch my theory of propositions. Consider the sentence 'Dara swims' and, idealizing considerably for the sake of exposition, assume that its syntactic structure at LF is as follows:

Dara   swims

Figure 1

Call the syntactic relation between 'Dara' and 'swims' here R. I'll sometimes call R *the sentential relation* of the sentence 'Dara swims'. Now, among the reasons that the English sentence in figure 1 is true iff Dara swims is that the sentential relation R is interpreted by English speakers in a certain way. We interpret it as *ascribing* the semantic value of 'swims' to the semantic value of 'Dara'. Clearly, this is a contingent matter. There might have been a language containing the sentence 'Dara swims' the speakers of which took the sentence to be true iff Dara fails to possess the property of swimming.[7] The difference in truth conditions of the sentence 'Dara

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[5] I probably wasn't as explicit as I should have been about this point in King (2007), though I certainly did touch on it: see p. 8 and ch. 1, nn. 5 and 6; ch. 2, n. 13; and pp. 59–61. Soames (2008), which, as he points out himself, defends a view of propositions very much in the spirit of the view defended in King (2007) with great clarity, makes essentially the same point vividly. I have found Soames's discussion both congenial and helpful.

[6] As suggested above, Soames (2008) is the only other view of propositions I know of that has this feature.

[7] I am not claiming such a language is a possible *human* language. See King (2007, pp. 34–8), particularly the discussion of Nenglish.

swims' in these two languages is due to the speakers of the languages interpreting the syntactic concatenation in the sentence differently. And of course we English speakers interpreting R in the way we do (described above) is not an isolated matter. In general we interpret syntactic concatenation by composing semantic values of the concatenated lexical items in certain ways. I sometimes put this by saying that we interpret syntactic concatenation as instructing us to compose semantic values in certain ways. I'll express the fact that R in figure 1 is interpreted by English speakers as ascribing the semantic value of 'swims' to the semantic value of 'Dara' by saying that in English *R encodes ascription*.[8] It is the fact that R encodes ascription in English that makes the English sentence 'Dara swims' have truth conditions rather than being a list of Dara and the property of swimming.[9]

Because it will be relevant to issues we discuss later, let me say a bit more about what I mean in saying that we interpret syntactic concatenation in certain ways and what explains our so doing. Competent English speakers, when they encounter the sentence 'Dara swims', spontaneously and without thinking take the sentence to be true iff Dara swims. They thereby take the syntactic concatenation in the sentence to ascribe the semantic value of 'swims' to the semantic value of 'Dara'. In other constructions, speakers spontaneously and without thinking take syntactic concatenation differently; for example, when they encounter 'red house' they do something like conjoin properties, and when they encounter 'Everyone swims' something altogether different. In all these cases, competent speakers, when encountering concatenated expressions, compose the semantic values of the concatenated expressions in characteristic ways. This is what their *interpreting* the syntactic concatenation consists in.

What explains our interpreting syntactic concatenation in the way we do? I said that in different constructions English speakers interpret syntactic concatenation differently (i.e. compose semantic values differently). I am guessing that across languages we see the same handful of ways in which syntactic concatenation (the output of Merge) is interpreted by speakers depending on what is concatenated (name/predicate; quantifier/predicate; adjective/noun; etc.). If

[8] In King (2007) I expressed this by saying that R encodes the instantiation function; see pp. 34–8.

[9] See the discussion of Englist in King (2007, pp. 36–8).

this is so, it seems very likely that it is part of our biologically endowed language faculty that we interpret syntactic concatenation—compose semantic values of concatenated items—in this handful of ways. The idea then would be that due to this biological endowment, we come hard-wired to interpret syntactic concatenation in a small handful of ways; and in language learning we figure out which of these ways to do it in the case of 'Dara swims', 'red house', and so on. Thus, interpreting syntactic concatenation in a certain way, by in effect spontaneously and without thinking composing semantic values in a certain way when confronted with lexical items so concatenated, amounts to being hard-wired to compose semantic values in that way due to our biologically endowed language faculty. This is how to understand my claim above that we interpret syntactic concatenation as instructing us to compose semantic values of the concatenated lexical items in certain ways, and the explanation of why we do so.[10]

