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Defending a Modest Semantic Brutalism

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Scott Soames is a naturalist propositional realist. Propositional realism requires a commitment to propositions, propositional access, and semantic properties (namely, representationality and truth conditionality). Soames' task, as a naturalist propositional realist, is to give appropriate explanations of the entities in question in terms of a naturalist base ontology. In contrast, brutalism (of any sort) holds that some facts are *brute* or unexplainable in terms of some base ontology. I argue that at least one semantic fact in particular—that propositional representationality bears the property I call *Tight Connection*—remains unexplained even given Soames' efforts. I argue that there is no route available for Soames to explain the fact that propositional representationality bears *Tight Connection* in terms of his own base ontology. Therefore, I argue that we should endorse the view that at least one fact about semantic properties (namely, that propositional representationality bears *Tight Connection*) is a brute one.

To

my mother,

and my sister.

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1. Introduction

Scott Soames has given a theory of propositions which aims to naturalize propositional realism (with all its core commitments) while changing our understanding of propositions, semantic properties, and propositional access so as to abandon certain traditionalist commitments which would render these phenomena unnaturalizable. In particular, Soames endorses a principle of *optimistic naturalism* as opposed to *brutalism*, particularly *semantic brutalism*, which asserts that some facts about semantic properties are brute (that is to say, true without explanation). I argue that even if we grant Soames the base ontology he needs in order to give the explanatory account of propositions, semantic properties, and access he offers, Soames will not be able to explain at least one semantic fact: the fact that propositional representationality bears a certain property (which I call *Tight Connection*) which it certainly bears. I argue that we should view this fact as a brute fact. Minimally, we should be modest semantic brutalists and endorse this brute fact as one which escapes naturalist explanation.

My paper is structured as follows. In section 2, I recount the commitments of propositional realism, traditionalism, and naturalism. In section 3, I define the act/event and type/token distinctions which play a significant role in Soames' project. In section 4, I present Soames' base ontology and then present his explanatory account of propositions, semantic properties, and access. In section 4 I also mention in passing some problems his theory has which will not be the focus of my paper, but which may interest the reader. In section 5 I defend my claim that Soames endorses *Tight Connection*. In section 6 I present the problems *Tight Connection* poses for Soames (particularly, a kind of asymmetry), and the way in which the two naturalist routes of explanation available to Soames will fail in different ways. Ultimately, I conclude that we should endorse at least one brute fact (the fact that propositional

representationality, be what it may be, bears *Tight Connection*).

2. Propositional Realism, Traditionalism, Naturalism

Soames is a propositional realist and a naturalist. Traditionally, propositional realism has been at odds with naturalism. From a naturalist perspective, the traditionalist understanding of propositions, semantic properties, and the relation of access which holds between agents and propositions is seen as problematic. Soames (and others[1]) believe that propositional realism can be naturalized. They aim to naturalize it by changing our understanding of the aforementioned entities (propositions, semantic properties, and the access relation).

According to propositional realism, certain things can be said about propositions.[2] They encode our sentences, and they are the contents of our cognitive attitudes. They have semantic properties (representationality and truth conditionality), which semantic properties they lend to the sentences they encode. We can, in some sense, *access* propositions, and in virtue of this access we can assign propositions to sentences, as well as have them be contents of our cognitive attitudes. Different agents can access the same propositions. There are motivations for all these claims about propositions, but I will leave out presentations of these motivations from my paper. Suffice to say, both traditionalists and naturalists like Soames accept these claims, and they codify the core of propositional realism.

Additional things can be said about the semantic properties in question. They are uncontroversially properties that exist, because they are at the very least properties of *sentences*.[3]

1 For example, Peter Hanks and Jeffrey C. King.

2 The picture of propositional realism which I paint is relatively conventional, but somewhat exclusive. For example, it excludes Jeff Speaks' theory of propositions. This is not done to slight his theory in the least, but rather because his theory abandons propositional features that are rather important in this paper's dialectic between naturalists and traditionalists. In particular, Speaks' propositions lack *representationality*, which is of crucial importance to this paper's dialectic.

3 Of course, someone might say that it *isn't* completely uncontroversial. What isn't controversial is that we do apply predicates to the subjects in question (sentences) which have certain conditions of veridical application, such that some sentences assigning representationality or truth conditionality to sentences *are true*. "Sentences have representationality/truth conditionality" is a true sentence, and the subject (sentences) certainly exists. But whether the predicates correspond to perfectly natural properties or something less simple, is another matter.

Truth conditions are conditions according to which sentences are true; something has truth conditionality iff it has the capacity to have certain truth conditions. In addition to truth conditions, sentences seem to represent ("mean") *specific* truth conditions in particular. Simply put, meaning seems to be a finer grained notion than truth.[4] Something has representationality iff it represents certain *specific* truth conditions. On a propositional realist view, sentences have representationality and truth conditionality because they encode propositions. Therefore, these semantic properties belong to propositions first, to sentences second.

