**OUP blog entry for *Act-Based Conceptions of Propositional Content. Contemporary and Hostorical Perspectives***. Edited by F. Moltmann and M. Textor, Oxford UP, July 2017

**What sorts of things are the things we believe, hope, or predict?**

Friederike Moltmann

<Painting of thinking woman by Ganna Kryvolap>

It is part of our everyday life that we ascribe beliefs, desires, hopes, claims, predictions and so on to other people and ourselves, and the ascription of such propositional attitudes, as they are called, generally takes a canonical form, of the sort *John believes that Macron is president of France, Mary hopes that Macron is president of France*, and *Joe predicted that Macron would become president of France*.

Propositional attitudes appear to involve objects. They are the things that *that*-clauses seem to stand for and that we make reference to when we talk about ’what John believes’, ‘what Mary hopes’ and ‘the thing Joe predicted’.

But what sorts of things are these attitude-related objects? Clearly, they are representational objects that can be true or false or be fulfilled or not. What John believes can be true or false and what Joe predicted can be fulfilled or not.

The things associated with propositional attitudes, moreover, seem to be able to be shared among different agents. John can believe, hope or predict the same thing as Mary, and John and Mary can both have the belief that Macron is president of France or make the prediction that Macron would become president of France.

While philosophers agree on what sorts of properties the things associated with propositional attitudes should have, there is great disagreement about the nature of those things. The dominant view in contemporary philosophy of language is due to the philosopher Gottlob Frege, who around 1900 argued that the things associated with propositional attitudes are abstract, mind-independent objects that come with truth conditions, abstract propositions.

But then how can we when we think, hope, or predict relate to such propositions and mentally grasp them? And how could propositions as abstract objects represent and be true or false? After all mathematical objects cannot do that.

A different approach to propositional content has recent been pursued by a number of contemporary philosophers. According to that approach, propositional contents are intimately related to our mental life. Propositional contents on such an approach are identified with types of mental acts or states, with types of features of mental acts and states or with products produced by mental or linguistic acts. Such an act-based approach to propositional content has become a central topic of discussion in contemporary philosophy of language.

However, the act-based approach is in fact not a new approach to propositional content. It was an equally important view pursued during Frege’s time and before, by philosophers such as Bolzano, Husserl, Reinach, Meinong, and Twardowski. It was pursued in particular in parts of Eastern Europe, for example in the city of Lvov, where Twardowski, one of the main proponents of the approach, lived and taught. It is important and exciting to revisit that approach in view of the contemporary debate, to learn from it and to give it justice and recognition.

The paintings of Lvov and of New York on the cover of the book represent a historical and a contemporary center for the pursuit and discussion of the act-based approach to propositional content.

<Painting of Lvov by Ganna Kryvolap>

<Painting of New York by Ganna Kryvolap>