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Cognitive Propositions

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Scott Soames's new book *Rethinking Language, Mind, and Meaning* is aptly titled and important. Its first chapter is called "The Need for New Foundations," wherein it's argued that what needs new foundations is the possible-worlds semantics that currently defines the way meaning is studied by semanticists in generative linguistics and by an ever-increasing number of philosophers of language. That need, Soames argues, is made plain by the following dilemma that arises for the possible-worlds semanticist. On the one hand, if she takes the two-place predicate 'Sentence σ is true at possible world w' to be an undefined primitive, then we don't know what a theorem such as

> For every possible world w, 'La nieve es blanca' is true at w iff at w, snow is white

is supposed to tell us about the meaning of the Spanish sentence. On the other hand, if she understands the displayed theorem to be telling us the conditions under which *the proposition expressed* by the Spanish sentence would be true in an arbitrary possible world, then she would be presupposing antecedent notions of *the proposition expressed by a sentence* and the *monadic notion of truth* applicable to it and would therefore be under the obligation to explicate those two prior notions. The trouble, however, is that:

> Since possible-worlds semanticists have typically refused to acknowledge this [debt], let alone to pay it, they are in no position to claim that their theories provide any information at all about meaning. By contrast, those of us who wish to preserve the great progress in the study of language made by applying the methods of intensional semantics to natural language must find a way of paying the price for them by explaining what propositions really are and how they can be added to possible-worlds semantic theories as genuine truth-condition determiners. This is our most serious problem.

"Our most serious problem" is greatly exacerbated when we realize that it can't be solved by any of the three currently dominant conceptions of propositions—namely, the conception of propositions as sets of possible worlds (equivalently, as functions from possible worlds into truth-values), and "the traditional Fregean [and] Russellian conceptions of structured propositions." The problem that defeats each of these conceptions is this:

(1) Propositions of the kinds in question are required by the theories that invoke them as the things we believe and assert to be the *primary bearers of truth conditions*, where this means that, if x is a thing that isn't a proposition but has truth conditions (e.g. a sentence or belief), then it has its truth conditions by virtue of standing in a certain relation to a proposition that has those truth conditions.

(2) In order for propositions of any kind to be the primary bearers of truth conditions, they must have their truth conditions without interpretation by us.

(3) But without interpretation by us, none of the propositions in question would have any truth conditions at all.

In order to economize on time, I will discuss only how this problem is supposed to play out as regards the Russellian conception of propositions, the conception of propositions Soames thought was correct before the just-mentioned problem forced him to conclude that Russellian propositions can't be the propositions we believe and assert. The rest of my talk is divided into the following four parts. Part I presents Soames's case for claiming that, without interpretation by us, Russellian propositions can't be the primary bearers of truth conditions; part II raises two *prima facie* problems for Soames's case against Russellian propositions; part III describes Soames's theory of (what he calls) *cognitive propositions*, the conception of propositions he thinks is needed to solve "our most serious problem"; and part IV raises some *prima facie* problems for the theory of cognitive propositions.

I. *Russellian Propositions' "Primacy" Problem*

Before considering why Russellian propositions can't provide the foundations Soames thinks semantics needs, I want to ask what exactly we should understand Russellian propositions to be.

In asking that question I'm not asking what Russell or anyone else may have said they are, but rather what is the most charitable construal of them as regards the theories in which they are invoked.

Russellian propositions are said to be structured entities whose basic components are the objects and properties our beliefs and assertions might be about. But what exactly should that be taken to mean? In my book *The Things We Mean* I said that one thing it should be taken to mean is that Russellian propositions may be *represented*, or *modeled*, by certain set-theoretic constructions, such as ordered pairs of the form $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$, where $\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle$ is an n-ary sequence of objects, R^n is an n-ary relation, and where, so represented, we may say that, necessarily, the proposition modeled by $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$ is true iff $\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle$ instantiates R^n, false otherwise. And then, like some others who have written about Russellian propositions, I went on to warn:

> Even though Russellians often speak of their propositions as *being* ordered pairs, it is important to think of ordered pairs of the form $[\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle]$ as *representing*, rather than being, [Russellian] propositions. Otherwise [the Russellian] will be stuck with having to decide … whether the proposition that Fido is a dog is identical to <Fido, doghood> or to <doghood, Fido>, or whether it is indeterminate to which of the two it is identical. Better to think of [Russellian] propositions as *sui generis* abstract entities individuated in terms of their 'constituents' as related to one another in a certain way rather than attempt to reduce them to some sort of set-theoretic entity. (*Things*, p. 16)

Now, a model of a thing isn't the thing it models and will therefore have numerous properties not possessed by the thing it models. But if m is a useful model of x, then that will be by virtue of m's providing us with a way of using features of m to make explicit certain features of x in a way that is more perspicuous than other ways of making those features explicit. There are at least two features of Russellian propositions that are advantageously made explicit when we model them as pairs of the form $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$—namely, their *truth conditions* and their *identity conditions*:

- *Truth conditions.* Our concept of the propositions we believe and assert is derived from the behavior of 'that'-clauses in propositional-attitude and propositional speech-act reports, and the uses to which those reports are put in explaining and predicting non-linguistic and linguistic behavior and in using the beliefs and utterances of others as a source of knowledge about the world. Integral to that concept of a proposition are the concepts of propositional truth and falsity that not only come with it, but come with it in such a way that, subject to qualification pertaining to the liar and related paradoxes, instances of the schema

  [T] Necessarily, the proposition that S is true iff S

  are conceptual truths for us. While the platitudes that define our notion of a proposition (*qua* object of belief and assertion) enable us to know, say, that

  [I] Necessarily, the proposition *that Hesperus = Phosphorus* is true iff Hesperus = Phosphorus,

  it leaves open questions about how we're to understand that conceptual truth. So, certain philosophers—call them Fregeans—say that the occurrences of 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' in [I]'s that-clause refer to distinct modes of presentation m and m′ and that the proposition *that Hesperus = Phosphorus* is true in an arbitrary possible world w just in case in w: for some x, y, m is a mode of presentation of x, m′ of y, and x = y, while other philosophers—call them Russellians—say that, if for some x, y, 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' refer respectively to x and y when the names occur outside of modal or other special contexts, then the proposition *that Hesperus = Phosphorus* is true in an arbitrary possible world w just in case in w: x = y. That sort of clarification is easy for the Russellian to give on a case-by-case basis, but not so easy for her to give in a generalization that applies to all propositions at once. But when the Russellian models propositions as pairs of the form $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$, she can pair propositions with their set-theoretic models and say that, if $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$ is the designated model for a proposition p, then, necessarily, p is true iff $\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle$ instantiates R^n, false otherwise.
- *Identity conditions.* It's easy for the Russellian to say that the proposition *that Robert Galbraith admires woodchucks* = the proposition *that J. K. Rowling admires groundhogs* just in case Robert Galbraith = J. K. Rowling and the property of being a woodchuck = the property of being a groundhog, but, again, not so easy to give a neat generalization that captures the identity conditions for all propositions. But that is easy to do when we use pairs

of the form $<<x_1, \ldots, x_n>, R^n>$ to model propositions, for then we can say that, necessarily, the proposition p = the proposition q just in case the ordered pair modeling p = the ordered pair modeling q.

So what does it mean to say that Russellian propositions are "structured" propositions whose "basic components" are the objects and properties our beliefs and assertions might be about? As far I can see, it means nothing more that they have the features their set-theoretic models model them as having. And if the question is what, models aside, are Russellian propositions really, then I would say that if you're looking to identify those propositions with things specifiable in another idiom, then that can't be done. Russellian propositions can't be identified with set-theoretic entities of any kind, nor with anything else. The most we can do by way of saying what they are is to articulate their defining features, and we can do that by explaining, as I just tried to do, what is conveyed by modeling them as pairs of the form $<<x_1, \ldots, x_n>, R^n>$.

I return now to why Soames thinks that, without interpretation by us, Russellian propositions wouldn't have truth conditions. Well, it's not altogether clear to me why he thinks that. He makes the following three points:

> (1) Many contemporary proponents of Russellian propositions use n-tuples of objects and properties—e.g. pairs of the form $<<x_1, \ldots, x_n>, R^n>$—to model those propositions.
>
> (2) But without interpretation by us such n-tuples don't represent the world as being one way rather than another, and thus don't have truth conditions.
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> (3) "The same is true of the propositions originally proposed by … Russell, as attested by recent work on the so-called *problem of the unity of the proposition*" (the sentence ends with a footnote advising us to see Soames's several publications where he discusses the "unity" problem).