Traditionalists consider propositions to be non-physical. Often, traditionalists say that propositions are non-spatial and atemporal. The claim of most importance which traditionalists make about propositions is that they are causally inert, such that including them in a scientific theory would make no difference, positive or negative, to that theory's empirical adequacy.[5] For this reason they qualify as theoretical danglers.[6] In addition, traditionalists consider propositions to be non-mental. That is to say, their existence is external to and independent from the minds of agents. Hence, being neither physical nor mental, propositions are characterized as inhabitants of a "third realm." Traditionalists understand propositional access as a quasi-perceptual[7] primitive epistemological relation that holds between agents and propositions (and nothing else); it is called *quasi-perceptual* because, like perception, it obtains between agents and entities external to and independent from agents. Because it is non-causal (seeing as propositions are causally inert on this account), and it only obtains between agents and propositions, the access relation

4 Some philosophers (i.e. Donald Davidson) believe that sentential meaning can be expressed entirely in terms of truth conditions. This project (truth conditional semantics) has been criticized by Soames as insufficient. Soames' view is that meaning cannot be adequately expressed just in terms of truth conditions. It is a finer grained notion, and one which stands apart from (even if tightly connected to) truth conditionality. See Soames (1991).

5 I am *not* committed to Bas van Fraassen's constructive empiricism. But I do believe that our best scientific theories should be empirically adequate before we have reason to accept them as true, if we do have reason.

6 Let us understand *theoretical dangler* as follows. A theoretical dangler is by definition a theoretical entity such that including it in a scientific picture of the world will make it no more or less empirically adequate. An empirically adequate scientific picture of the world is therefore always possible without theoretical danglers.

7 The term is Soames' own. See Soames (2014) p. 26.

must itself be a theoretical dangler which in no way affects the empirical adequacy of scientific theories which include it.

Traditionalists further believe propositions to be the primary bearers of semantic properties: that is to say, semantic properties belong to them first. Traditionalists understand the fact that propositions bear semantic properties as a brute fact, and the character of the semantic properties themselves (and the tight connection that exists between them) they also understand as brute facts. They don't believe these facts can be explained naturalistically.

Naturalists stand opposed to things like theoretical danglers or naturalistically-unexplained (brute) facts. Thus, they are opposed to third realm propositions, brutal semantic properties, and quasi-perceptual access. The hope naturalists have is that, given a base naturalist ontology, these phenomena will be satisfactorily explained. This hope can be generalized as *optimistic naturalism*. Optimistic naturalism follows from what I call *ontological naturalism*, which is the belief that the only acceptable ontology is a naturalist ontology. Optimistic naturalism tells us further that *all* true phenomena can be explained in terms of a naturalist base ontology. The term owes its name to Ben Caplan *et al*, who employ the phrase in "Not the Optimistic Type" (2013). Caplan *et al* ascribe optimistic naturalism to Scott Soames as well as Peter Hanks.[8] On their account, optimistic naturalism is specifically a position about semantic properties. I would prefer to call this position *semantic optimistic naturalism.* I believe that a more generalized notion of optimistic naturalism is available than just semantic optimistic naturalism, and that this more generalized notion is more useful to us in the end. In particular, I believe that Soames is an optimistic naturalist in this general sense about many things other than just semantic properties, and that a naturalist in the broad sense (not just a naturalist propositional realist) will be an optimistic naturalist about many things.

8 They also ascribe it to Jeffrey C. King, but not in the body of their text. See Caplan *et al* (2013), p. 586n4.

Optimistic naturalism is opposed to various forms of *brutalism*, of which semantic brutalism is but one kind. Though semantic brutalism forms part of the traditionalist account of propositions, it can stand apart from other traditionalist theses. For example, Caplan *et al* identify Michael McGlone and others[9] as holding a brutal view about semantic properties, and it isn't clear to me that McGlone or the others are traditionalists. On a view such as McGlone's[10] it is simply a brute fact that propositions have semantic properties. Semantic optimistic naturalism is defined by Caplan *et al* in direct opposition to McGlone's semantic brutalism.[11] Soames, who presents his view as naturalist, also opposes naturalism to brutalism.[12] I will follow Soames and Caplan *et al*'s dialectic by characterizing brutalism and naturalism as being *by definition* mutually incompatible. To think otherwise is probably to define naturalism in some other way than that employed in the existing dialectic.

My contention is that at least one fact about semantic properties is brute. I claim that it is a brute fact that propositional representationality bears a certain property I call *Tight Connection*, which I first define in section 4, and best define in section 6. This fact is such that, in consequence of it being a property of propositional representationality, when a proposition bears propositional representationality, it also bears truth conditionality. I specify *propositional* representationality here for reasons (namely, contrast with *agent* representationality) that shall be made clearer in section 4.

