

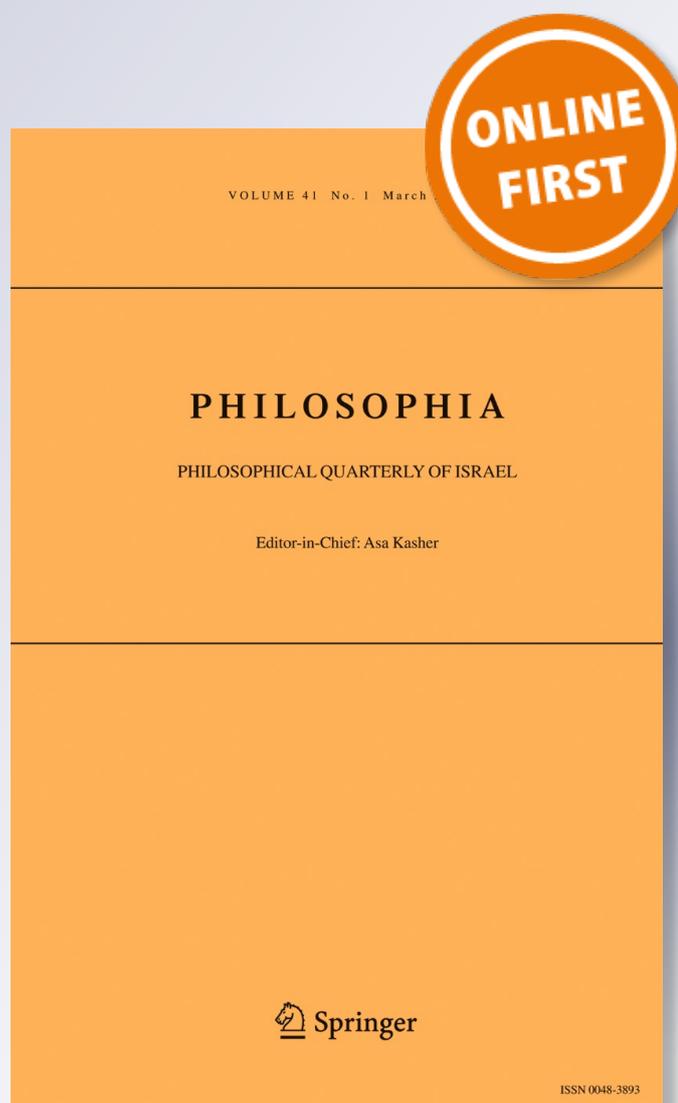
# Review Essay: Scott Soames, Philosophy of Language

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## Review Essay: Scott Soames, *Philosophy of Language* Princeton University Press, 2010, Pp. ix, 189

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Part of the *Princeton Foundations of Contemporary Philosophy* series, *Philosophy of Language* is a superb overview of “where we have been, where we stand today, and where we are, or should be, going in the philosophy of language” (p. ix) by one of its most prominent contemporary practitioners.

It is divided into two parts. The first, in four chapters, reviews a century of work in the philosophy of language beginning with Frege’s seminal contributions, and working through contributions by Russell, Tarski, Carnap, Davidson, Stalnaker and Lewis, Montague, Kripke and Kaplan. The second, in three chapters, takes up challenges of building on this legacy to reach an adequate conception of the nature of language and meaning. It takes up a critical study of the role of propositions and possible worlds in the tradition, reaching negative conclusions about both as a foundation for semantics, but sketching as well a novel approach to propositions that aims to avoid the pitfalls of the traditional conception, together with a conception of possible world-states understood in terms of sets of propositions to explain a variety of epistemic phenomena involving necessity and contingency. The final chapter takes up the question whether the traditional division between semantics and pragmatics can be sustained, and Soames defends a view according to which “the meaning of a sentence is a set of constraints on what normal uses of it assert, or express” (p. 4). The book covers an impressive amount of ground in a compact 173 pages. It is not merely a history of the subject but an active investigation into it that uses its history as a foil. It is rich in argument and ingenuity. At many places, though, the discussion is overly compressed, and would be a steep climb for those looking to come to grips with the material for the first time.

