

## **NYU talks *Acts, Objects, and Attitudes***

Friederike Moltmann

November – December 2015

Times:

Mondays 4-6, Nov. 9, 16, 30 (room TBC),

Dec. 7 (room TBC), 14 (room TBC)

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# **Outline and Programme**

## **General Description**

Contemporary philosophy of language and linguistic semantics are dominated by the view that (abstract) propositions act as the meanings of sentences as well as the contents (or objects) of propositional attitudes. The notion of an abstract proposition has recently been challenged by a number of philosophers who instead have proposed act-based conceptions of propositional content (Soames, Hanks). In these informal talks, I will critically discuss the standard view as well as the alternatives that replace propositions by types of acts. I will instead outline a view that rejects the identification of the meaning of a sentence with the content of a propositional attitude. On that view, instead, sentences are considered predicates of a range of attitudinal and modal objects, which include mental states, (nonenduring) ‘products’ (in the sense of Twardowski) of cognitive and illocutionary acts (thoughts, judgments, decisions, assertions, requests, promises), (nonenduring) products of locutionary and phatic acts (in Austin's sense), as well as modal objects of the sort of obligations, permissions, and abilities. This ontology of attitudinal and modal objects is reflected in natural language both implicitly, in the linguistic behavior of embedded clauses and the quantifiers and pronouns that can replace them, and explicitly, in the range of nominalizations that natural languages generally display. I will discuss both philosophical motivations for the view of sentences as predicates of attitudinal and modal objects and linguistic (semantic and syntactic) evidence for it.

Handouts and readings are made available here:

<http://friederike-moltmann.com/news/nyu-talks-acts-objects-and-attitudes/>

## **Programme**

### **Nov. 9: The standard view of propositions and attitude reports and its problems**

- The abstract propositions view and the Relational Analysis of attitude reports
- Conceptual challenges for abstract propositions
- Linguistic challenges for the Relational Analysis: substitution problems and the semantic behavior of special quantifiers and pronouns

### **Nov. 16: Act-based conceptions of propositions and their problems**

- Propositions as types of acts: problems with the Relational Analysis and problems with acts as truth bearers
- The action-product distinction: first observations

### **Nov. 23 (session to be decided)**

### **Nov. 30: Attitudinal objects and the action-product distinction: Twardowski and further developments**

- Nominalizations for attitudinal and modal objects
- Twardowski's historical distinction between (cognitive and illocutionary) actions and (cognitive and illocutionary) products
- Further properties distinguishing actions and products
- Modal products as (more) enduring products
- Twardowski's products as abstract artifacts
- Simple attitude reports and modal sentences

### **Dec. 7: Locutionary products and phatic products, verbs of saying, and the semantics of quotation**

- The notion of an illocutionary product
- New linguistic generalizations about illocutionary verbs and verbs of saying
- Searle's notion of an illocutionary act
- Austin's distinction between illocutionary locutionary, phatic and phonetic acts
- Outline of a product-based semantics of quotation

### **Dec. 14: Attitude reports and modal sentences: further applications and refinements**

- Truthmakers (satisfiers) for attitudinal and modal objects
- Interactions between modal and attitudinal verbs
- Factive and response-stance verbs
- Nonattitudinal sentence-embedding predicates (e.g. *is true*)