Returning to the main theme, we are trying to figure out what relation holds together Dara and the property of swimming in the proposition that Dara swims. Recall that we wanted to be sure that we pick a relation such that there are good independent grounds for thinking that Dara and the property really do stand in that relation. Given that 'Dara' has Dara as its semantic value and that 'swims' has the property of swimming as its semantic value, then in virtue of the existence of the English sentence 'Dara swims', here is a two-place relation that Dara and the property of swimming stand in: *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 en-*

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[10] Thus when Thomas Bontly (2009) interprets my talk of syntactic concatenation instructing us to compose the semantic values of the concatenated lexical items in certain ways as indicating that I take the syntactic concatenation itself to 'express a propositional content in the imperative', he is seriously misinterpreting my view. As far as I can tell, Bontly thought that my view was that speakers grasp this 'imperative propositional content' expressed by syntactic concatenation ('Ascribe the semantic value of the right terminal node to the semantic value of the left terminal node!'), and then on the basis of so doing know how to compose the semantic values of the concatenated lexical items. Given what I've said in the text, it should be obvious that this is not my view; and indeed I find the view absurdly implausible. If anything like what I've said in the text is correct, our interpreting syntax in the way we do has nothing to do with syntactic concatenation itself 'expressing a proposition' (but instead has to do with our biologically endowed language faculty equipping us to compose the semantic values of concatenated expressions in a small handful of ways). Based on this rather severe misinterpretation of my view, Bontly goes on to incorrectly claim that my explanation of why/how propositions have truth conditions begs the question.

codes ascription and __ is the semantic value of a in c and __ is the semantic value of b in c.

As I did in King (2007), I'll call an object possessing a property, or *n* objects standing in an *n*-place relation, or an object standing in a relation to a property, or *n* properties standing in an *n*-place relation, and so on, a *fact*. Then since Dara stands in the above relation to the property of swimming, the following is a fact: *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.* As I suggested above, that the English sentence 'Dara swims' exists, that 'Dara' has as its semantic value (in any context) Dara and that 'swims' has as its semantic value (in any context) the property of swimming jointly suffice for the existence of this fact. Equally, that the German sentence 'Dara schwimmt' exists (and that the words in the sentence have the semantic values in context that they do) and that the English sentence 'I swim' taken in a context in which Dara is the speaker exists each suffices for the existence of this fact as well. Without the existence of any such sentences, the fact in question wouldn't exist.

This fact, or what is the same thing, Dara standing in the two-place relation mentioned above to the property of swimming, is almost what I claim is the proposition that Dara swims. To see what more needs to be added, note that there is no reason to think that the just mentioned fact has truth conditions and so is either true or false. But consider again the two-place relation that I claim obtains between Dara and the property of swimming in this fact: *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 __ is the semantic value of a in c and __ is the semantic value of b in c.* Since I claim that Dara stands in this relation to the property of swimming in the proposition that Dara swims, call this relation the *propositional relation* of the proposition that Dara swims. Now if this propositional relation encoded ascription, as does the sentential relation *R* that is a component of the propositional relation, the proposition would have truth conditions. For in that case, the propositional relation would be interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara and so the proposition would be true iff Dara

possesses the property of swimming.[11] Hence, I claim that 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.*[12] Since Dara does possess the property of swimming, there is also the fact of her possessing this property. But note that this fact is quite distinct from the fact that I claim is the proposition that Dara swims. Still, the former makes the latter true. But had there been no fact of Dara possessing the property of swimming, the fact that is the proposition that Dara swims would still have existed and sadly would have been false.[13]

I take it that I have now answered UQ1. I have said what relation binds together Dara and the property of swimming in the proposition that Dara swims. I turn now to UQ2: why does the proposition that Dara swims represent Dara possessing the property of swimming and so have truth conditions? We have already given an initial answer to this question. That answer is that the propositional relation of this proposition is interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara and thereby encodes ascription. As a result, the proposition represents Dara as possessing the property of swimming and so is true iff she does so.