Chapter 1 contains a nice compact discussion of Frege’s main contributions with a subtle review of the problem of attitude contexts (esp. the threat of an infinite hierarchy of senses) and the alternatives available. Similarly, the discussion of Russell, in a surprisingly short space, explains what is right and wrong about

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Russell's account of propositions, the circularity of his account of quantifiers, his achievement in analyzing definite descriptions, but also the mistake in how he articulates their logical form, his emphasis on thought rather than the social institution of language, and the role in his thinking of the requirement that we be acquainted with the constituents of propositions to entertain them and how that influenced his account of ordinary proper names.

Chapter 2 takes up varieties of truth-theoretic semantics beginning with a discussion of Traski's classic work on defining a truth predicate for a formal language in a metalanguage as a way of avoiding the semantic paradoxes. Soames runs through both an absolute truth theory and a sample of defining truth in a model, and carefully distinguishes between them. (On page 36 there is a potentially confusing typographical mistake in the definition of 'Self-Application  $y,x$ ', which is preceded by an existential quantifier binding 'y' where there should be none.)

Soames is skeptical of truth-theoretic semantics. He examines briefly Carnap's and Davidson's approaches. I remark briefly on some aspects of the discussion of Davidson. Soames takes Davidson to have held that "systematic knowledge of truth and reference could do all the work for which we need a notion of meaning," and to "embrace Quine's rejection of analyticity, synonymy, and our ordinary notion of meaning, substituting knowledge of truth and reference whenever there was something genuine to be captured" (p. 45). This is what I have called elsewhere the Replacement Interpretation of Davidson's project (Lepore and Ludwig 2011). I believe that it is incorrect, and Soames himself gives evidence for this. He notes that after Davidson realized that his initial suggestion that an extensionally adequate truth theory for a language with demonstratives and indexicals would not suffice for it to have theorems that satisfy Convention T (suitably modified for context sensitive languages), he introduced a new constraint (in "Radical Interpretation" (Davidson 2001a)), namely, that it be confirmed from the standpoint of a radical interpreter. But this makes sense only if he was aiming at an independent target. In addition, he clarified what knowledge he thought one had to have about a truth theory to use it for interpretation, and denied explicitly (in "Reply to Foster" (Davidson 2001b)) that he identified the meaning theory with a truth theory.

In the end, Soames thinks the various refinements that can be introduced still will not suffice to justify the claim that a truth theory can be used *in providing* a meaning theory for a language. The final objection is that once we have added that we need to know a translational truth theory, and know of it that it is one, and that we need to know a canonical proof procedure for picking out the theorems to be used for interpretation, we can see that the truth theory itself is not doing the work. It is just a mechanical method for matching object language sentences with metalanguage sentences we understand and understand to interpret them—any other predicate could be substituted for the truth predicate in the axioms and do the same job. This loses sight, however, of the fact that proofs of canonical theorems are to supply information about the compositional semantic structure of object language sentences. If we know the theory *is a truth theory* and *the axioms give satisfaction conditions using expressions that interpret the primitive expressions*, the proofs show how the parts systematically contribute to fixing interpretive truth conditions. Substituting another predicate would not do that, except insofar as we *knew that it was coextensive with*

*the truth predicate* and *we knew the axioms met the above condition* (see (Lepore and Ludwig 2011) and (Ludwig 2012) for further discussion).

Chapter three takes up possible worlds semantics and modality. Soames identifies possible worlds with world-states construed as world representing properties. This allows both possible and *impossible* world-states. On the assumption that some objects have essential properties, metaphysically necessary truths outstrip analytically necessary truths. Once on the table, this shows how something could be epistemically possible (interpreted here as what is left open by what can be known apriori) but metaphysically impossible: e.g., that Shakespeare is not Bacon, if true, is necessarily true, but it cannot (it seems—see below though) be established a priori. This suffices to establish the existence of the necessary aposteriori. If the analytic is apriori, it shows also that what's necessary is not ipso facto analytic.

Soames draws on an argument of Salmon's for the conclusion that neither S4 nor S5 gives the logic of metaphysical necessity. Suppose a ship *s* to have originated from material *m*. Assume *s* could have originated from slightly different material, but not from too different material. Transitivity will fail at some point on the way from nearby to far worlds with respect to the number of planks used in constructing an *s*-like ship that are identical with the actual planks used. However, one might well wonder whether the problem lies with S5 or S4 being the logic of necessity or with the first premise of this argument. The prima facie equally plausible assumption that a ship *s* is identical with temporal successors which don't differ too much in their parts but is not identical with temporal successors that do leads to the failure of the transitivity of identity. That's too high a price for the assumption.