When I first read chapter 1 of *Rethinking* I was puzzled about what Soames took to be the relation of (1) and (2) to (3). On the one hand, *the paragraph (on p. 13) in which Soames offers to explain why Russellian propositions can't be the primary bearers of truth conditions* is almost entirely taken up with points (1) and (2), and this suggests that those two points are supposed to

show that Russellian propositions themselves can't without interpretation by us have truth conditions. On the other hand, (3) is the last sentence of that paragraph and it seems to imply that Soames isn't going to tell us why the propositions originally proposed by Russell can't have truth conditions without interpretation by us, and that if we want to know why they can't, then we'll have to study recent work on the problem of the unity of the proposition. On the third hand, each of the other two hands is puzzling in its own right. The first hand is puzzling because, as I already remarked, a model of a thing isn't the thing that it models, so we can't infer just from the fact that a model has a certain property that the thing it models also has that property. Consequently, it can't be inferred just from the fact that, say, <<Ava, Bob>, the love relation> can't without interpretation by us have truth conditions that the Russellian proposition it models—viz. the proposition *that Ava loves Bob*—also can't have truth conditions without interpretation by us. If the idea is that (1) and (2) plus something else entails that Russellian propositions can't without interpretation by us have truth conditions, then we need to be told what that something else is. The second hand is puzzling because there are at least two reasons why it's hard to believe that Soames intends the apparent implication that we need to consult his separate publications on the "unity" problem in order to know why, without interpretation by us, Russellian propositions can't have truth conditions. First, how could chapter 1 give us reason to believe that there is a need for a new conception of propositions if it didn't give us reason to believe that Russellian propositions aren't up to the job? Second, Soames's understanding of Russellian propositions' "unity" problem "is *not* to find some relation born by the constituents of a proposition to one another that 'holds them together' as parts of a single complex entity." That, Soames says, is a pseudo-problem. The real problem of "unity" that arises for Russellian proposition is to show how without interpretation by us they can have truth conditions, which is to say, how they can "be—*inherently and without further interpretation by us*—capable of being true or false" (from *New Thinking about Propositions*).

My puzzlement was resolved when I read the first page of the next chapter, "The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Information," the chapter in which Soames lays out his new account of the nature of propositions. The first section of that chapter is called "What Are Propositions?", and Soames begins it by announcing that he is going to be giving an account of propositions according to which "propositions are inherently representational entities that are capable of being true or false, independent of any actual use to which we or other agents put

them." He then adds that "*the constraint is demanding, since, as I indicated in the previous chapter, there are reasons to believe that no set-theoretic construction of objects, properties, world-states, or other denizens of Plato's heaven could ever be inherently representational bearers of truth conditions in this sense*" (my emphasis). It's this added sentence that seemed to clear up my problem of understanding the relevance of the claim that no set-theoretic construction can have truth conditions without interpretation by us: Soames must think that if there are Russellian propositions, then they *are* set-theoretic constructions—for how else could the just-quoted sentence be relevant?

II. *Prima Facie Problems with Soames's Case against Russellian Propositions*

There are two problems:

1. As I've already suggested, Russellian propositions *don't* need to be construed as set-theoretic entities. Let there be two conceptions of Russellian propositions. On one conception, perhaps Soames's, if there are Russellian propositions they would have to be set-theoretic constructions, and on another conception, the one described earlier, they are not set-theoretic constructions but are rather *sui generis* abstract entities that can be *modeled* by any one of various set-theoretic constructions, and, as those models are intended to reveal, it's an essential feature of Russellian propositions that they have the truth conditions they have, and therefore have them without any interpretation by anyone. What Soames would need to show, but what he hasn't shown, is that the second conception isn't viable. But, one might ask, don't we need an explanation of how Russellian propositions *can* have their truth conditions essentially? Only if, I would answer, we also need an explanation of how those things we call sets can have members.