3. Type/Token and Act/Event Distinctions

Types are very important for Soames' naturalization project with regards to propositions. They are also important for Peter Hanks' analogous project. Due to the crucial role types play in

9 In addition to Michael McGlone, Trenton Merricks and Caplan *et al* themselves hold a brutal view about semantic properties. See Ibid., p. 588n35. Note however that Caplan *et al* hold that propositions lack representational properties, just like Jeff Speaks does (see footnote 2). See Ibid., p. 585n2.

10 Ibid., p. 576.

11 Caplan *et al* (2013), pp. 576-577

12 Soames (2014), p. 92.

Soames' and Hanks' projects, their projects are jointly captured under the broader name of *type theory*. Soames has held different views at different times about which kind of types do the relevant work for his theory of propositions. Soames makes use of a distinction between *acts* and *events* in his work. He employs the distinction in *What is Meaning?* (2010) and *New Thinking About Propositions* (2014). The earlier Soames identified propositions as *event types* of a certain sort; the later Soames identifies propositions as *act types*.[13] In this section, I will address the act/event and type/token distinctions. In section 4 I will further explain the role act and event types play in Soames' theory of propositions.

One difficulty facing us is that though the act/event and type/token distinctions can be explained by employing talk of *participation*, there are different notions of participation, and explaining the distinction requires at least three such different notions. There is one sense in which agents participate in acts, another sense in which agents and acts both participate in events, and a third sense in which types participate in tokens. My hope is that the use of examples will clarify the three different senses.

We begin with act and event tokens. Suppose that at a given time, Alice eats a cookie. If we consider Alice's eating a cookie as a structured complex of some kind, this complex can be divided into *Alice* and *eating a cookie*. The complex as a whole is an event token (at a given time). Alice's eating a cookie, standing alone (considered apart from Alice), is an act token (at a given time). When Alice eats a cookie, she *participates* in the act of eating a cookie (in one sense of the word). In another sense of the word, both Alice and the act token of eating of a cookie *participate* in the event token which they are constituents of. It is difficult saying what an act is. Acts seem to be properties or property-like, and it may be a necessary condition for acts that they be properties *of agents*, but beyond this I cannot give a decisive method for distinguishing acts

13 The change of mind is described in Soames (2014) pp. 240-241 and 241fn16.

from other properties. Suffice to say, I trust the reader will know what acts are (*eating a cookie* is an act, *being 5'3"* is not).

Prima facie, some acts have a certain resemblance hold between them, and some events have a certain resemblance hold between them. Accordingly, act tokens and event tokens which resemble[14] can be considered *instantiations* of a shared type. For example, Alice's eating a cookie at one time resembles (in some sense) Alice's eating a cookie at a different time, and Bob's eating a cookie at another time, and so forth. These events have the event type of *someone eating a cookie at a time*. The act of eating a cookie which Alice participates in at one time, then at another, and the act in which Bob participates, are instantiations of the act type *eating a cookie at a time*. Specific act and event tokens may instantiate multiple act and event types. The participation notion relevant to an understanding of types' participation in tokens must be understood as the relational converse of instantiation: types participate in tokens when tokens instantiate types.

My explanation of the distinction between the participation of agents in acts, the participation of agents and acts in events, and the participation of types in tokens is hopefully clear enough. The act/event distinction is used in this manner by Soames, and I don't know whether his distinction is canonically used in this manner beyond the context of his writings. By contrast, I have defined the type/token distinction according to its standard use, which Soames abides by. In the following sections I will largely opt for *instantiation* talk when talking about types and tokens. Nevertheless, I will be using *participation* talk when talking about agents, acts, and events.

14 Of course, it's not settled whether types exist for as many gradations of resemblance as exist, or not. Two entities (acts, events, or otherwise) may resemble more than a third. Does this mean that these two entities share a unique type which the third does not share? In some cases we want to say yes, but it's not clear to me that *everyone* wants to say yes in *all* such cases. But seeing as this question does not need to be solved one way or another in my paper, I will set it aside.

4. Type Theory: Soames' Theory of Propositions

As has been said, Soames is both a propositional realist and a naturalist. As such, he wants to explain propositions, semantic properties, and access in terms of a base ontology which is itself naturalist. In this section, I will first lay out the entities Soames depends on in giving his explanatory account of the phenomena in question (propositions, semantic properties, and access). Then I will sketch Soames' complete theory of these phenomena using his base ontology.

