Research Statement

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I'm a philosopher working on the nature of representation in language and thought whose methodology is informed by and contributes to empirical work in formal semantics. My research concerns core psychological attitudes, such as belief, desire, and intention, which play central roles in the philosophies of language and mind, epistemology, and meta-ethics. The general principle guiding my work is that these attitudes can best be understood by combining philosophical inquiry with empirical work in linguistics, specifically on the logical form of attitude ascriptions. Throughout my research, I defend a new theory of the attitudes and their objects that, when implemented within a responsible syntax and compositional semantics, makes correct predictions in philosophically puzzling cases.

In the **first chapter** of my dissertation, published as "A Puzzle about Belief-about" (*Mind*, 2021), I present a challenge for the traditional view of belief as a two-place relation we bear to propositions. The central observation is that it makes sense to say (for example) that what Peter believes about Paris is what Lewis believes about London, despite no proposition being coherently identifiable as what each person believes about his respective city. Exceptional cases like this, I argue, demonstrate that sometimes we need something akin to a property to play the role originally assigned to a proposition. When I utter, 'Peter believes about Paris that it's pretty,' for example, the 'that'-clause must designate *the property of being pretty*; unlike any proposition, this property is the kind of thing that, roughly speaking, different people can believe about different cities. I end this work by showing how to salvage the traditional, binary view of belief through a complex lexical meaning for the word 'about.'

The **second chapter** of my dissertation argues that these exceptional cases should form the basis of a new theory of the attitudes, which should, in turn, inform our theory of propositions. The data is far simpler to explain by taking belief to be a three-place relation that we bear to things, such as cities, and properties, such as the property of being pretty. Paradigmatic cases of propositional belief, such as when Lewis believes that London is pretty, can be assimilated into the new theory by taking propositions to be properties of (covertly expressed) possible worlds. On this view, for example, the logical form of 'Lewis believes that London is pretty' is better revealed by rewriting it as 'Lewis believes about w that London is pretty in it,' where 'w' refers to the relevant circumstance of evaluation, and 'that London is pretty in it' designates a property of possible worlds. A variety of linguistic and metaphysical considerations are relevant in evaluating this view, situating it in the literature, and defending it from objections.

Since there is independent linguistic motivation for taking there to be possible world variables at logical form, my theory provides a linguistically motivated account of how propositions are compositionally derived as the meanings of sentences in context. It is common, especially among linguists, to arrive at a similar result by taking propositions to be functions from possible worlds to truth values. There are powerful arguments, however, suggesting that

propositions must admit of distinctions between things that are necessarily equivalent, and for this job, many philosophers turn to the view that propositions are structured, that is, individuated by the identity and arrangement of constituents. The **third chapter** of my dissertation therefore develops a compositional semantics for structured propositions that incorporates possible world variables at logical form in order to correctly predict challenging cases of transparency. This work contributes to a growing literature aimed at legitimizing structured views of propositions by implementing them in accordance with contemporary theories of formal semantics.

I come out of the dissertation with a three-part framework: (i) attitudes like belief are three-place relations we bear to things and properties, (ii) propositional belief is a limiting case in which we bear the belief relation to possible worlds and their properties, and (iii) propositions are structured entities that can be rigorously implemented in a formal semantic theory. With this framework in place, there is more work to be done. The ternary view of the attitudes admits of complications when considering pluralities and relations instead of individual objects and monadic properties. Any respectable view of propositions must be situated within and evaluated against competing theories in the literature. And the semantic framework for structured propositions must be extended to more complex constructions, such as counterfactual conditionals, in order to gain increasing linguistic plausibility.

My research to date and in progress consistently brings together work that linguists have done with philosophical thinking about the nature of content. It's an open question whether these two areas of inquiry can be neatly made to match. My goal is to help us make this determination by keeping one eye on deeply philosophical questions about representation and the other eye on detailed empirical work in linguistics.