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Synthese (2019) 196:1453–1473
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-016-1219-5

S.I.: UNITY OF STRUCTURED PROPOSITIONS

Act theories and the attitudes

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Received: 18 January 2016 / Accepted: 31 August 2016 / Published online: 20 September 2016
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Abstract Theories of propositions as complex acts, of the sort recently defended by Peter Hanks and Scott Soames, make room for the existence of distinct propositions which nonetheless represent the same objects as having the same properties and standing in the same relations. This theoretical virtue is due to the claim that the complex acts with which propositions are identified can include particular ways of cognizing, or referring to, objects and properties. I raise two questions about this sort of view—one about what it means to stand in a propositional attitude relation to a complex act of this sort, and one about which ways of cognizing can be parts of propositions. Both questions turn out to be difficult for the complex act theorist to answer in a satisfactory way.

Keywords Propositions · Unity · Acts

A leading recent theory of propositions takes them to be certain sorts of complex cognitive acts. This theory has been defended, in different forms, in a series of recent books and articles by Peter Hanks and Scott Soames.[1] This theory has, justifiably, attracted a great deal of interest, in large part because of two theoretical virtues which Hanks and Soames have claimed for the view.

The first is that the theory promises to explain the representational properties of propositions, rather than taking these to be primitive and inexplicable features of propositions. While there are differences between the way that Hanks and Soames think that this explanation is supposed to run, in both cases the idea is to explain the

[1] See Hanks (2011, 2015) and Soames (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).

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representational properties of propositions in terms of more fundamental facts about the representational properties of subjects, or token acts of those subjects.[2]

The second theoretical virtue claimed for the view is that it promises to solve one of the most fundamental unsolved problems in the philosophy of mind and language: the problem of explaining how a pair of propositions can be genuinely distinct despite representing just the same objects as having just the same properties and standing in just the same relations. These are, in Soames' terms, 'cognitively distinct but representationally identical propositions.'

Hanks and Soames have different, but closely related, views about how the theory of propositions as acts makes room for distinctions between propositions of this sort. In what follows I'll be following Soames' exposition of the view, though some of what I have to say will apply to Hanks' theory of propositions as well. My aim will be to show that the very aspect of the theory which makes room for distinct but representationally identical propositions leads to a pair of difficult questions for act theories of propositions.

1 Distinct but representationally identical propositions

Let's consider two much discussed types of sentence pairs, whose proper treatment seems to cry out for distinct but representationally identical propositions:

[1] I am on fire.

[2] Jeff Speaks is on fire.

[3] Hesperus is Hesperus.

[4] Hesperus is Phosphorus.

In both cases, we can argue that these familiar pairs of sentences express different propositions by embedding the relevant sentences in attitude ascriptions. It is not difficult to describe situations which generate the intuition that sentences like the following can differ in truth-value:

[5] I believe that I am on fire.

[6] I believe that Jeff Speaks is on fire.

It is plausible (though not, of course, undeniable) that the best explanation of these intuitions about truth-value is that the embedded sentences—(1) and (2)—express different propositions, and that for this reason (5) and (6) ascribe different beliefs.

[2] See especially Hanks (2015, Chap. 3) and Soames (2015, Chap. 2). For criticism, see Caplan et al. (2014).

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And, as is well-known, we can give a parallel argument for the conclusion that (3) and (4) express different propositions based on the premise that sentences like

[7] The ancients believed that Hesperus is Hesperus.

[8] The ancients believed that Hesperus is Phosphorus.

can differ in truth-value.[3]

What one means by 'express' here will, of course, depend on how one interprets speaker intuitions about the differing truth-values of (5)/(6) and (7)/(8). If one takes these intuitions to track the differing truth-values of the semantic contents of the ascriptions, then one might take these intuitions to support the view that the embedded sentences semantically express different propositions. If one instead takes them to track the differing truth-values of the propositions the ascriptions would typically be used to assert or convey, then one might take these intuitions to support the view that the embedded sentences would typically be used to assert or convey different propositions. I mention this point only to set it aside: the debate between semantic and pragmatic responses to the problem posed by pairs of sentences like the above will be orthogonal to the topics I want to discuss. I will be assuming that, in one of the above senses of 'express', we want to be able to explain how pairs like (1)/(2) and (3)/(4) could express different propositions.