2. There is also a quite different point to be made. Propositional-attitude properties—e.g. the property of being a belief that toenails are conscious—are indispensable to us, for they make it possible for us to use others as sources of information about the external world, and to predict and explain the behavior of ourselves and others. Those properties are able to do the work we need them to do thanks in large measure to the propositions embedded in them: propositional-attitude properties relate the internal states to which they apply to propositions in ways that enable us to characterize the functional relations that those states bear to external states of affairs, to other internal states, and to behavior. The properties of propositions that enable them to do that is that, by virtue of their having truth conditions, they stand in logical and other

inferential relations to other propositions in ways that mirror the causal and other relations the states they index stand in to the states indexed by those other propositions. Now consider ordered pairs of the form $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$ (there are other constructions that would do as well). Every $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$ is such that, necessarily, either $\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle$ instantiates R^n or else $\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle$ doesn't instantiate R^n. Call the condition of $\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle$'s instantiating R^n the T-condition of $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$, and call the condition of $\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle$'s not instantiating R^n the F-condition of $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$. Then the T- and F-conditions of these ordered pairs would determine relations between such pairs that were entirely analogous to the logical and other inferential relations that propositions stand in to one another. What this suggests, I submit, is that, without any interpretation by us, pairs of the form $\langle\langle x_1, \ldots, x_n\rangle, R^n\rangle$—as well, of course, as various similar sorts of constructions—are already well enough equipped to be the things we believe and assert.

III. *Soames's Theory of Cognitive Propositions*

Let's assume that Soames has shown that a new account is needed of the propositions we believe and assert. We've already noticed one constraint he says any such account must satisfy—namely, it must be an account of propositions that are "inherently representational entities that are capable of being true or false, independent of any actual use to which we or other agents put them." At the same time, he would claim that the "problem of unity" shows that propositions can't be the primary source of truth conditions, and thus of intentionality, and that this means that another constraint on our devising an account of propositions is that, rather than take the disastrous course of locating the source of intentionality in the *propositions* agents entertain when they predicate a property φ of a thing o and *then* explaining an agent's predicating φ of o in terms of her entertaining a proposition that predicates φ of o, we should instead reverse the direction of explanation and locate the source of intentionality in the *agent's* predicating φ of o and *then* explain how the proposition she entertains can predicate φ of o in terms of the agent's predicating φ of o. One way, if not the only way, of satisfying this source-of-intentionality constraint would be to have a conception of propositions such that for an agent to entertain a proposition that predicates φ of o *just is* for her to predicate φ of o. What conception of propositions will enable us to do this? Soames's answer is that it's the conception of a proposition as a certain type of *cognitive act*—to wit, the act-type of an agent's predicating a

property of a thing. So consider the proposition that a book B is red. That proposition is the act-type of an agent's predicating redness of B, and for the agent to entertain that proposition is just for her to perform that act, that is to say, for *her* to predicate redness of B. In the event, we deem the proposition *that B is red* to be true just in case for an agent to represent B as being red—i.e. for her to predicate redness of B—is for her to represent B as it really is. One may wonder how the proposition that B is red can predicate redness of B if that proposition just is the act of predicating redness of B. To echo a remark I believe Jeff King makes somewhere, wouldn't that be like saying that Al's act of kissing Betty itself kissed Betty? Soames nicely explains how it's acceptable to speak of acts of predication as themselves predicating properties of things; he says that "the sense in which *the act* can be said to [predicate a property of a thing] is analogous to the derivative sense in which some acts are said to be intelligent, stupid, or thoughtful. For *an act* to be intelligent is *not* for it to be a quick and powerful thinker, even though that is what it is for an agent to be intelligent." Thus, for Soames the primary notion of predication is a notion of something *agents* do, and it's only in a sense derived from that primary sense that we can speak of the act-type of predicating a property of a thing as *itself* predicating the property of the thing.

So, the propositions we believe and assert are cognitive propositions, act-types of predicating properties of things, and "to entertain a proposition is not, as Frege or the early Russell would have you believe, to think of it in a special way; it is to perform it." To perform a cognitive proposition one "identifies" an object o, "identifies" a property φ, and then one predicates φ of o, but these actions needn't be either ones we intentionally perform or ones of which we're consciously aware. Soames doesn't define what it is to "identify" an object or a property, and he doesn't define what it is for an agent to predicate a property of a thing. He does, however, tell us that predicating is something one can do in various ways: to visualize B as red, to imagine B as red, or to see B as red isn't to do something *in addition* to predicating redness of B; it's just to predicate redness of B in one way rather than another. But he also tells us that entertaining a proposition—i.e. predicating a property of an object—is "the attitude on which other propositional attitudes are based. To *judge* that B is red is [to] perform the predication in an affirmative manner.… To *believe that B is red* is (very roughly) to be disposed to judge that it is."