Soames depends on the following entities: agents, acts (act tokens), events (event tokens), types (act types and event types), a triadic predication relation (which holds between agents, properties, and objects), and a property of agent representationality, which can also be expressed as a representation relation between agents and an object's bearing a property.[15,16] Some of these entities (agents, agent representationality, predication) are entities Soames is an optimistic naturalist about, but for which Soames has not given an explanation in terms of a more basic and unquestionably-acceptable naturalist ontology. Some might suspect that no such naturalist explanation is possible for some of these entities.[17]

In the course of giving his account, Soames also commits himself to property-bearing non-existent types: these are propositions (as types) which do not exist, but bear properties of truth and falsity, such that we can say that there are as many truths and falsehoods as we

15 However, because an object may fail to bear a property, even though an agent *represents* it as bearing the property, this relational account brings us face to face with the issue of intentional inexistence (namely, seemingly successful aboutness aimed at non-existents). Perhaps this means that the relational account is a useful picture but not a complete picture. Or, perhaps it means something else (depending on how we deal with the problem of intentional inexistence).

16 There should be little controversy for the claim that Soames commits to agents, act/event tokens, and act/event types in his ontology. But does he commit to *entities* when he commits to true sentences that employ the triadic predicate of predication, and the dyadic predicate of agent representation? I suppose the existential commitment here is of the same sort as that presented on footnote 3. In fact, I expect Soames to have some clearer explanation of just what predication and agent representation are. I don't claim these entities to be *ontologically basic* entities, just *methodologically basic* for the endeavor at hand (they form the base for the reduction at hand, and have not yet been reduced further, though Soames as an optimistic naturalist surely thinks they *can* be reduced).

17 The idea that conscious agents cannot be adequately explained in terms of physical phenomena is particularly popular. See for example Levine (1983) for the beginning of *explanatory gap* literature on the subject.

intuitively need there to be, even though some of the propositions bearing truth and falsity do not themselves exist.[18] Soames has been criticized on these accounts as well.[19] I will be generous and grant Soames all the entities which form his base ontology; in other words, I will not dispute his reliance on them, at least for the sake of my paper.

I contend that even if I do grant Soames the ontology he needs to give his explanatory account, he will not be able to explain all the semantic facts. My claim is that whatever it is that Soames identifies *with* the semantic property of propositional representationality is such that his explanatory account does not actually show *how* or *why* this property itself has the property of being in a certain tight connection with truth conditionality. This property (call it *Tight Connection*) is a property of propositional representationality such that truth conditionality always obtains of its bearer iff and in virtue of the fact that propositional representationality obtains of its bearer (where the bearers are one and the same). I believe we should all endorse the the reality of this property. For my purposes, it is enough to demonstrate that Soames endorses the reality of this property. I will give my defense of this view in section 5.

Soames' theory of propositions starts as follows. According to Soames, we begin with agents. Agents can stand in a triadic *predication* relation to properties and objects such that an agent predicates a property of an object. When an agent predicates a property of an object, Soames says the agent also *represents* the object bearing said property.[20] This representationality which agents have is the property of *agent representationality* which Soames holds is more basic than *propositional representationality*. Whereas the traditionalist holds propositional representationality to be primary, and explains agent representationality in terms of it, Soames inverts the order of explanation. Soames believes agent representationality to be primary instead,

18 Soames gives his account of property-bearing non-existent propositions in Soames (2014) pp. 102-103.
19 See for example King (2014) p. 130.
20 Soames (2014) p. 95.

and holds that propositional representationality is to be explained in terms of agent representationality.[21]

Soames then tells us that when an agent predicates a property of an object, either the act token (predicating a property of an object) or the event token (the agent's predicating a property of an object) becomes representational itself, and then the act or event *type* of these act or event tokens becomes representational as well.[22] It is the act or event types which are ultimately to be identified with propositions. Which types become representational (whether the act or event types), and in what sense they are representational in comparison to agent representationality (are the two representationalities identical or non-identical?) is answered variously by Soames at different times: Soames has changed his mind about these matters at least once, allowing us to distinguish between an earlier and a later Soames. The earlier Soames held that the event type is the proposition, whereas the later Soames holds that the act type is the proposition. The earlier Soames also held that the two representationalities are identical, whereas the later Soames holds that they are not identical.[23]

Types can be multiply instantiated. Different tokens of the same type are possible. The propositional types in question (be they act or event types) are such that when they are multiply instantiated, different agents participate in the act or event tokens (albeit in different senses of *participation*). Regardless, Soames thinks that an agent's participation in the act or event tokens, which in turn instantiate the respective types, is sufficient for us to make sense of propositional access[24], and in particular multiply instantiated access, which is crucial to propositional realism. We can present the schema as follows: *A* accesses *P* just in case *A* participates in *T* and *T*

21 Ibid., p. 96.
22 Ibid., pp. 96-97. Soames says that “instances” (tokens) of these types are representational first, and that the types are then representational because the “instances” (tokens) are.
23 Ibid., pp. 239-241.
24 Ibid., p. 96.

instantiates *P*, where *A* = agent, *P* = proposition (whether viewed as act or event type), and *T* = act or event token. The notion of participation relevant to our schema will differ based on whether we rely on act or event tokens, but otherwise the schema is roughly the same in both cases. Different agents will be able to access the same propositions on this account, because different agents participate in different tokens (act or event) which instantiate the same types (propositions).