But the claim that these pairs of sentences express different propositions presents theorists with an uncomfortable, and much discussed, dilemma. On the one hand, they might take these sentences to express Russellian propositions. But then it seems that these pairs of sentences must express the same proposition, since they differ only by the substitution of coreferential simple singular terms, and, according to standard Russellian views, the semantic content of a simple singular term is the object to which it refers.

On the other hand, they might take these sentences to express Fregean propositions, whose constituents are not objects, properties, and relations, but modes of presentation of objects, properties, and relations. But then one has to explain what, exactly, these modes of presentation are. And it has proved difficult to give a theory of modes of presentation on which they play the theoretical roles that candidates for the semantic contents of natural language expressions would have to play—which has led many theorists to try, if possible, to do without them.

This is the familiar dilemma which many people working the philosophy of mind and language have, in one guise or another, had to face. It is also a dilemma which Soames thinks that his theory of propositions can help us to transcend, by letting pairs

[3] There are of course other routes to the conclusions that these pairs of sentences express different propositions. Many have argued that (1)/(2) express different propositions, on the grounds that believing what is expressed by (1) might have a more immediate connection to action than believing what is expressed by (2). And many have argued that (3)/(4) express different propositions, on the grounds that (3) is trivial, uninformative, and a priori, whereas (4) is non-trivial, potentially informative, and a posteriori.

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like (1)/(2) and (3)/(4) express different propositions without incurring the troublesome commitments of traditional Fregeanism.[4]

Here is what Soames says about the distinction between propositions like those expressed by (1) and (2):

> The new analysis springing from the cognitive conception of propositions distinguishes predicating P of an agent A identified as predication target *in the first-person way* from predicating P of A *however identified*. Since doing the first is also doing the second, but not conversely, the acts are different. Since the same property is predicated of the same thing, they are cognitively distinct but representationally identical propositions.[5]

This provides the key, in Soames' view to explaining the difference between the propositions expressed by (1) and (2). Propositions are complex acts, which contain several sub-acts. And the propositions expressed by (1) and (2) have some of their sub-acts in common. Both, for example, include the act of cognizing the property of being on fire, and the act of predicating the property of being on fire of a certain object. But they also differ in at least one of their sub-acts. While both include an act of cognizing the object in question, the proposition expressed by (1), but not the proposition expressed by (2), includes the act of cognizing that object in a first-person way.

Let's use '(1P)' as a name for the proposition expressed by (1) and '(2P)' as name for the proposition expressed by (2). Then we can represent the complex act which is the proposition expressed by (1) as follows:

$$(1P) = \textsc{pred}\langle \text{on fire, JS}\rangle \oplus \text{1stP(JS)} \oplus \textsc{cog}(\text{being on fire})$$

where 'PRED' stands for an act of predication, 'COG' stands for an act of cognizing an object or property, '1stP' stands for an act of cognizing an object in a first-person way, and '$\phi \oplus \psi$' stands for the complex act which includes performing ϕ and ψ.[6] The bare singular proposition which attributes being on fire to the relevant object might then be represented as

$$(2P) = \textsc{pred}\langle \text{on fire, JS}\rangle \oplus \textsc{cog}(\text{JS}) \oplus \textsc{cog}(\text{being on fire})$$[7]

Since one can think of JS in the first person way only if one cognizes JS, one can, as Soames says, perform the first act only if one performs the second. But one can

[4] Remember the above remarks about the neutral sense of 'express.' Soames, now as in his previous work, takes pairs like (1)/(2) and (3)/(4) to semantically express the same proposition. He's thus out to provide a pragmatic solution to Frege's puzzle. But his theoretical apparatus could be used just as well by someone who took (1)/(2) and (3)/(4) to semantically express different propositions.

[5] Soames (2015, p. 46). Emphasis in the original.