Turn now to the work this framework might do in semantics. The idea is that in saying what it takes for a sentence to be true at *any* world in the intended model, we give its meaning. Soames says we must interpret 'world' here to pick out epistemically, not metaphysically, possible worlds. The (unstated) reason is that it is epistemically possible worlds that are linked to semantic competence. In any case, the trouble is that it is too coarse-grained: sentences different in meaning may be true in all the same epistemically possible worlds, and so knowledge of modal truth conditions falls short of understanding meaning.

I elide the discussion of possible worlds semantics for counterfactuals to turn to Montague semantics. Montague's project was to apply formal techniques directly to natural languages without regimentation into formal or semi-formal languages. (Some of the exposition could be more perspicuous—the application of Rule 2 on p. 65 is not as clearly expressed as it could be, e.g.; and the rules are not given explicitly and so their application will have air of mystery about it for the uninitiated.) Soames is very good on the basic structure of the approach (why it recommends assimilating names to quantified noun phrases, e.g.) and its problems, one of which is that it assimilates names to quantified noun phrases, which is implausible, and in any case makes no provision for the clear possibility of simple referring terms in a language. This casts doubt on the theoretical perspective that insists on an isomorphism between syntactical and semantical rules. And finally and most importantly, as Soames points out, Montague's approach, in characterizing intensions as functions from worlds to extensions, characterizes them too coarsely to capture all distinctions in meaning.

Chapter four is largely concerned with work of Saul Kripke on necessity, analyticity and apriority, and connected issues with proper names and natural kind terms, and David Kaplan's work on demonstratives and indexicals. The discussion is organized around five "traditional" theses undermined by Kripke and Kaplan's work: (i) that the meaning of a term is never its referent, (ii) that the meaning of a term is a sense a speaker associates with it which makes transparent sameness and difference of meaning on the basis of internal factors, (iii) that the necessary, apriori, and analytic coincide, (iv) that no objects have essential properties in themselves, and (v) that the job of philosophy is to discover apriori truth through conceptual analysis. One might doubt that the tradition was quite so monolithic or unsubtle as represented here, but the theses serve as a useful foil for the discussion.

Soames provides an excellent compact discussion of Kripke's work on the relations between necessity, apriority and analyticity, as well as the brief for names being directly referring. In this story typically natural kind terms are assimilated to proper names (a mistake, I think, and Soames agrees (Soames 2002, p. 248) though he does not raise the issue here), and Soames says the meaning of, e.g., 'green' is the property *being green* (whatever surface structural reflectance property explains the respects in which we classify things under the heading 'green'—call it  $SSR_{green}$ ). 'x is green' is true of something iff it has the property being green.

This story about natural kind terms and the acceptance of essential properties are each supposed to provide a route to the necessary aposteriori. If we allow that anything that is a human being is so essentially (or anything of that general form), then since it is aposteriori which things are human beings, there are some aposteriori necessities of the form: Necessarily, if H exists, then H is a human being (interpreted so: for any world w, if H exists in w, then H is a human being in w—where 'H' names a particular human being). This is derived from the claim that H is a human being (aposteriori), and the claim that anything which is a human being is essentially so (apriori).

But the route from the story about natural kind terms is less clear if we say that the meaning of 'green', say, is being green. For then *that anything green has the property  $SSR_{green}$*  is the proposition *that anything that has the property of being green has the property of  $SSR_{green}$* . If we take terms of the form 'the property of being G' to introduce properties into predicative positions in the proposition (whatever that comes to), then this expresses the same proposition as: anything that has the property of being  $SSR_{green}$  has the property of  $SSR_{green}$ . And it seems that that is knowable apriori. This parallels a point that Soames himself makes about 'Mark Twain = Samuel Clemens', namely, that this expresses the same proposition as 'Mark Twain = Mark Twain'. If we allow a proposition is knowable apriori, as Soames explicitly does, if there is some way in which it can be presented to us so that it is apriori, then the proposition expressed by 'MT = SC' is apriori. But the same point then can be extended to necessary propositions expressed by sentences involving natural kind terms. Perhaps the point extends even to negations of identity statements, if we allow languages in which no distinct names can name the same thing, for then the proposition that Kaplan  $\neq$  Kripke can be presented in a way that enables one to know that it is true without empirical investigation. This is language relative, but we can note that even in the case of 'MT = MT' we have to know we express this in a

language which allows the second use of a name to refer to the same as the first in a sentence.