But this initial answer to UQ2 is unsatisfying unless we can explain how/why the propositional relation of the proposition that Dara swims encodes ascription or is interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara. On the present view, of course, somehow language users interpret the propositional relation in this way and so bring it about that it encodes ascription. The question is what constitutes their doing this. Above, I said something about what it is for language users to interpret syntactic concatenation in

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[11] In King (2007), I put this point in terms of the propositional relation encoding the instantiation function: see pp. 59–64. My talk here instead of the propositional relation being interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara echoes Soames's (2008) way of stating what I take to be essentially the same point.

[12] As I've indicated, the propositional relation encoding ascription is simply a matter of it possessing the relational property of being interpreted by us as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara. So the fact that is the proposition includes the propositional relation possessing this relational property.

[13] In saying this, I am assuming that English, Dara, etc., would still have existed.

the ways they do. I must now say more about what it is for speakers to interpret propositional relations in the ways they do. As we'll see, these two questions are intimately connected.

Since language users interpret the propositional relation, and this is required for the proposition to have truth conditions, prior to their so interpreting it the 'proposition' didn't have truth conditions. Indeed, as we saw, the fact that I claim is the proposition that Dara swims requires for its existence the existence of a certain sort of sentence whose lexical items have certain semantic values (relative to context). So in order for the proposition that Dara swims to exist and have truth conditions, two things must happen. First, (appropriate) sentences must come into existence as a result of which the following fact exists: *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.* Second, the two-place propositional relation of this proposition (*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 __ is the semantic value of a in c and __ is the semantic value of b in c*) must come to be interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara. Though we know language users somehow bring it about that this second thing happens, the task of current concern is to give some explanation of how it happens. Though I don't think we can give the full explanation here, I do think we can go quite some way to doing so. The explanation I am about to give differs in some respects from the explanation I gave in King (2007). I'll say more about that after giving the explanation I now prefer.

Here's how the propositional relation of propositions like the proposition that Dara swims came to be interpreted as ascribing the relevant property to the relevant individual. Once languages come into existence facts like the fact I claim is the proposition that Dara swims came into existence.[14] Now here let me tell a highly idealized and mythological story about speakers coming to interpret the propositional relation of the fact that is the proposition that Dara swims in the way they do. Consider a time when languages had

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[14] I'll henceforth ignore the fact that Dara didn't exist in the distant past.

come into existence, bringing such facts into existence, but the propositional relations had not yet been endowed with the significance that gives propositions their truth conditions. As speakers attempted to make use of structured contents, in part by beginning to employ that-clauses to talk about them, they would have implicitly taken the structured content of a sentence to have the same truth conditions as the sentence. Now consider all the facts that consist of Dara and the property of swimming bound together by some relation and that would have been candidates to be the proposition that Dara swims. My thought is that *whichever* of these had been 'chosen' to be the proposition that Dara swims, the relation binding together Dara and the property of swimming in the proposition inevitably would be interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara in virtue of the fact that speakers implicitly and without thinking took the proposition to be true iff Dara possesses the property of swimming. Interpreting the relation in question as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara is required for the proposition to have these truth conditions. Speakers implicitly taking the proposition to have the same truth conditions as the sentence 'Dara swims' results in their so interpreting the propositional relation.[15] Hence whichever fact consisting of Dara standing in some relation to the property of swimming ends up being chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims, its propositional relation will inevitably be interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara. So to complete my explanation of how/why the fact I claim is the proposition that Dara swims, call it *DS*, has *its* propositional relation interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara, all I need to do is to explain why *it* was chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims.

Before turning to that, let me highlight *both* an important respect in which the story I've just told is misleading *and* an important moral of the story. According to the story, language came into existence temporally prior to propositions existing. But I don't really think that happened. Languages, propositions and the sorts of propositional attitudes we enjoy today all came into existence at the same time. Still, the explanation in my story of why speakers without thinking and implicitly interpret *the propositional relation* in the way they do appeals covertly to the way they interpret *the syntactic concatenation* in

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[15] Eklund (2008) seems to miss this part of my explanation as to why propositions have truth conditions.