[6] There are problems with understanding the nature of these complex acts which parallel in certain ways the traditional problem of the unity of the proposition. The problems to be discussed in what follows would arise even if these problems could be solved. For discussion of the problem of the unity of the proposition when propositions are thought of as complex acts, see Speaks (ms).

[7] This is a slight oversimplification. Given that (2) involves a name, the proposition it expresses, in the relevant sense of 'express,' will contain a Millian mode of presentation of the sort discussed below. Since that is irrelevant to issues involving first person propositions, I stick with the simpler rendering of (2P) here.

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perform the second act but not the first if one cognizes JS in something other than the first-person way. And this seems to be exactly what we should want, since it seems that entertaining a first person proposition entails entertaining the corresponding singular proposition, but not the converse.

We can, and Soames does, tell a parallel story about the difference between (3) and (4). The difference is that there we appeal not to acts of cognizing objects in first-person ways, but rather to what Soames calls 'Millian modes of presentation.' A Millian mode of presentation is an act of cognizing an object by using a certain name. So, for example, 'Hesperus' is associated with the act of cognizing Venus via the name 'Hesperus', whereas 'Phosphorus' is associated with the act of cognizing Venus via the name 'Phosphorus.' This gives us the resources to distinguish between the propositions expressed by (3) and (4), which might on this view be represented as follows:

(3P) = PRED⟨=,⟨Venus, Venus⟩⟩ ⊕ HESP(Venus) ⊕ HESP(Venus) ⊕ COG(=)
(4P) = PRED⟨=,⟨Venus, Venus⟩⟩ ⊕ HESP(Venus) ⊕ PHOSPH(Venus) ⊕ COG(=)

where HESP(Venus) and PHOSPH(Venus) are, respectively, the acts of thinking of about Venus using the name 'Hesperus' and the act of thinking about Venus using the name 'Phosphorus.'

It is not hard to see how the framework could be extended to other cases that generate puzzles analogous to that posed by the pairs of sentences just discussed, including sentences about the present moment and the actual world, and sentences involving demonstratives.[8] And one can see why Soames thinks of the view as transcending the traditional dichotomy between Russellian and Fregean views. It provides conditions for identity and distinctness of propositions like those given by a Fregean theory, but does so without invoking the apparatus of Fregean sense, and instead makes use only of types of actions which even traditional Russellians must recognize, like acts of referring to objects via use of certain names.

This sketch of Soames' views is enough to bring out the centrality of the 'sub-acts' of propositions—acts of cognizing, or referring to, objects—to his explanation of the possibility of distinct but representationally identical propositions. The distinctness of these propositions is, after all, explained in terms of the distinctness of the relevant sub-acts. And this explanation obviously depends on the fact that the sub-acts of propositions can include not just bare acts of cognizing objects and properties, but also acts of cognizing objects and properties *in a particular way*.

This fact leads us to the two questions on which I want to focus:

(i) What does it take to stand in a propositional attitude relation, like judgement, to a complex act which includes acts of cognizing objects and properties in a particular way?
(ii) Which acts can be parts of propositions? We've seen that propositions can include, not just acts of cognizing objects, but acts of cognizing, or referring to, objects in a particular way. But can any way of cognizing an object be part of a proposition?

[8] See, for discussion, Soames (2015, Chaps. 3–5).

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These are questions to which a fully satisfactory theory of propositions as complex acts owes answers. In the next two sections, I'll argue that these questions are more difficult for the act theorist than it might at first appear.

2 Propositional attitudes toward complex acts

Let's turn first to question (i) and ask what it takes, on an act-theoretic conception of propositions, to judge a proposition. Here is what Soames says:

> To *judge* that B is red is to perform the predication in an affirmative manner, which involves accepting it as a basis for possible action. To affirm or accept that B is red is not to predicate any property of the act, or to make *it* an object of cognition, but for one's performance of it to involve forming, or activating already formed, dispositions to act, both cognitively and behaviorally, toward B in ways conditioned by one's attitudes toward red things.[9]

Soames is surely right that judgement in general cannot require that the subject of the judgement make cognitive acts objects of thought. One can make a judgement about objects in one's perceptual environment, for example, without even being in position to have thoughts about one's own cognitive acts. Cognition does not require meta-cognition. We can state this plausible starting point as follows:

> [Innocence] In general, judging a proposition does not require subjects to have thoughts about cognitive acts.[10]

Given this starting point, Soames' view of judgement is a plausible one. If propositions are acts, then standing in a propositional attitude relation to a proposition will involve performing the act which the proposition is. But of course entertaining a proposition can't be sufficient for judging it, since one can entertain a proposition without in any way endorsing it.[11] So judging a proposition must involve both performing the act which the proposition is, thus entertaining the proposition, and something else.

