

PHIL 332: Philosophy of Language  
Class 25: Stalnaker on Propositional Concepts

1. When I utter ‘Grass is green’ I express a proposition – a function from possible worlds to truth values, a function that is true at a world just in case grass is green in that world. We can represent this proposition using a matrix. Suppose there are just three worlds,  $i$ ,  $j$  and  $k$ . Suppose that grass is green in  $i$  but not  $j$  or  $k$ . Then:

‘Grass is green’

	$i$	$j$	$k$
	T	F	F

2. Which proposition I express does not depend on the context in which the utterance was made:

‘Grass is green’

		$i$	$j$	$k$
$i$	T	F	F	
$j$	T	F	F	
$k$	T	F	F	

3. For some sentences, which proposition I express does depend on the context in which the utterance is made. Take the sentence ‘You are a fool’. Let  $i$  be a world in which I am talking to O’Leary, O’Leary is a fool, and Daniels is not a fool. Let  $j$  be a world in which I am talking to O’Leary, O’Leary is not a fool, and Daniels is a fool. Let  $k$  be a world in which I am talking to Daniels, O’Leary is a fool, and Daniels is not a fool. Then:

‘You are a fool’

		$i$	$j$	$k$
$i$	T	F	T	
$j$	T	F	T	
$k$	F	T	F	

This illustrates that there are two independent reasons why two people might disagree about the truth value of an utterance.

4. Every sentence utterance determines such a matrix. It represents what Stalnaker calls a *propositional concept*: a function from possible worlds to propositions, or a function from ordered pairs of possible worlds to truth values.
5. The diagonal represents the *diagonal proposition* of the utterance.
6. In some cases, the diagonal proposition is necessarily true (i.e. true in every world). Suppose that  $i$  is a world in which I am in Ithaca,  $j$  is a world in which I am in Oxford, and  $k$  is a world in which I am in Wagga Wagga. Then for my utterance of ‘I am here’:

'I am here'

	<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>i</i>	T	F	F
<i>j</i>	F	T	F
<i>k</i>	F	F	T

The utterance is true in every context, even though it expresses a contingent proposition in every context – an example of the *contingent a priori*.