the sentence 'Dara swims'. Speakers implicitly and without thinking take the structured content of the sentence 'Dara swims' to have the same truth conditions as the sentence itself. This requires them to implicitly and without thinking interpret the propositional relation in the way they do. But the reason the sentence 'Dara swims' has the truth conditions it has is (in part) that speakers interpret the syntactic concatenation here as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara. (Recall that the explanation of how and why speakers interpret syntactic concatenation in the way they do appeals to our biologically endowed language faculty.) Thus, the explanation of why speakers interpret the propositional relation in the way they do appeals to speakers interpreting syntactic concatenation in the way they do. In this sense, speakers interpreting syntactic concatenation in the way they do is *explanatorily* prior to speakers interpreting propositional relations in the way they do. Making language *temporally* prior to propositions in my myth was a device to bring this out. But I am ultimately committed only to the explanatory priority I just mentioned, and not to the temporal priority in my myth.

Turning now to the question of why *DS* was chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims, let me first repeat some conditions that any fact chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims must satisfy. For a fact to be the proposition that Dara swims, it must have Dara and the property of swimming bound together by some two-place relation or other so that Dara and the property of swimming can be constituents of the proposition. Further, we should have good independent reason to think that Dara and the property actually do stand in the relation in question (and similarly for other propositional relations and constituents), so that propositions exist. In addition, the fact chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims, and the others the theory claims are propositions, must be suitable to play the various roles philosophers have thought propositions play (e.g. they must have the proper fineness of grain to be objects of the attitudes, etc.).

The question before us is how, from among all the facts that satisfy these conditions, *DS* gets chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims. Here is a crucial point: for a fact to be chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims we must be able to make sense of people having some cognitive connection to it. As discussed above and for the reasons given there, whichever fact is chosen to be the proposition, speakers will interpret its propositional relation as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara. But for a particular fact to be the one

whose propositional relation is so interpreted, we have to be able to see how speakers have some sort of cognitive access to the fact in question. For we claim that it is speakers so interpreting the propositional relation that makes the fact/proposition have truth conditions in the first place. And surely for a given fact to be the one whose propositional relation speakers interpret, they have to have some sort of cognitive access to it. I'm going to continue to speak loosely about speakers having *cognitive access* or a *cognitive connection* to this or that fact. At some point, I need to get more serious about the *sort* of cognitive connection required. But this is not that point.

This cognitive connection speakers must have to the fact that is the proposition that Dara swims cannot in the first instance be that they have access to a sentence of their language that expresses the fact/proposition. For we are now trying to explain what they did to make the fact in question something with truth conditions and so a proposition in the first place. Part of our explanation is that they interpret the propositional relation of the fact in a certain way and that so doing requires them to have some cognitive connection to the fact in question. Hence the cognitive connection to the fact in question must be prior to and independent of the relevant sentence expressing the fact/proposition.

Still, presumably the cognitive connection between speakers and the fact in question is mediated by their employing and manipulating certain sentences of their languages. For the novelty of the present view of propositions is that sentences and their representational powers are conceptually prior to, and explain, the representational powers of propositions. This suggests that the explanation of how speakers have cognitive access to propositions and endow them with significance must have to do with their use of sentences. Further, it must be the case that speakers of different languages can be cognitively connected to the same fact. For we want German and English speakers both to count as somehow interpreting the propositional relation of the proposition that Dara swims as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara, since there is only one proposition that Dara swims, which both German and English speakers may believe, doubt or know. If German and English speakers both interpret the propositional relation of this proposition, the present explanation requires them both to have some cognitive connection to it that, again, is prior to and independent of the fact that they end up employing sentences that express the proposition.

Since speakers must have cognitive access to the fact that is the
proposition that Dara swims and do so in virtue of employing sen-
tences like 'Dara swims' and 'Dara schwimmt', it seems that the fact
that is that proposition must be intimately connected to sentences
like 'Dara swims' and 'Dara schwimmt' in such a way that we can
understand how employing such sentences gives speakers of differ-
ent languages cognitive access to the fact in question. I'll now try to
explain why *DS* is exactly a fact of this sort.

