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Context and Content: Essays on Intentionality in Speech and Thought

Robert C. Stalnaker

Oxford University Press UK (1999)

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Abstract

In *Context and Content* Robert Stalnaker develops a philosophical picture of the nature of speech and thought and the relations between them. Two themes in particular run through these collected essays: the role that the context in which speech takes place plays in accounting for the way language is used to express thought, and the role of the external environment in determining the contents of our thoughts. Stalnaker argues against the widespread assumption of the priority of linguistic over mental representation, which he suggests has had a distorting influence on our understanding. The first part of the book develops a framework for representing contexts and the way they interact with the interpretation of what is said in them. This framework is used to help to explain a range of linguistic phenomena concerning presupposition and assertion, conditional statements, the attribution of beliefs, and the use of names, descriptions, and pronouns to refer. Stalnaker then draws out the conception of thought and its content that is implicit in this framework. He defends externalism about thought--the assumption that our thoughts have the contents they have in virtue of the way we are situated in the world--and explores the role of linguistic action and linguistic structure in determining the contents of our thoughts. *Context and Content* offers philosophers and cognitive scientists a summation of Stalnaker's important and influential work in this area. His new introduction to the volume gives an overview of this work and offers a convenient way in

for those who are new to it. The Oxford Cognitive Science series is a new forum for the best contemporary work in this flourishing field, where various disciplines--cognitive psychology, philosophy, linguistics, cognitive neuroscience, and computational theory--join forces in the investigation of thought, awareness, understanding, and associated workings of the mind. Each book constitutes an original contribution to its subject, but will be accessible beyond the ranks of specialists, so as to reach a broad interdisciplinary readership. The series will be carefully shaped and steered with the aim of representing the most important developments in the field and bringing together its constituent disciplines.

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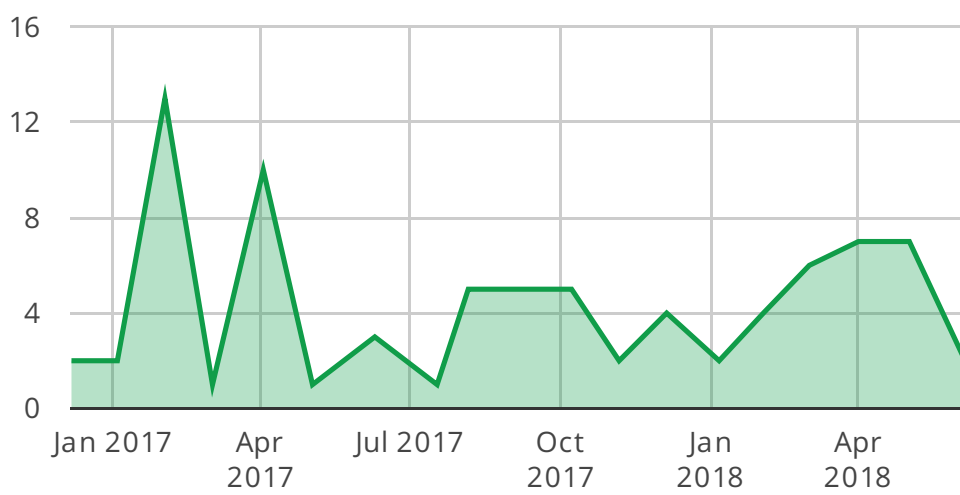
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