Soames' theory of propositions can be criticized in several ways. When trying to explain *de se* propositions[25], Soames claims that the difference between *de se* propositions and their *de re* counterparts amounts to entertaining (accessing) the *de re* proposition *in a certain way* (the first personal way), which is constitutive of a *new* proposition.[26] This notion of "certain ways" is not well defined. If I entertain some *de re* proposition while eating a cookie, does this give rise to a new proposition?[27] Probably not; but then what makes it so that some propositions entertained in a certain way are new propositions, and others are not? A second problem arises when we consider Soames' claim that an act or event type represents because every conceivable instance of it represents[28]; given a sum of tokens, it still seems that the tokens may have different types, and not all can be propositions.[29] The earlier Soames also faces the problem of explaining *why* the given types have representationality at all. It is false that types *always* have the properties that their tokens have (the bicycle type does not have the property of being rideable in the way the bicycle tokens do), so an explanation is necessary as to why *some* types have properties (like representationality) which their tokens have. A variation on this problem may also face the later

25 See Perry (1979) for an account of the problem of *de se* propositions.
26 Soames (2014) pp. 106-113.
27 The example given here belongs to Caplan *et al* (2013), p. 579, though they employ the example for a somewhat different sort of criticism. Other versions of the actual criticism in question are given in Speaks (forthcoming), pp. 14-15, and King (2014), pp. 132-133, with different examples being used.
28 Soames (2014) p. 97.
29 The cookie example was originally given to elucidate this problem in particular. See Caplan *et al* (2013), p. 579.

Soames.[30]

These problems might be reason enough to reject Soames' theory of propositions as inadequate. Be that as it may be, there is a certain strategy Soames should follow to answer his objectors here. For example, the earlier Soames would overcome his objectors if he could give the necessary and sufficient conditions according to which a type inherits some property that its token has, and in particular, the conditions according to which *propositions* (as act or event types) inherit relevant (semantic) properties from act or event tokens. Likewise, Soames would overcome other objectors of his if he could give the necessary and sufficient conditions according to which some types, but not others, are propositions, or if he could give the necessary and sufficient conditions according to which entertaining *de re* propositions in *some* of the "certain ways" but not others is enough to generate new propositions. It simply remains for Soames to give those conditions, if it can be done; if he did this, he would be giving a more complete explanatory account of things than he has so far done, but an explanatory account after all. However, I don't think Soames can merely lay out necessary and sufficient conditions to overcome the particular objection *I* have for him. I will flesh out my objection in section 6.

5. Soames' Acceptance of *Tight Connection*

In the previous section, I gave a basic definition of the property *Tight Connection,* defining it as the property of propositional representationality such that truth conditionality obtains of its bearer iff and in virtue of the fact that propositional representationality obtains of its bearer (where the bearers are the same). I attribute to Soames acceptance of this formulation of the property. In this section, I want to defend my claim that Soames accepts this formulation of the property.

Soames says: "To *entertain* the proposition that o is red is to predicate redness of o,

30 See Caplan *et al* (2013) for a more thorough account of the last couple of problems raised here.

which is to do something that results in an instance of the event type that the proposition is. The representationality, and hence truth conditions, of the proposition are due to the representational features of these possible instances."[31] He adds: "From this we derive [the proposition's] truth conditions: the proposition is true iff whatever (namely o) it represents to be a cerain way *is* that way (red); it is false iff o isn't red."[32] Here we see Soames associate truth conditionality tightly with propositional representationality (such that he *thinks* he has explained the former now that he has purportedly explained the latter), and we see Soames say that a proposition *has* truth conditions iff and seemingly in virtue of the fact that it has representationality.

We must be careful here about what Soames is actually endorsing. For a given proposition *P*, it represents some *R* (for atomic propositions, this is the same as an object *o*'s bearing property *F*), and it is true iff it has truth conditions *T*. In a critique of truth conditional semantics[33], Soames points out that what a sentence *means* (represents) is not the same as its truth conditions, because sentences can be true given certain truth conditions which they emphatically do *not* represent. Though Soames' critique is formally given in terms of *sentences* rather than *propositions*, we can import his conclusions to the case of propositions (seeing as, in his view, sentences encode propositions, and inherit their semantic properties from them).