Sentences are themselves facts of a sort. The words 'Dara' and
'swims' stand in a syntactic relation in the sentence 'Dara swims'. I
won't here worry about what words are, but I am thinking of word
types, and ultimately it seems likely that they are just properties. If
so, the sentence 'Dara swims' is two properties standing in a syntac-
tic relation. Clearly, speakers of English have cognitive access to this
fact/sentence (at least those do who have 'Dara' and 'swims' in their
idiolects). But I think they also thereby have access to the fact that is
what we might call the *interpreted sentence*: this is the fact consist-
ing of the sentence, together with the semantic relations between
'Dara' and Dara and 'swims' and the property of swimming. Given
the way we drew the sentence 'Dara swims', we might draw the fact
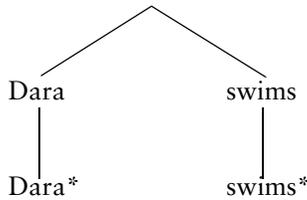that is the interpreted sentence as follows:

Figure 2

(where Dara* is Dara and swims* is the property of swimming; and
the vertical lines are the semantic relations between 'Dara' and Dara
and 'swims' and the property of swimming). We can describe this
fact in English as follows: Dara is the semantic value of 'Dara',
which occurs at the left terminal node of the English sentence whose
syntactic relation *R* encodes ascription, and 'swims' occurs at the
right terminal node and has the property of swimming as its seman-
tic value.[16] I think that in virtue of having cognitive access to the

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[16] Figure 2 fails to capture the fact that the sentence 'Dara swims' is English.

English sentence 'Dara swims', and being competent with the expressions in it, speakers have cognitive access to this fact that is the interpreted sentence as well.[17] Likewise, a German speaker who makes use of 'Dara schwimmt' thereby has cognitive access to the following fact/interpreted sentence, which is distinct from the fact in figure 2, assuming 'schwimmt' and 'swims' are different words:
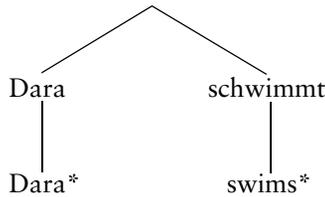

Figure 3

(where Dara* and swims* are as in figure 2).

Let's call a fact such as o possessing F a *witness* for the fact of F being instantiated or there being an F; similarly for o bearing R to o' and there being a thing x and a thing y such that x bears R to y, and so on.[18] Note that a witness for a fact Q suffices for Q's existence: if there is a fact of o possessing F, there is a fact of F being instantiated. It should be clear that the facts in figures 2 and 3 are both witnesses for *DS*, the fact I claim is the proposition that Dara swims.[19] *DS* is the result of 'existentially generalizing' on the words in figures 2 and 3, and the languages involved.[20] Thus, interpreted sentences of various different languages are all witnesses for *DS*.

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[17] Having such access is consistent with not having met Dara, knowing little about her, not knowing much about swimming, etc. One can have cognitive access to something without knowing much about many of its parts. For example, I certainly have cognitive access to the actual world despite not having seen most of it and not knowing anything about most of it. I can have cognitive access to a certain individual without knowing anything about a metal pin in her ankle, etc.

[18] This way of speaking was suggested by Dominic Gregory in his excellent if brief comments on a precursor to King (2007) at the Logic and Language Conference at the University of Birmingham in 2006. The fact of there being Fs consists of the property F possessing the property of having instances.

[19] Strictly, the following fact is a witness for *DS* instead of the one in figure 2 (similar remarks apply to the fact in figure 3): with respect to my current context c, Dara is the semantic value of 'Dara', which occurs at the left terminal node of the an English sentence whose syntactic relation R encodes ascription, and 'swims' occurs at the right terminal node and has the property of swimming as its semantic value in c. However, since nothing hinges on this, I've used the facts in figures 2 and 3 for ease of exposition.

[20] See note 16. The context is existentially generalized upon too. See note 19.

Now, the important point is that having cognitive access to a witness for a fact generally suffices for having cognitive access to the fact in question. It seems to me that this is perfectly general. Having cognitive access to the fact of *o* possessing *F* is one way of having cognitive access to the fact of *F* being instantiated. But then this means that having cognitive access to either of the facts in figures 2 and 3, and similarly for certain interpreted sentences of other languages, gives speakers cognitive access to *DS*.