In this passage, Soames is focused on the question of what it takes to judge a simple singular proposition. Let's now turn to the question of how this account of judgement handles more complex propositions, which include specific ways of cognizing objects.

I'll argue that, when we turn to propositions which involve ways of cognizing, we find that Soames' theory does not make room for certain sorts of cases which are clearly possible: cases in which a subject entertains two distinct but representationally

[9] Soames (2015, p. 18).

[10] The 'in general' qualification is needed, since some propositions are explicitly about cognitive acts—and to judge those, subjects must of course have thoughts about the cognitive acts which those propositions are about.

[11] This is a point of difference between Hanks and Soames. While both identify (at least some) propositions with acts of predication, Hanks takes predicating a property of an object to involve commitment to the object's having that property. Hence performing the act to which a proposition is identical is, for him, sufficient to judge that proposition. (Unless the act takes place in a cancellation context; see Hanks 2015, Chap. 4.) So Hanks is better placed to handle the special case of judgement than is Soames. But problems parallel to the ones discussed below will, I think, arise for a view like Hanks' for propositional attitudes other than judgement. I don't argue the point here, however.

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identical propositions, but judges only one of them. Suppose that we have a pair of distinct but representationally identical propositions, like (1P) and (2P). It certainly seems as though we can imagine a subject who entertains both of these propositions, and judges the second, but not the first, to be true. Just imagine the standard example of a subject seeing someone in a mirror on fire, whom he mistakenly takes to be someone other than himself. In that case he will entertain and judge (2P). He might also think to himself, 'I'm glad that I'm not the one on fire.' In so doing he will entertain (1P)—but of course he does not also judge (1P). Quite the opposite.

The cleanest way to present the problem I have in mind is to begin with an account of judgement which is in one crucial respect simpler than Soames' theory, and show how the problem arises for this simpler view. I do that in the section to follow. In the following two sections, I will consider two initially promising ways of solving the problem (one of which is already implicit in the quote from Soames above) and then show why these modifications to the account of judgement fail to solve the core problem.

2.1 The simple account of judgement

On Soames' view, judging a proposition involves not just entertaining it, but also forming or activating certain dispositions related to its content. The simplest way to develop a theory of judgement of this general sort is as follows:

[J1] For any proposition p which is a monadic predication of a property F of some object o, a subject judges p iff

(1) the subject entertains (performs) p, and
(2) the subject forms or activates dispositions to act toward o in ways conditioned by the subject's attitudes toward things which are F

With this account in hand, consider the sort of scenario sketched above, in which (intuitively) the subject entertains both (1P) and (2P), but judges only (2P).

If [J1] were true, situations like this would be impossible. In the example above, our subject entertains both propositions, and hence satisfies condition (1) for judging both (1P) and (2P). And, if two propositions are both predications of the same property of the same object, then the dispositions relevant to judging one will be identical to the dispositions relevant to judging the other. (Condition (2), after all, only makes reference to the object and property represented by the proposition.) So our subject will satisfy condition (2) for judging (1P) iff she satisfies condition (2) for satisfying (2P). So, since we know that our subject satisfies condition (2) for judging (2P), she must satisfy condition (2) for judging (1P) as well. So it follows from [J1] that a subject who judges (2P) and entertains (1P) must also judge (1P). But that, of course, is a mistake.

Here is a diagnosis of what has gone wrong. We are explaining judgement in terms of the formation or activation of certain dispositions. Let's call the dispositions relevant to judging some proposition p the 'p-relevant dispositions.' Then the problem is that, if the relevant dispositions are specified via condition (2), the following principle will hold:

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[Equivalence] If p, q are representationally identical propositions, then a disposition is p-relevant iff it is q-relevant.