Soames provides a good brief sketch of Kaplan's model theory for a language with indexicals and demonstratives and the distinction between character and content, and explains clearly why the model theory doesn't have the resources to mark Kaplan's distinction between direct reference and the general notion of rigid designation. Direct reference is defined as having a referent as semantic content. Rigid designation is defined in terms of having the same referent at all contexts of evaluation where it exists (and nothing distinct). When these definitions are applied to 'dthat(the F)', 'dthat(the F)' is a directly referring term, while 'the actual F' is not, though both are rigid. But both end up represented by a constant function from contexts of evaluation to referent.

In any case, this overlooks a further distinction between a term whose referent is introduced into a proposition but is also understood to be determined in a context by descriptive material available from understanding it (like 'dthat(the F)'), and one whose referent in a context is given simply by an assignment in the language to the term. Both terms introduce objects into propositions, but one does so via semantically associated descriptive content. In a straightforward sense, only a term whose referent in a context is given simply by an assignment (this second case) is directly referring. This, however, can be taken to support a point that Soames makes about Kaplan's logic of demonstratives, namely, that since it introduces 'dthat(D)' to model demonstratives, where 'dthat' is syncategorematic, it does not actually capture the contextually invariant meaning of 'that' and other demonstratives.

Chapter 5 begins the new directions part of the book. It takes up two main topics. One is a new theory of propositions. The other is a new model for possible worlds semantics for modal statements.

The new theory of propositions is discussed at greater length in Soames 2010, and I have discussed this book in (Ludwig 2012), so I will be brief here. It is motivated by rejection of the Frege-Russell view that propositions have their representational contents independently of us and are what it is in virtue of which our cognitive states and sentences have their representational features. Propositions are still needed for roles as the referents of complement clauses of attitudes reports and of various terms in natural language. But they are to get their representational content by virtue of their relation to our "inherently representational cognitive states" (p. 116). Soames considers and rejects a deflationary account and advocates instead a "Cognitive-realist" approach: "Since propositions are needed to track cognitive acts, why not take them to be *event-types* instances of which involve those very acts?" (p. 121). Then the idea is that for "a proposition to represent the world as being a certain way is for any *possible* predication that tokens it to do so" (p. 123). The event-types are types of acts of predication in thought, and complex propositions are constructed out of such acts. Thus, to say that John believes that Mary is awake is roughly to say that John instantiates an act-type (we could as well say state-type, perhaps) of the type referred to by 'that Mary is awake' (interpreted relative to the context) in, as we might put it, the belief way. This is an elegant and clever solution to the design problem as Soames develops it, though more details need to be worked out, and one might wonder about the psychological reality of the proposal, whether, that is, such act-types really figure

in our thinking about the thoughts of others, though it certainly is an advance over the deflationary account and traditional accounts on this score.

As noted above, Soames advocates replacing possible worlds with possible world-states. Soames presents possible world-states as “useful tools for regimenting modal reasoning, investigating modal claims, and formulating systematic theories of the truth conditions of modal sentences and propositions” (p. 130), but he denies that the meanings of sentences containing ordinary modal expressions are given by possible-world specifications of their meanings. World-states are properties specifying ways the world could be. They can specify particular objects, not just qualitative properties. They can, as noted, include metaphysically impossible world-states. The actual world is a maximal world-describing property, the one that the world instantiates. (The world then is not the actual world but what instantiates it. The collection of things is not going to make true anything, so is the world then “everything that is the case”?) Metaphysically possible world-states are those that “could have been instantiated” and those epistemically possible are “those one cannot know apriori not to be instantiated” (p. 124). World-states are analogous to Carnap’s state descriptions in *Meaning and Necessity*. Atomic sentences are replaced by atomic propositions expressed by atomic formulas and their negations. A world-description is a set of atomic propositions or negations of them. It is complete if every atomic proposition or its negation is included, consistent if the propositions cannot be known apriori not to be true. A world-state  $w$  is the property of making the propositions in a world-description true;  $w$  is instantiated iff every member of the description is true (and their apriori consequences) while the objects in the universe include only those required by it. The actual world is the instantiated world-state. Something is necessary (or possible) at  $w$  iff it is true at all (or some) of the world-states metaphysically possible from  $w$ . More must be added to accommodate causal and explanatory statements and attitude contexts—so we add enough to answer every question for a complete world-state, at least relevant to the inquiry at hand.