In summary, by having cognitive access to sentences like 'Dara swims', 'Dara schwimmt', and so on, speakers of different languages have cognitive access to interpreted sentences like those in figures 2 and 3. These interpreted sentences are all witnesses for *DS*. But having cognitive access to a witness for a fact generally suffices for having cognitive access to the fact in question. Speakers of different languages thus all have cognitive access to *DS*.

As promised, then, we now see how, by their use of sentences like 'Dara swims', 'Dara schwimmt', and so on, speakers of different languages all have cognitive access to *DS*. This makes it possible to see how all these speakers could interpret *DS*'s propositional relation as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara, thereby endowing *DS* with truth conditions. Above we saw that this had to be the case for a fact to be chosen as the proposition that Dara swims.

I said earlier that though I thought we could go some way toward explaining how/why the propositional relation of *DS* came to be interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara, I didn't think we could give the complete explanation. Let me sum up how far we've got. Because speakers implicitly took the structured content of 'Dara swims' to have the truth conditions of the sentence 'Dara swims', any fact consisting of a two-place relation between Dara and the property of swimming that is chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims will inevitably have its propositional relation interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara. So in order to explain why *DS*'s propositional relation is so interpreted, we just have to explain why it was chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims. The account of why *DS* was chosen is that, first, it satisfies certain conditions that the proposition must satisfy: (1) it is a fact that consists of Dara and the property of swimming standing in a two-place relation and so can be seen as having Dara and the property of swimming as constituents; (2) (in virtue of the existence of sentences like 'Dara swims' and 'Dara schwimmt') we have good

independent reason for being sure that the fact *DS* exists; (3) it is suitable for playing the 'proposition role', as characterized by our talk about propositions using that-clauses and the various roles propositions have been thought by philosophers to play (it and the other propositions delivered by the present theory have suitable fineness of grain for being the objects of attitudes, etc.); and, most importantly, (4) we can see how speakers of different languages can have cognitive access to *DS* by means of using sentences like 'Dara swims' and 'Dara schwimmt', and so can start to make sense of the idea that all such speakers interpret the propositional relation of *DS* as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara in part by using such sentences. Perhaps there is more to be said along these lines, but it is here that I would want to invoke eligibility and claim that *DS* is the most intrinsically eligible of the facts that satisfy conditions (1)–(4) (and perhaps additional conditions) that a fact must satisfy to be the proposition that Dara swims, and so it is chosen to be.

How does the explanation I've just given of how/why propositions have truth conditions and so represent the world as being a certain way differ from the explanation given in King (2007)? The first part of the explanation, as to why any fact chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims will have its propositional relation interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara, is exactly the same. But the second part of the explanation just given, as to why *DS* was chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims, differs from that in King (2007). Specifically, the portion of the explanation given here to the effect that a crucial part of the reason *DS* gets chosen is that we can see how speakers of different languages can have cognitive access to *DS* by means of using sentences like 'Dara swims' and 'Dara schwimmt', and so can start to make sense of the idea that all such speakers interpret the propositional relation of the *same* fact—*DS*— as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara in part by using such sentences was not in the explanation given in King (2007). I now think that this is a very important part of the explanation as to why *DS* and propositions generally have truth conditions.[21]

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[21] There was an aspect of the explanation given in King (2007) that to some extent played the role in that explanation that the new point just mentioned plays in the present explanation. In King (2007), I claimed that any fact that is a candidate to be the proposition that Dara swims had to have the sentential relation *R* of the sentence 'Dara swims' as a component of its propositional relation (and that *DS* is the most eligible of the candidate facts satisfying this condition). I think this is plausible, but only because (many) such facts are such that we can see how speakers of different languages can have cognitive access to them by means of

Let us finally address UQ3: why does it appear that 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)? My answer to this will come in three parts. First, I'll explain why on the present view there is no proposition with only Cheney and Bush as constituents. Second, I'll explain why, at least in one sense, there could have been such a proposition. Finally, I'll explain why it seems as though there couldn't have been such a proposition.

On the present view, propositions exist only if the relevant vehicles expressing them exist. Consider the fact *DS* that I claim is the proposition that Dara swims: 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*. As I've indicated, and as should be clear anyway, if there were no languages containing sentences like 'Dara swims', 'Dara schwimmt', or 'I swim' (in a context with Dara as speaker), then the above fact/proposition wouldn't exist. Hence, since there are no languages (or at least none known to me) containing sentences such as 'Dick Cheney George W. Bush', there is no proposition having only Bush and Cheney as constituents.