IV. *Prima Facie Problems with Soames's Account of Cognitive Propositions*

Although there is a good deal more that Soames has to say about cognitive propositions, and about their role in thought, in speech and in natural language semantics (I especially like his explanation of how his account permits two propositions to be representationally identical but cognitively distinct), we have enough before us to raise certain *prima facie* problems for the theory of cognitive propositions. As we will see, some of these *prima facie* problems are based on some of the further things Soames has to say about cognitive propositions in the course of elaborating his theory of them. These *prima facie* problems, in no particular order, are as follows.

a. In the chapter on "Cognitive Propositions" in *New Thinking about Propositions*, a book he co-authored with Jeff King and Jeff Speaks, Soames offers an impressive list of the attractive features of his account of cognitive propositions. One of them is that the account does what a naturalistic account of propositions needs to do—namely, "avoid characterizing propositions as inhabitants of a Platonic third realm beyond mind and matter, with no explanation of how we come to bear attitudes to them, as well as how we are acquainted with, and come to know things about, them." More specifically, the account "demystifies our acquaintance with, and knowledge of, propositions by taking both to be grounded in concrete cognitive experience." I don't see that the account of cognitive propositions either shows them not to be "inhabitants of a Platonic third realm beyond mind and matter" or "demystifies our acquaintance with, and knowledge of, propositions." *Properties*, on the traditional conception of them, are inhabitants of a Platonic third realm beyond mind and matter: they are not physical things; they may be expressed by predicates in numerous languages but themselves belong to no language; and they are neither creations nor inhabitants of anyone's mind: the property of being a prime number existed before there were things that had minds, and therefore were not brought into existence by anything anyone did or thought, and if you and I contemplate the property of being a prime number, the property you contemplate is identical to the property I contemplate. Act-types are properties in exactly the sense that the property of being a prime number is a property, and therefore as much an inhabitant of a Platonic third realm as any other property; and since cognitive propositions are act-types, they, too, are to be found inhabiting Plato's Heaven. Furthermore, Soames's account of the act of predicating a property of an object requires one to "identify" the predicated property, and therefore to be acquainted with it, but no account is given of how that is possible,

for no account is given of what it is for us to be acquainted with a property, to "identify" a property, or to represent a property in thought, and since one can be acquainted with or have knowledge about a cognitive proposition only if one can be acquainted with or have knowledge about the property the cognitive proposition predicates, it can't correctly be claimed that Soames's account of cognitive propositions "demystifies our acquaintance with, and knowledge of, propositions." This *prima facie* problem for Soames's theory of cognitive propositions doesn't directly challenge the truth of that theory; it challenges only a claim Soames makes about his theory. The remaining problems do challenge the truth of the theory of cognitive propositions.

b. Gary Ostertag ("On Act- and Language-Based Conceptions of Propositions: Two Aspects of Propositional Unity," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 2013) makes an objection that may be put in the following way. According to Soames, without interpretation by us, propositions as traditionally conceived can't have truth conditions. But yet the propositions we believe and assert do have truth conditions without interpretation by us; so it's incumbent on a theory of the nature of those propositions to explain how they can have truth conditions without interpretation by us. That, of course, is exactly what the cognitive conception of propositions aims to do. But just as propositions have *truth conditions*, so properties and relations have *instantiation conditions*. Just as the proposition *that there are unicorns* is true iff there are unicorns, so *the property of being a unicorn* is instantiated by a thing iff it's a unicorn. Moreover, it would seem that the properties we predicate of things have their instantiation conditions without interpretation by us. So, shouldn't an account of those properties explain how they can have instantiation conditions without interpretation by us? Yet it's difficult to imagine what such an account would be like, and it's even more difficult to imagine explaining instantiation as something humans do. Now, instead of saying e.g. that Fido instantiates the property of being a dog, we could say that the property of being a dog *applies* to Fido, and we *can* speak of a person's applying the property of being a dog to Fido. In fact, to apply doghood to Fido *just is* to predicate doghood of Fido. Now that we see that 'instantiation conditions' and 'application conditions' are labels of the same thing, might we hope to explain doghood's having the application conditions it has in terms of the act of applying that property to things? Not really, for one can apply properties to things only by virtue of the fact that it's already an essential feature of those properties that they have the application conditions they have. As