On this view world-states are constructed out of properties, relations, and individuals. This obviates the need for mere possibilia of any stripe in constructing a semantic model for statements about necessity and possibility. This looks like an attractive alternative to possible worlds because it is clearer what we are quantifying over are. But a problem arises for such approaches if they restrict objects to those that are, for there could have been contingent existents that don’t exist (and more than do). We could allow into our domain mere possibilia, but aside from the mystery of what these are, this undercuts the attraction of the approach as an alternative to quantifying over possible worlds. Soames confronts this problem, and responds by saying that we need to quantify over objects and world-states that don’t exist, and he says: “Although this is controversial, the idea that we can refer to, and quantify over, only things that exist is, I believe, an unfounded philosophical prejudice at variance with our ordinary thought and talk” (p. 128). Soames notes that we can quantify over things that don’t exist *now*, and he suggests that with this model in mind we should not hesitate to accept quantifying over things that don’t exist *actually*. The trouble with the analogy is that we understand quantifying over things that don’t exist now as a matter of quantifying over things that exist at other times, but we don’t deny the existence of other times. But we are denying the existence of the individuals required to make sense of the world-states that play the role of times, since those individuals

are to partly constitute them. Hence, we must deny that there are such world-states, if we deny there are those constituents, and the analogy fails. (One could deny that times other than the present exist, of course, but on this view it is hardly clear we can legitimately quantify over things at “times” other than the present.)

Chapter six is concerned with the relations between modal claims and apriority, using the discussion of world-states in chapter five to extend the discussion of their relations in chapter four.

A consequence of the approach developed in chapter five, it seems, is that the proposition *that p is true at w*, if *p is true at w*, turns out to be *apriori*. For the property *w* is that of making true a certain set of propositions, and if *p* is true at *w*, then it is one of them or an apriori consequence of them. And such propositions are true at every world.

This appears to raise a puzzle. The reasoning (my rendition) can be laid out as follows (where we use ‘@’ to refer to the actual world).

1. It is apriori that, for any *p*, *p* is true iff *p* is true at *the actual world*.
2. Therefore, it is apriori that, for any *p*, *p* is true iff *p* is true at @ (from 1).
3. For any *p*, propositions  $q_1 \dots q_n$ , if *p* is true at the world state that is the property of making true  $\{q_1, q_2, \dots\}$ , then it is *apriori that p* is true at the world that is the property of making true  $\{p_1, p_2, \dots\}$ .
4. Therefore, for any *p*, *w*, if *p* is true at *w*, then it is apriori that *p* is true at *w* (from 3).
5. Therefore, for any *p*, if *p* is true at @, then it is apriori that *p* is true at @ (from 4).
6. For any proposition *p*, set of propositions *Q*, if *p* is an apriori consequence *Q*, and every proposition in *Q* is apriori, then *p* is apriori.
7. For any *q*, that *q* is true is an apriori consequence of the proposition that for any *p*, *p* is true iff *p* is true at @, and the proposition that *q* is true at @.
8. Therefore, for any *q*, if *q* is true, *q* is apriori (from 2, 5, 6, 7).

But clearly *not all true propositions are apriori*. Soames’s solution is to deny (6), namely, that all apriori consequences of propositions that are apriori are themselves apriori. Thus, we can know the proposition *that p is true at @* apriori, and we can know apriori that *the proposition that p is true* is an apriori consequence of *the proposition that p is true at @* and (2). But it is consistent with this that we cannot know *that p is true* apriori.

How is this possible? A proposition *p* is apriori (as Soames puts it) iff there is some way of entertaining it on which one can come to know *p* but not on the basis of empirical evidence. (A natural question to raise about this is whether we should think the proposition as such is what is apriori rather than thinking of a proposition as being apriori relative to a way of presenting it—more on this thought later.) This principle can be employed as follows to explain how (6) could be false. There is a way of entertaining the proposition *that p is true at @*, which puts one in a position to know it apriori, namely, by having ‘@’ presented as the property that makes such and such a set of propositions true. (We will raise a concern about this momentarily.) But the trouble is that one can know *that* but not know that @ so presented is instantiated, even though one knows that the actual world is instantiated. For picking out the actual world as the actual world (the property that the world instantiates) picks it out (on this

view) indexically, and so not in way that makes clear what set of propositions it makes true.