Soames' critique rests on the following observation. On Tarski's approach, a sentence in an object language is true iff its disquotation in a metalanguage obtains. All necessary sentences are logically equivalent; it follows that all their disquotations are also logically equivalent. Therefore, for any necessary sentence, the disquotations of all other necessary sentences are each viable truth conditions. Similarly, for any given contingent sentence, the conjunction of that sentence's disquotation and some true necessary sentence's disquotation will also be a viable

31 Soames (2014) p. 96.
32 Ibid.
33 See Soames (1992).

truth condition for that contingent sentence. But surely the sentences in question (whether necessary or contingent) don't *mean* these truth conditions. Therefore, meaning (or representationality) is a finer grained notion than truth conditionality. Sentences, on Soames' view, have the semantic properties which they have because they *encode* propositions, which have them first. Therefore, we can safely conclude that *propositions*, like sentences, have truth conditions which are more coarse grained than that which they represent.

In other words, Soames is not saying that for *every* truth condition of a proposition, the proposition *represents* that truth condition. What Soames tells us instead is that when a proposition has representationality, it has truth conditionality as well; it seems safe to conclude that on Soames view, it would be impossible for a proposition to have truth conditionality without representationality. On Soames' account, truth conditionality is only possible *because* representationality has been given first. It is not difficult to imagine how this would hold even from an analysis of sentences. What is a sentence that has no *meaning*, but has truth conditions? A sentence without meaning seems to be no sentence at all. Similarly, it seems impossible for a proposition to have representationality without truth conditionality. That is because what a proposition represents is also a truth condition for that proposition. Soames has told us this; therefore, as soon as a proposition represents, it has truth conditions. This establishes the logical equivalence of representationality and truth conditionality, whereas the fact that Soames seems to ground the latter on the appearance of the former shows that Soames takes the latter to obtain *in virtue of* the former.

6. Asymmetry, *Tight Connection*, and Brutalism

I claim that Soames endorses *Tight Connection* with respect to propositional representationality. *Tight Connection* is a property of properties. A formalized definition of *Tight Connection*, which is generalized to *any* property and its given property bearer, may be spelled

out as follows:

> *Tight Connection:* For some property *F* with property bearer *o*, property *F* has the property *Tight Connection* iff *o* bears truth conditionality iff and in virtue of the fact that *o* bears *F*.

If Soames endorses *Tight Connection* (which I believe he does) then he also must recognize (and I think we all should) a certain asymmetry between agent representationality and propositional representationality. The asymmetry is as follows: although propositional representationality bears the property *Tight Connection*, agent representationality does not. That is because agents (as property bearers of agent representationality) do not bear truth conditionality. All bearers of truth conditionality are also bearers of truth value, but it makes no sense to say that an *agent* is true or false. Nor does it make sense to say that given certain truth conditions an *agent* will be true.

Soames believes that agents are primary bearers of representationality, and that propositions bear their representationality only in a derivative way, such that the fact that agents are primary bearers of representationality *explains* why propositions bear representationality.[34] The traditionalists he opposes believe the order of explanation to be reversed: propositional representationality is more basic, and agent representationality is to be explained in terms of it.[35] Apart from the *order* of explanation, accounts of explanation can also differ based on whether the properties of agent representationality and propositional representationality are the same or different. Four combinations of explanation are possible based on two dimensions (order of explanation, identity vs. non-identity). Call *traditionalist* those explanations which say that propositional representationality is more basic and explains agent representationality, and call *naturalist* those explanations which say that agent representationality is more basic and explains

34 Soames (2014) p. 96.
35 Ibid.

propositional representationality. Call *transmissional* those explanations which say that agent representationality and propositional representationality are the same, and call *focal* those explanations which say that agent representationality and propositional representationality are different (for reasons yet to be explained). Our four possible combinations are then captured by the following table:

	Traditionalist	**Naturalist**
Transmissional	Transmissional Traditionalist	Transmissional Naturalist
Focal	Focal Traditionalist	Focal Naturalist

The earlier Soames was a transmissional naturalist, whereas the later Soames is a focal naturalist.[36] For reasons I shall soon show, I believe only the focal traditionalist account is exempt from explanatory problems *given a base ontology*. By contrast, both available routes for Soames will present explanatory problems.

Transmissional accounts are problematic, regardless of whether one is a traditionalist or a naturalist. Transmissional accounts are called *transmissional* because one and the same property is purportedly *transmitted* from one bearer (the primary bearer) to another (the derivative bearer). A transmissional account of representationality will tell us the story of this transmission. But such transmissional accounts are problematic because, when faced with asymmetry, they start to look impossible. *Tight Connection* is a property that we cannot imagine propositional representationality lacks. The property itself is defined in such a way as to capture this very intuition. It shouldn't matter what entities (agents, propositions, or something else) bear representationality: *Tight Connection* is a property of *representationality* such that its bearers will bear truth conditionality also. Yet agents lack truth conditionality. If anything, this would be a

36 Ibid., pp. 239-241. See also Caplan *et al* (2015). They distinguish between an “inheritance” view, corresponding to the earlier Soames' view, which is transmissional naturalist, and an “extension” view, corresponding to the later Soames' view, which is focal naturalist.

counterexample to the claim *that* the properties in question (agent representationality and propositional representationality) are the same. Hence, a transmissional account must explain what should be impossible by its own account, and for this reason, neither the naturalist nor the traditionalist fares well.

