

ON PROPOSITIONS

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Traditionally, propositions have been assigned at least three roles: meanings of sentences, objects of propositional attitudes, and bearers of truth values. We are not certain that there is any one sort of entity which can play all three roles; in particular it is not clear to us that the identity conditions satisfied by entities playing one of these roles must coincide with the identity conditions satisfied by entities playing another of these roles. In recent years it has become fashionable to construe propositions as functions of a certain sort, namely as functions taking truth values as values. We regard this view of propositions as a version of (at least) the traditional view of propositions as bearers of truth values; on this view, a proposition bears the value truth if and only if its value as a function is truth. Our aim is to specify what sort of functions propositions so viewed are, and in particular to specify identity conditions for propositions so viewed.

Before presenting our view, we state two reasons for identifying propositions with functions. First, those who object to propositions often do so on the grounds that their identity conditions are not clear. But the identity conditions for functions are clear: functions are identical if and only if they have the same values for the same arguments. So viewing propositions as functions tells us at least what sort of identity conditions to seek for propositions. Second, the identification of propositions with functions seems intuitively natural. In general, a function assigns an entity in its range to each entity in its domain. Propositions as bearers of truth values seem intuitively to fit this characterization; they select a truth value given how things are. Roughly and intuitively put then, a proposition is a function which assigns the value truth to a sentence if things are as the sentence says, and which assigns falsity otherwise. Thus the thesis that propositions are functions into truth values seems both theoretically well-motivated and intuitively plausible.

Usually those who identify propositions as bearers of truth values with functions take them as functions from possible worlds to truth values. Intuitively this is to identify a proposition with the function whose value is