A simpler way of putting the essence of it is this. Suppose @ is a proposition from which every truth about the world follows—the world proposition. I know apriori (it seems) that for any  $p$ ,  $p$  is true iff  $p$  is entailed by @. That @ entails  $p$  is (it seems) apriori. But I am not thereby in a position to infer apriori any contingent truth. And I am not because I have only introduced a term that refers to the world-proposition, but I have not presented it in a way that allows me to grasp it. And even if I grasp it, I do not know that what I grasp is the referent of '@'. So, that @ entails  $p$  is apriori, but not as so presented, and if presented so that I can see that the proposition is apriori, I do not know that it is instantiated.

But when we put it this way, we might wonder whether it is true that the proposition *that @ entails  $p$*  is a priori. This is so, it seems—given the characterization of what it is for a proposition to be apriori given above—only if this is the same proposition as the proposition that might be expressed by ‘the proposition that A and B and ... entails  $p$ ’, where following ‘the proposition that’ we have a conjunction which expresses  $P$ . And this seems far from clear. If we deny this, then we can deny that *that @ entails  $p$  is true* is a priori.

The same question can be raised in connection with the original form of the puzzle. Two moves are needed to get the result. First, we must be able to substitute '@' for ‘the actual world-state’ *salva veritate*, to get from (1) to (2). Second, we must be able to substitute a term ‘ $w$ ’ for ‘the world state that is the property of making true  $\{p_1, p_2, \dots\}$ ’, where these pick out the same world state, *salva veritate*, to get from (3) to (4).

With respect to the second, is it clear that '@' and ‘the property of making true  $\{p_1, p_2, \dots\}$ ’ contribute the same thing to propositions expressed by sentences containing them? This seems *prima facie* implausible. In fact, in a footnote (n2, p. 133), Soames denies they contribute the same, on the grounds that one is an articulated term and other is Millian. But he claims that if one knows the proposition expressed by ‘S(the world-state that ...)', and @ = the world-state that ..., then one knows the proposition expressed by ‘S(@)’ (though not vice versa, which is why they don’t express the same proposition).

Strictly speaking, Soames must maintain that the substitution can be made *salva veritate* not just for ‘knows’ but also for ‘knows *apriori*’. However, the principle that you know a proposition apriori iff there some way in which it is presented to you on which you can know it nonempirically cannot be applied here to get to the conclusion because *that S(@)* is not the same proposition as *that S(the world-state that ...)*. Grant that if one *believes*, for example, that the proposition that arithmetic is reducible to logic is true, then one *believes* that Logicism is true. Still, if the propositions believed are distinct, it is not clear what justifies the corresponding principle with respect to *apriori* knowledge. If in fact the proposition that  $p$  is true at @ is not something one can come to know apriori in any way that proposition is presented to one, then the right conclusion would seem to be that even if one can be credited with believing or even knowing that S(@) given that one believes or knows S(the world state ...), where @ is that world state, it does not follow from knowing S(the world state ...) apriori that one knows S(@) apriori.

However, perhaps this is too quick. For consider whether one can know that  $p$  is true at dthat(the world-state that ...). It would appear that one can know this a priori,

and if the proposition expressed is just that  $p$  is true at  $w$ , where  $w$  is the world-state that ..., then it would seem that there is a way the proposition can be presented to one that enables one to know it apriori, in which case one can know apriori that  $p$  is true at  $w$ , if  $p$  is true at  $w$ , and, hence, one can know apriori that  $p$  is true at  $@$ , if  $p$  is true at  $@$ . In the same way, one can know, letting '@' now refer to the world-proposition, that  $dthat(\text{the proposition that } A \text{ and } B \dots)$  entails  $p$ , where  $@$  is the proposition that  $A$  and  $B \dots$ , and so know apriori that  $@$  entails  $p$ .

Then, we can reason from premise 3 plus the proposition that

for any  $p$ , propositions  $q_1 \dots q_n$ , if *it is apriori that*  $p$  is true at the world that is the property of making true  $\{p_1, p_2, \dots\}$ , then *it is apriori that*  $p$  is true at  $dthat(\text{the world that is the property of making true } \{p_1, p_2, \dots\})$ .

and the principle that

for any proposition  $p$ , it is apriori that  $p$  if there is a way in which  $p$  can be presented to one on which it is apriori, i.e., its truth can be known apriori.

to the subconclusion 4, for any  $p$ ,  $w$ , if  $p$  is true at  $w$ , then it is apriori that  $p$  is true at  $w$ , etc.