On a transmissional account, if the reason *Tight Connection* does not obtain of agent representationality is that agents in some way play a role in the identity conditions of agent representationality as opposed to propositional representationality, then the account is *not* transmissional after all. If instead propositions (as property bearers) somehow play a partial role in making representationality have *Tight Connection*, or if agents (as property bearers) somehow play a partial role in making representationality fail to have *Tight Connection*, one must ask if this is "just the way it is" or not. If yes, then this is a brute fact. If no, then a naturalist explanation is needed. As I have mentioned, Soames has since changed his mind and abandoned the transmissional naturalist account in favor of a focal naturalist account. For the remainder of my paper, I shall turn our attention to focal accounts.

On a focal account, the sense of "representationality" invoked by agent representationality is merely homonymous with that invoked by propositional representationality. The name ("representationality") may be the same, but the meaning differs across the two cases. This homonymy is comparable to that which obtains between river banks and financial banks. However, it is not enough *that* they are homonymous. Some homonyms (like river banks and financial banks) may be completely arbitrary. By contrast, a close connection is supposed to exist between derivative representationality and primary representationality: the latter is taken to explain the former. Since a story exists to connect the two notions of representationality, with one being a more basic and central notion than the other, the homonymy is apt *because* of this purported connection.

The above picture essentially illustrates Aristotle's theory of focal meaning.[37] We may explain the theory by way of example. Consider for example, *health*. A person is healthy, exercise is healthy, and a certain complexion is healthy. These three notions of health are homonymous. A person is healthy when its body functions as it ought to. But exercise and complexions lack bodies, so their healthiness cannot be the same as a person's healthiness. Rather, they are "healthy" in a sense focused on a central notion of health (which applies to persons) by way of some connection. For example, exercise is said to be healthy in a derivative if homonymous sense, because exercise *causes* genuine health in the central sense. Likewise, a complexion is said to be healthy in a derivative if homonymous sense, because it is *caused by* genuine health in the central sense. Focal accounts of representationality must explain derived representationality in terms of some connection to a central notion of representationality (primary representationality). Because the representationalities are different, asymmetry is not a problem for focal accounts in the same way it is for transmissional accounts.

Asymmetry still holds true of focal accounts, but order of explanation matters in determining if asymmetry will pose a problem for a given focal account. On the focal traditionalist account, propositional representationality is our central sense of representationality, forming part of our base ontology as it were, in terms of which the focal traditionalist must merely explain the *disappearance* of the property *Tight Connection* in the derived representationality (which is agent representationality). This is rather simple to do. We can explain agent representationality in terms of propositional representationality by giving an account of the former property (understood as a relation) in terms of relation composition[38], with

37 See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1003a33-1003b1

38 Relation composition (developed by C. S. Peirce and Augustus De Morgan) is a measure by which new relations can be composed from other relations in the following way: relations Pxy and Qyz compose relation Rxz. For example, the relation "is the uncle of" is composed of the relations "is the brother of" and "is the parent of." Adam is the uncle of Clara iff he is the brother of Beatrice, who is the parent of Clara.

the latter property (also understood as a relation) being a component relation. As I said in section 4, it is possible for us to think of agent representationality as a representation relation between an agent and an object's bearing a property; the same can be said of propositional representationality (it is a representation relation between a proposition and an object's bearing a property). We may say that *A* represents$_{\text{agent}}$ *X* when and just in case *A* accesses *P* and *P* represents$_{\text{proposition}}$ *X*, where *A* = an agent, *X* = an object's bearing a property, and *P* = a proposition. Given that we employed relation composition, we may assert an *identity* between the left hand explanandum and the right hand explanans: for an agent to represent (in the derivative sense) an object's bearing a property *is* for it to access a proposition, which represents (in the primary sense) said object's bearing a property.

Soames recognizes that a traditionalist would give a focal, rather than a transmissional, account of representationality. He takes the traditionalist to explain "the fact that the agent represents o as red" in terms of "(a) the fact that the agent has a certain attitude to the proposition that o is red, plus (b) the fact that the proposition—in and of itself and without interpretation by us—intrinsically represents o as red."[39] The focal traditionalist account avoids the problems faced by the transmissional traditionalist account (given that it is a *transmissional* account). More importantly, the asymmetry is not puzzling here: if we understand the component relations, we understand agent representationality (given that the latter just *is* the former), and we shouldn't be surprised that the latter lacks the property *Tight Connection*, because composite relations are under no obligation to bear all the properties which their component relations bear. Indeed, when one *defines* agent representationality the way we have, it is *especially* non-surprising that it would lack the property *Tight Connection*.