But could there have been such a proposition? At least in one sense, on the present view the answer is yes. Imagine that there had been a language containing sentences such as 'Dick Cheney George W. Bush'. Imagine that the speakers of the language took this sentence to be true iff Cheney is more corrupt than Bush and so interpreted the syntactic concatenation in this sentence in such a way that the sentence ascribes the property of being more corrupt than Bush to Cheney. Then (given some assumptions I'll suppress here) there would have been a proposition containing only Bush and Cheney as constituents and its propositional relation would have been interpreted as ascribing the property of being more corrupt than the constituent at the right terminal node to the constituent at the left

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using sentences like 'Dara swims' and 'Dara schwimmt', and so can start to make sense of the idea that all such speakers interpret their propositional relations as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara in part by using such sentences. Hence, this latter, more basic point is present in the explanation given here of why *DS* was chosen to be the proposition that Dara swims.

terminal node. So the proposition would have been true iff Cheney is more corrupt than Bush. I am not claiming that the language I describe is a possible human language. But it is a possible language, and presumably there could have been creatures who used it.[22]

The main point here is worth (re-)emphasizing. Speakers of languages endow the facts that are propositions with truth conditions by way of interpreting their propositional relations in certain ways. As we saw, the propositional relation of the fact that is the proposition that Dara swims is interpreted as ascribing the property of swimming to Dara. There could have been a fact consisting of Cheney standing in a two-place relation to Bush of the following sort: 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 greater corruption and Cheney is the semantic value of a in c and Bush is the semantic value of b in c (where for a sentential relation of a language L to encode greater corruption is for speakers of L to interpret it as ascribing to the semantic value of the name at the left terminal node the property of being more corrupt than the semantic value of the name at the right terminal node). In particular, if the language I described earlier had existed, this fact would have as well. And speakers of this language could have interpreted the propositional relation of this fact as ascribing to Cheney the property of being more corrupt than Bush. It is in this sense that there could have been a proposition that had only Bush and Cheney as constituents.

Finally, why does it seem as though Bush and Cheney can't be combined to form a proposition, given that there could have been a proposition with only these two scoundrels as constituents in the way just described? I think the reason is as follows. When we try to imagine such a proposition, we implicitly suppose that the propositional relation binding Cheney and Bush together is interpreted in the same way as the propositional relation binding together, for example, Dara and the property of swimming.[23] Such a proposition with Cheney and Bush as constituents would be incoherent: it would be interpreted as *ascribing* Bush to Cheney (or Cheney to

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[22] Of course, I haven't really described a language at all, but only a very small fragment of one.

[23] Or at any rate, we imagine the propositional relation being interpreted the way the propositional relation of some *actual* proposition is interpreted. Interpreted in any such way, a proposition with only Cheney and Bush as constituents would be incoherent.

Bush) in the way that the proposition that Dara swims ascribes the property of swimming to Dara. But it just doesn't make any sense to ascribe Bush to Cheney in this way, and hence it appears that Bush and Cheney could not be combined to form a (coherent) proposition. However, as we have seen, if a language existed containing sentences like 'Dick Cheney George W. Bush' and in which the syntactic concatenation was interpreted in a certain way (a way in which no actual syntactic concatenation is interpreted), facts would be brought into existence whose propositional relations could be interpreted as encoding greater corruption (a way that no actual propositional relation is interpreted). Such facts would then be propositions containing only Bush and Cheney as constituents. The illusion that there couldn't have been any such propositions is due to (implicitly) fixing on the interpretations of actual propositional relations, and then realizing that any fact consisting of Bush and Cheney bound together by some relation, interpreted as we actually interpret any propositional relation, would be incoherent.[24,25]

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[24] Further, I suspect the reason we hold the interpretations of actual propositional relations fixed (and imagine interpreting the imagined propositional relation in some way an actual propositional relation is interpreted) is that we don't realize that *we* are the ones who interpret propositional relations and so we don't realize that we (or other creatures) might have done so differently.

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