It is clear that what turns the trick is the idea that a proposition is apriori if there is a way of presenting it which puts one in a position to know it is true a priori. What you can know about the entailment potential of a proposition, however, is going to depend on how it is presented to you. If the proposition  $p$  is presented as  $dthat(\text{the proposition that } \dots)$ , then  $p$  is presented in a way that enables grasp of the content of the proposition. Now consider the actual world proposition  $@$ . Let's say that this can be presented as  $dthat(\text{the actual world proposition})$  or  $dthat(\text{the proposition that } \dots)$ . The difficulty is that the way it is presented in the second case gives one (in principle, let's say) grasp of its content, but the way it is presented in the first case does not, and from neither way can one infer that the other way picks out *the same proposition*. So though we might know apriori that  $p$  is entailed by  $dthat(\text{the proposition that } \dots)$ , and we might know apriori that  $p$  is true iff  $p$  is entailed by  $dthat(\text{the actual world proposition})$ —so that, we say, we know apriori both that  $p$  and that  $q$  iff  $p$ —still we cannot infer that  $q$  from this because knowing each apriori is really courtesy of the way the propositions they are about are presented to one, and those ways aren't connected apriori.

Returning to the first transition, what justifies the step from (1) to (2)? It is not justified if we take 'the actual world' to be a genuine description, such as 'the instantiated world-state'. We must take it to introduce an object directly into a proposition expressed by a sentence containing it. Taking it as an indexical requires taking worlds to be features of contexts, but unless one has a Lewisian view, possible worlds are not literally features of contexts of utterance. But all we need is a way of understanding 'the actual world' that introduces the instantiated world state into a proposition (for the point of the argument, it need not be how 'the actual world' should actually be understood). Kaplan's device ' $dthat(\dots)$ ' will serve for this purpose. We can take 'the actual world' to function like ' $dthat(\text{the world-state that is instantiated})$ '. Then ' $S(\text{the actual world})$ ' expresses the same proposition as ' $S(@)$ ', where '@' refers directly to the world-state that is instantiated. Can we know apriori the proposition expressed by ' $p$  is true iff  $p$  is true at  $dthat(\text{the world-state that is$

instantiated)? Yes, provided that this doesn't entail anything aposteriori. Then, if we allow that a proposition is apriori if there is a way of presenting it on which one can come to know it is true without empirical investigation, the step from (1) to (2) is secured.

On the relation of apriority to epistemic possibility, Soames say that it is natural to think that apriori propositions are those true at all epistemically possible worlds, but that that this isn't so. Rather, if a proposition is true at all epistemically possible worlds, then it is apriori, but not vice versa. Why? For a contingent truth  $p$ , the proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$  is true at @, Soames says, is contingent, but a priori. If contingent, there is a metaphysically possible world at which it is false. Since it is metaphysically possible, Soames reasons, it could have been instantiated, and so is coherent, and so is epistemically possible. So a proposition can be knowable apriori and not be true at all epistemically possible states.

Earlier, Soames characterizes epistemically possible states as "those one cannot know apriori not to be instantiated" (p. 124). Let  $P$  be a contingent proposition. Let (E) be the proposition that  $P$  is true iff  $P$  is true at @. A world at which  $\sim$ (E) is true is epistemically possible only if one cannot know apriori that  $w$  is not instantiated. One can know (E) apriori, and that (E) is contingent apriori (let's grant). It seems then that one can know apriori that for any world  $w$ , if  $\sim$ (E) is true at  $w$ , then  $w$  is not @. But this doesn't entail that we can know of any particular world  $w^*$  that it is not actual. For this would require us to know of a particular world  $w^*$  that  $\sim$ (E) is true at  $w^*$ . It does not appear that we can pick out possible worlds other than the actual world except by picking them out as the property of making a certain set of propositions true. If we pick out  $w^*$  as the property of making  $\{p_1, p_2, \dots\}$  true, then if we knew that  $\sim$ (E) was true at  $w^*$ , we'd have to know both that  $P$  is true/false at  $w^*$  (which we can grant we could know apriori) but also the proposition that *that  $P$  is false/true at @*, and, hence, that *that  $P$  is false/true at @* is true at  $w^*$ . We can't know that  $P$  is false/true at @ apriori. So we can't know apriori that  $\sim$ (E) is true at  $w^*$  and it follows that (E) is apriori but epistemically possible.