On the focal naturalist account, agent representationality is our central sense of

39 Soames (2014) p. 96.

representationality. It forms part of our base ontology (just as I said it did for Soames in section 4), and it is in terms of it that the focal naturalist must explain the *emergence* of the property *Tight Connection* in the derived representationality (which is propositional representationality). Soames can follow the traditionalist in invoking relation composition here as well. We may say that P represents$_{\text{proposition}}$ X when P is instantiated by T, and T is participated in by A, and A represents$_{\text{agent}}$ X, where P = a proposition (as act or event type), X = an object's bearing a property, T = an act or event token, and A = an agent. If Soames accepts an identity between the left hand explanandum and the right hand explanans, then he must explain *why* propositional representationality has the property of *Tight Connection* that it does, because the mere relation composition account does not *explain* why this is the case. It actually stays silent about it *being* the case that the composite relation has said property.

It is precisely *for this reason* (the silence in question) that I have a problem with what I take would be Soames' further identity claim between the composite relation in question, and what we all recognize (in a theory-neutral sense) as propositional representationality. There is a possibility that the two are in fact not identical, and therefore Soames would be making an identification by fiat which is in reality falsidical. To avoid this mistake, Soames should genuinely demonstrate that his identification is not merely by fiat, and therefore has no danger of being falsidical. The problem is that Soames can only help himself to *Tight Connection*, and assign it to his composite relation, *subsequent to* the identification in question: it does not fall out from the relation composition account of explanation at all. But it is *this* identification move which I think is unjustified. Only if Soames can give an explanatory account that does entail the necessity of this identity judgment, then and only then can we say that he has genuinely explained representationality and *thereby* explained truth conditionality also. Until he has done so, both semantic properties remain unexplained by his account. He has putatively explained a

certain *something*, but identifying this certain *something* with propositional representationality (which in turn has the property *Tight Connection*) is a further step that is not *itself* entailed by the explanation Soames can give.

Suppose now that someone were to say: "You are not charitable enough. It just so *happens* to be the case that propositional representationality bears the property *Tight Connection*. True, Soames' explanation does not logically *entail* the identity judgment of which you speak, but some identities are knowable only *a posteriori*. Soames' theory otherwise gives a good account of propositional representationality itself (absent *Tight Connection*), and of propositions, and of access, especially multiply instantiable access. Let the theory do its work, and if it is better than other theories, it will win out." Suppose I accept this response wholeheartedly: suppose that I became convinced, upon this appeal, to grant that maybe the identity judgment is veridical, and that given the virtues of the theory Soames is justified thinking it is. A problem still remains. If this notion of "just so happening to be the case" is not explainable in naturalist terms, *it is a brute fact*, by definition. It is true that some identities can be knowable only *a posteriori*, but even knowing the identity in question (if it exists) would not explain *why* propositional representationality, defined in the Soamesian fashion, bears the property *Tight Connection*. If it *just so happens to be the case* that it does, in an unexplained way, then this counts as a *bona fide* brute fact.

7. Conclusion

If I am right, we should minimally say that the existence of at least *one* brute fact has been established: that representationality bears the property *Tight Connection*. Perhaps we ought to be modest and restrict ourselves to just this claim and nothing more. On this view, we may even preserve the bulk of the Soamesian system and accept just one brute fact where naturalist explanation fails. That being said, I don't think we should be so quick to endorse the Soamesian

system. As I said in section 4, I granted Soames his base ontology simply to show that *even if* this base ontology was granted unto him, Soames would not be able to completely naturalize propositional realism. But have all members of Soames' base ontology really been explained in terms of a yet-more-basic, naturalist-approved ontology?[40] I'm not certain of it. It is beyond the space of this paper to defend my suspicion, however.

My hope is that by making space for *some* semantic brute facts, I am making space for traditionalism more broadly. Of course, one would have to demonstrate additional explanatory failures by naturalism first. I cannot do that here. It is enough for me to show that modest semantic brutalism is respectable given the failure of complete naturalist explanation. That being said, establishing brutalism about *Tight Connection* leaves open the question of which, agent representationality or propositional representationality, is more basic. Traditionalists believe the latter is more basic, and even that it is a primitive of some sort. Depending on whether we make propositional representationality a primitive or a composite relation, we will assign a brute fact either to a primitive or a composite relation. I would prefer to assign a brute fact to a primitive over a composite relation. In a way, this is a matter of ontological taste, one I will not defend in this paper. It is to be contrasted with a different taste, according to which we should never multiply primitives if we can avoid it. Be that what it may be, we cannot avoid at least a modest semantic brutalism.

40 The base ontology I grant to Soames is *methodologically* basic, not genuinely *ontologically* basic (for him). What is methodologically basic minimally forms the base for an explanatory reduction of something else, but it is not taken to necessarily *be* the true ground level of fundamentality. The claim that Soames' base ontology is merely methodologically basic is one I present in greater detail in footnote 16.

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