Ostertag remarks, the question "How does the property of being blue manage to apply to all and only blue things?" should strike as a pseudo-question, in that the only appropriate answer to the question seems to be that it's in the nature of properties to have the instantiation conditions they have. "But then," Ostertag remarks, "the question is raised as to why a parallel response isn't available to the traditional Russellian. Why can't she say that the [unity] problem is itself a pseudo-problem—that it is in the nature of propositions to represent the world in a particular way?"

c. According to the theory of cognitive propositions, entertaining a proposition is the propositional attitude in terms of which certain other propositional attitudes are defined. For example, to *judge that Fido is a dog* is to predicate doghood of Fido in an "affirmative manner," and we are told that a very rough statement of what it is to *believe that Fido is a dog* is that it's to be disposed to judge that Fido is a dog. I don't pretend to understand this, unless to judge that Fido is a dog is simply to come to believe that Fido is a dog, but let's put my understanding or lack thereof aside and ask what it is for a brain state to be, or to realize, a belief that such and such. There surely are such states. A minute ago you believed, say, that you held a doctorate from MIT, even though you weren't thinking about that. But if I had asked you where you earned your doctorate, you would probably have told me without any hesitation that you earned it at MIT. Let s be the brain-state token that at present is or realizes x's belief that p. What makes it the case that s is a belief that p? While no one knows how exactly to answer this question, the majority of philosophers who think about it suppose that s's being a belief that p is somehow determined by a combination of functional properties s has—properties that relate s causally or counterfactually to desire states, to other belief states, to sensory inputs and to behavioral outputs—and to certain causal or other relations s bears to certain external objects and properties. Soames's theory would seem to be hostage to a risky bet—namely, that the functional properties that help to make s a belief that p require s to have been caused by a neural event that is or realizes the agent's predicating a certain property of a certain thing in the sense Soames requires.

d. According to the theory of cognitive propositions, for every proposition p we can assert, there is some property φ and object o such that p predicates φ of o and is therefore true iff o has φ; and for a person to entertain p is just for her to predicate φ of o. I take this also to entail

(nearly enough) that p = the proposition that o is φ.[1] But now consider the disjunctive proposition *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow.* What is the property φ and the object o such that that proposition is the act of predicating φ of o? One thought is that it's the act of predicating the *disjunction relation* of <the proposition *that Putin is in Washington*, the proposition that *Obama is in Moscow*>. Soames rejects this thought because it requires an agent who entertains a disjunctive proposition to have the ability to think thoughts *about* propositions, but there are cognitively unsophisticated agents who can entertain disjunctive proposition but are not able entertain propositions about propositions. So, the theory of cognitive propositions requires there to be some property φ other than the disjunction relation and some object o other than <the proposition *that Putin is in Washington*, the proposition that *Obama is in Moscow*> such that the disjunctive proposition *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow* is the act of predicating φ of o. But what might that φ and that o be? Soames is aware of the challenge this question poses for his theory. He writes:

> In order for there to be truth conditional representation, something, or some things, must be represented as being some way. It is not obvious what is so represented when … a disjunctive proposition represents *A as being F or B as being G*.… So, we must ask, *What is represented as being what way by the act that represents ... A as being F or B as being G*? The easy thought is that it is *the world*, *the universe*, or *reality* that is represented as … *being such that A is F or B is G.* But that may seem extravagant. If the goal was to make truth-functional cognition safe for agents with cognitive powers too limited to predicate properties of propositions, it is not evident that the goal can be achieved by requiring them to represent *the universe* as being a certain way.