According to (5) above, however, if  $P$  is true/false at @, it is apriori that  $P$  is true/false at @. From the apriori proposition that  $P$  is false/true at  $w^*$  and the (as we are supposing) apriori proposition that that  $P$  is true/false at @ is true at  $w^*$ , it follows apriori that  $\sim$ (E) is true at  $w^*$ . As we have seen, Soames avoids any untoward result by denying (6).

Let's now step back a bit to ask after the source of these surprising results. The source is the fact that singular propositions are stripped of content needed to determine their truth value (in the sense of what is epistemically required minimally to entertain them) when it hinges just on the identities of certain objects, whether particulars or abstract objects like propositions, but that the way they are presented to us can supply information to fill the gap. The proposition that Mark Twain is Mark Twain (assuming for the sake of argument that proper names are directly referring terms) involves a single individual. But it is the form of the sentence that expresses it (relative to the language) that tells us it involves a single individual, i.e. the repetition of the same name together with the fact that it used to refer to the same individual. We do not have "access" to the proposition except through the sentence that expresses it. It is that way of being presented with the proposition that puts us in a position to say that it is true without empirical investigation. A different sentence may express the

same proposition, such as 'Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens'. This "access" doesn't put us in a position to know that the sentence is true. What about the proposition? Is the proposition itself apriori or not? We have a choice between saying that it is in some mode of "access" to it puts us in a position to see it is true without empirical investigation (the route Soames takes—which requires then denying (6)), or saying that the proposition per se isn't, but a proposition as accessed in a certain way is, and thus to reject the traditional view that aprioricity attaches to propositions per se (at least in all instances). This latter route requires relativizing the principle that what is apriori entailed by what is apriori is apriori to linguistic "modes of presentation": if  $p$  is apriori relative to  $\phi$  and  $p$  relative to  $\phi$  apriori entails  $q$  relative to  $\varphi$ , then  $q$  is apriori relative to  $\varphi$ . Thus, we don't so much reject (6) on this view as offer a refined version of it that takes into account what the tradition overlooked.

The results above, reinterpreted in this light, seem less surprising. When we turn to propositions that contain propositions as objects (in an "object position"), the proposition contained as object may be presented in different ways just as a person may be, and, in particular, in different linguistic guises. Some enable us to grasp the proposition referred to and some do not, even when they simply deliver the proposition as an object. When we grasp the proposition referred to, we may be in a position to say that the containing proposition is true nonempirically, as in the proposition that  $p$  is entailed by  $d$ that(the proposition that ...), when '...' can be seen to entail  $p$ . If  $d$ that(the proposition that ...) = the actual world proposition, do we know the proposition that  $p$  is entailed by the actual world proposition a priori? If we say apriority in this case must be relativized to a way of presenting a proposition contained as object in another proposition, then the answer is that the question is not precise enough, for it does not specify relative to what linguistic vehicle we are to consider the question. At best we can say that the proposition that  $p$  is entailed by the actual world proposition is a priori relative to one way of presenting it and not so relative to another, and it is completely unmysterious given what it comes to.

Perhaps the choice between the two routes here, each of which recognizes the same facts, is in the final analysis a verbal one. Still, relativizing the apriori to the way a proposition is presented to one, that is, in particular, to its linguistic vehicle, makes clearer what mechanism is involved, and helps highlight an inadequacy in the traditional view, and so, in my view, is less apt to be misleading.

Chapter six also contains a subtle discussion of whether singular thoughts provide instances of the contingent apriori, but I will pass over it without discussion.

Chapter 7 closes the book by targeting the traditional view that in assertively uttering a sentence (where no implicatures cancel its standard force) one asserts its content in the context (and perhaps some obviously relevant consequences and presuppositions). Soames argues, on the contrary, that many utterances are semantically incomplete and require pragmatic enrichment to yield a proposition. On the alternative conception he advocates, the meaning of a sentence imposes a set of constraints on what normal, literal uses assert; when  $S$  is semantically incomplete, the meaning doesn't determine a proposition itself, but is pragmatically supplemented to express a thought; and when semantically complete, normal, literal uses assert its content as well as pragmatic enrichments of it.

Standing back from the book's details, to which I have by no means done full justice, this is, in my view, a very valuable (though not at all introductory) overview,

from a particular perspective, to be sure, of the trajectory on the philosophy of language from Frege to the present. Not every important development is represented, and not everyone will be on board with seeing propositions as having such a central role in illuminating meaning. But it covers a remarkable amount of ground in a short space, both presenting and contributing to an important network of themes that have shaped the philosophical study of language in the analytic tradition.

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