This is because the dispositions relevant to a given proposition's judgement are specified wholly in terms of the objects and properties that proposition represents, and representationally identical propositions represent the same objects as having the same properties.

This leads to a result analogous to—though obviously not the same as—the closure principles which bedevil coarse-grained accounts of propositions, like the view that propositions are sets of possible worlds. That view entails that if a subject stands in the belief relation to one proposition, she also stands in the belief relation to every proposition which is necessarily equivalent to it. (This is trivially true on such views, since on such views if p, q are necessarily equivalent, then $p = q$.) The present problem is that, if [J1] is true, if a subject judges a proposition then she must also judge every proposition that she entertains which is representationally identical to it:

[Closure] If a subject judges p and entertains q then, if p is representationally identical to q, she also judges q.

Since [Closure] is false and [J1] entails it, [J1] should be rejected.

[Closure] results from the conjunction of two assumptions: (i) the claim that the only difference between entertaining and judging is possession of (or activation of) the relevant dispositions and (ii) [Equivalence]. Hence [Closure] can be avoided by rejecting either of these two claims.

Soames' discussion quoted above suggests that he would reject (at least) the first of these assumptions. To make this move is to require not just that the subject satisfy (1) and (2), but also that there be some tight connection between the events in virtue of which the subject satisfies (1) and (2). As Soames puts it, the subject must form or activate the dispositions *in* entertaining the relevant proposition. I'll call approaches of this sort *connection* theories, since they solve our problem by requiring a tighter connection between entertaining the proposition and the relevant dispositions.

The second way out is to reject [Equivalence]. This requires, not that there be a tighter connection between (1) and (2), but that the subject satisfy a condition on her dispositions stronger than (2). Once we encounter propositions which involve a specific way of thinking about an object, it is after all a natural thought that we should require, not just that the subject form dispositions which are conditioned by her attitudes toward F things, but also that the subject form dispositions which are conditioned by her attitudes towards things she is thinking of *in the relevant way*. I'll call these, for lack of a better term, *mode of presentation* theories.

While Soames does not explicitly take this second route, it would not be an unreasonable way for him to develop his view. His discussions of judgement occur in contexts where the focus is not on distinct but representationally identical theories of judgement. It is plausible to think that, once the theory of propositions is complicated to make room for distinct but representationally identical propositions, the theory of judgement should also be complicated in a corresponding way.

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2.2 Connection theories

Let's start with connection theories. As just noted, Soames requires that the subject form or activate the relevant dispositions *in* the act of entertaining the relevant proposition. We might put this as follows:

[J2] For any proposition p which is a monadic predication of a property F of some object o, a subject judges p iff

(1) the subject entertains (performs) p,
(2) the subject forms or activates dispositions to act toward o in ways conditioned by the subject's attitudes toward things which are F, and
(3) the subject does (2) in doing (1)

The obvious question for the proponent of [J2] is what condition (3) amounts to: what does it take to form or activate the relevant dispositions in entertaining the proposition?

Three plausible answers to this question present themselves. (3) might require that there is a temporal connection between (1) and (2), an intentional or representational connection between (1) and (2), or a causal connection between (1) and (2). Let's consider these in turn.

2.2.1 Temporal connection theories

The first approach might render condition (3) simply as

(3*a*) the subject does (2) while doing (1)

But it is pretty clear that this response to the problem is unsatisfactory. One can entertain two distinct but representationally identical propositions at the same time, and judge only one of them. But, on the present theory of judgement, this is impossible.

One way to put this is that, while they do not entail [Closure], temporal connection theories do entail the following weaker, restricted closure thesis:

[RC1] If a subject judges p and entertains q at the same time then, if p is representationally identical to q, she also judges q.

But [RC1] is just as clearly false as [Closure].