The solution to this problem that Soames recommends is that:

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[1] I'm being very sloppy here in my use of 'φ'. If Jane predicates doghood of Fido, we can't say that Jane is entertaining the proposition that Fido is doghood; we have to say instead that she's entertaining the proposition that Fido is a dog. I trust, however, that I can be understood without going into the spiel that would be needed in order for me to use a sentence that really does require me to say what I'm confident my sloppy use of words conveys.

> We may characterize the agent as indiscriminately representing *everything*—i.e., each thing—as [being such that *A is F or B is G*]—by virtue of its being a matter of indifference which particular things are so represented (since either everything will be as so represented or nothing will). The agent might even be viewed as *predicating* the unusual property [*being such that A is F or B is G*], identifying its predication targets as any and all objects arbitrarily. With this, we arrive at an appropriately deflationary understanding of what it is to represent *the world* as [*being such that A is F or B is G*]—deflationary because it doesn't require one to have a conception of any single thing as somehow being *the totality of all things*.

I find this puzzling in a few respects.

(i) While it's indeed true that if anything is such that *A is F or G is B*, then everything is such that *A is F or G is B*, how is that supposed to entail that we may characterize one who entertains the proposition *that A is F or B is G* as indiscriminately representing each thing in the universe as being such that *A is F or G is B*? It should be obvious that one who entertains the proposition *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow* isn't *literally* representing anything as being such *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow*, nor is she predicating the property of being such that *Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow* of "any and all objects arbitrarily." In what sense, then, does a person who believes *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow* but who doesn't even know of my existence believe that my left ear is such that *Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow*?

(ii) In whatever sense a person who doesn't know of my left ear's existence may be "viewed as" predicating of it the property of being such that *Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow*, that sense must be consistent with the fact that that person very clearly is *not* predicating that property of my left ear or, for that matter, of anything else. But then on a literal reading of the sentence

> A person's entertaining a proposition p consists in there being a property φ and an object o such that she is predicating φ of o,

it's plainly false, and I don't see how we can know what the theory of cognitive propositions is until we are presented with sentences that express the theory on their literal readings.

(iii) If for any proposition p there is some property φ and object o such that entertaining p = predicating φ of o and such that p is true iff o has φ, then, evidently, p = the proposition *that o is φ*. Yet there is no object o—or at least no object o whose existence isn't a logical necessity—such that the proposition *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow* = the proposition *that o is such that* such that *Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow*. For while the proposition *that o is such that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow* entails that o exists, the proposition *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow* doesn't entail that o exists.

(iv) Consider the sentence

(a) Jane believes that Tom had enough.

The 'that'-clause in an utterance of (a) can't refer to the proposition *that Tom had enough*, and this for the simple reason that there can be no such proposition. In order for the 'that'-clause in an utterance of (a) to refer to a proposition, there must be some X such that it implicitly refers to the proposition *that Tom had enough of X*. Similarly, on my understanding of Soames's theory, he must say that, strictly speaking, there is no such proposition as the proposition *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow*, and that the 'that'-clause in an utterance of

(b) Jane believes that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow

refers to a proposition only if for some object o it implicitly refers to the proposition *that o is such that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow*. But there clearly is such a proposition as the proposition *that Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow*, and we know that it's true iff Putin is in Washington or Obama is in Moscow.

(v) Suppose Clyde does predicate the property of being such that *A is F or B is G* of my left ear. What is his understanding of the property he's predicating? Presumably, he takes himself to be predicating a property that a thing o has iff o exists and A is F or B is G. If that is so, it looks as though we may be landed with a vicious regress: if predicating the property φ requires knowing that a thing has φ only if *A is F or B is G*, then in order to predicate φ of something one must know what it is for it to be the case that *A is F or B is G*. Now, if it can simply be the case that *that A is F or B is G*, then 'the proposition *that A is F or B is G*' really

does all on its own specify a complete proposition, viz. the proposition *that A is F or B is G*. But, as I have already explained, Soames's theory seems not to permit the existence of such a proposition; if an apparent reference to such a proposition succeeds in referring to a proposition, then that proposition is, for some o, the proposition *that o is such that A is F or B is G*, so that what seems to be an act of predicating of my left ear the property of *being such that A is F or B is G* is really, for some object o, an act of predicating of my left ear the property of *being such that o is such that A is F or B is G*—and therein lies the start of an apparently vicious regress.