2.2.2 Intentional connection theories

At first glance, appealing to representational rather than temporal relations might seem to help. For even if one entertains a pair of distinct but representationally identical propositions at the same time, one might represent one of them but not the other as connected to certain dispositions. So we might understand condition (3) as

(3*b*) the subject represents (2) as connected to (1)

But stating this account of judgement is enough to show that it violates the principle with which we started: [Innocence]. It violates this principle because it requires any subject of a judgement to have thoughts about his own cognitive acts. And this (as I think Soames would agree) is not at all plausible.

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2.2.3 Causal connection theories

So let's turn to the last and I think most plausible sort of connection theory, one which requires that there be a causal connection between the act of entertaining the proposition and the formation or activation of the relevant dispositions. The simplest version of this would be to add the following condition to our account of judgement:

(3*c*) (2) is caused by (1)

A problem which is all too familiar from all manner of causal theories of X shows that this account is unacceptable as it stands. For consider a case in which I wonder whether I am on fire, and decide that I am not, but then in which this act of predication causes me to entertain the proposition that *that guy* (the one seen in the mirror) is on fire, which I then judge to be true. Viewing this case through the lens of Soames's theory, the causal order of the relevant events might be represented as follows:

I entertain (1P) ⇒ I entertain (2P) ⇒ I form the (1P)/(2P) dispositions

(Recall that, given [Equivalence], the (1P)-dispositions and the (2P)-dispositions will be the same.) In this scenario, our simple causal theory delivers the wanted result that I judge (2P). But it also delivers the very unwanted result that I judge (1P). After all, the act of my entertaining (1P) is a cause—even if an indirect one—of my forming the relevant dispositions.[12]

This is, it should be clear, a version of the familiar problem of 'deviant causation': one wants to say that, while the act of entertaining (1P) does indeed cause the formation of the relevant dispositions, it does not do so 'in the right way.' Discussions of this problem in other areas of philosophy show that explaining causation 'in the right way' is no easy matter. Nonetheless, it would not be unreasonable for the causal connection theorist to punt on this problem, and say that, while the distinction may be difficult to explicate, there is a genuine distinction between deviant and non-deviant causation which can come to the aid of causal connection theories. So let's set this sort of problem to the side.

A much more serious problem emerges if we consider cases in which subjects already have (and have activated) the relevant dispositions. So suppose, for example, that I assertively utter

[9] That's Hesperus over there.

I entertain and judge (9P). I must then have either formed or activated the (9P)-dispositions. Suppose that I both form and activate them, and suppose that, while these dispositions are activated, I then assertively utter

[10] That's Phosphorus over there.

[12] This argument relies on the plausible assumption that causation is transitive. This is not, however, an assumption which everyone accepts. But even if causation is not in general transitive, it will presumably still be possible to set up indirect cases of this sort.

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One would think that I thereby entertain and judge (10P). But on the present account of judgement, this is impossible. After all, since (10P) is representationally identical to (9P), the (10P)-dispositions are (given [Equivalence]) identical to the (9P)-dispositions. And those dispositions are already formed and activated. So my act of entertaining (10P) cannot cause me to form or activate the (10P)-dispositions, which means that condition (3*c*) is not satisfied.[13]

This sort of case shows that condition (3*c*) is too strong. It is natural to think that it should be weakened to something like the following:

(3*c*∗) (2) is caused by (1), unless the relevant dispositions were already formed/activated

But this lands us back in the problem that we were trying to avoid. For it makes impossible a situation like the following:

A subject entertains, and judges, (9P), thereby forming and activating the (9P)-dispositions. The subject then entertains (10P), but decides that Hesperus isn't Phosphorus after all, and so does not judge (10P).

This seems to be a coherent scenario; but it is ruled out by the theory of judgement which replaces (3*c*) with (3*c*∗). This is because, on that theory, our subject satisfies all the conditions for judging (10P). She entertains it, satisfying (1); she has formed/activated the (10P)-dispositions (these being, given [Equivalence], the same as the (9P)-dispositions); and, in virtue of these dispositions being already formed/activated by her judging (9P), she satisfies condition (3*c*∗) as well.

As with temporal connection theories, the problem is that while the present approach does avoid [Closure], it still entails a restricted closure principle:

[RC2] If a subject judges p and entertains q then, if p is representationally identical to q and the subject's p-dispositions are already formed/activated, she also judges q.

But, as the example just discussed shows, [RC2] is, like [Closure] and [RC1], false.[14]

2.3 Mode of presentation theories

It is natural at this point to wonder whether our difficulties in finding an adequate account of judgement are traceable to [Equivalence]. It was this principle, which identifies the relevant dispositions of all representationally identical propositions, which

[13] One might reply that we have here a case of causal overdetermination, and that, had the relevant dispositions not already been formed and activated, the act of entertaining (10P) would have formed or activated them. But that won't be in general true; it could be the case that, had the subject not judged (9P) to be true, she would have entertained but not judged (10P).

[14] Might one solve these problems by adopting a 'primitive connection' theory, which takes the 'in doing' relation as a primitive of the theory? An obvious worry is that such a theory would not provide a very information account of judgement. But a more serious worry is that such a theory would seem to be open to the same sort of objection as the causal theories just discussed. Cases in which subjects judge p after the p-relevant dispositions are already formed and activated would require the primitive connection theory to be weakened in a way analogous to (3*c*∗); but this would lead to a closure principle like [RC2].

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led to the various problematic closure principles we have discussed. We can do better, it might seem, if we make the relevant dispositions sensitive, not just to the objects and properties the proposition in question represents, but also to the ways of thinking of objects and properties which those propositions involve.

One natural way to incorporate this thought into our theory of judgement would be as follows:

[J3] For any proposition p which is a monadic predication of a property F of some object o, and which involves thinking of o in way W, a subject judges p iff

(1) the subject entertains (performs) p, and
(2*) in doing (1), the subject forms or activates dispositions to act toward o in ways conditioned by the subject's attitudes toward things which are F and which she thinks of in way W

This might seem to help with the case of (1P) and (2P). I have the attitude of desiring the preservation of things (namely myself) that I think of in a first person way. Given this, our new account of judgement will require that when I make a first person judgement that I am on fire, I must be disposed to act in ways conditioned by my attitude of desiring the preservation of the thing on fire—that is, that I be disposed to immediately put out the fire. But we can imagine that I don't care at all about the welfare of others. In that case I can make a non-first person judgement that someone is on fire—even if that person turns out to be me—without that disposing me to do anything at all. That will then be a case of me judging (2P) without judging (1P)—which is just what we were trying to make room for.

But the impression that [J3] helps here conflates two different interpretations of (2*). The ambiguity in question is a scope ambiguity involving, on the one hand, the subject's attitudes, and, on the other, the quantifier 'the things she thinks of in way W.'

Suppose first that the quantifier has narrow scope with respect to the relevant attitudes. Then (2*) requires that subjects who make judgements have propositional attitudes which are about ways of thinking about things—propositional attitudes which are about, for example, the first person way of thinking, or about Millian modes of presentation. But this—which is just a rejection of [Innocence]—is, for reasons already mentioned, very implausible. To judge a first person proposition, one need not have thoughts about the first way of thinking about objects, and to use a name to refer to an object, one need not think about the type of act of referring to that object using that name. This, after all, is just why Soames aims to give an account of judgement which does not require judging subjects to make cognitive acts objects of thought.

So suppose instead that the quantifier has wide scope with respect to the relevant attitudes. On this interpretation, the subject need not have propositional attitudes about ways of cognizing, which is good. But we avoid this problem only by introducing another. Consider the following condition on ways of thinking about objects:

Ways of thinking W and $W*$ are *extensionally equivalent* for a subject S iff $\forall x$ (S has thought about x in way W iff S has thought about x in way $W*$)

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It is not hard to come up with examples of ways of thinking which are extensionally equivalent for at least some subjects. For most people, for example, the ways of thinking HESP and PHOSPH are extensionally equivalent. The only object I have ever thought of via the name 'Hesperus' is the planet Venus, and the same for the name 'Phosphorus.' Just so, the first person way of thinking and the way of thinking *cognizing an object using the name* '*Jeff Speaks*' are for me extensionally equivalent, since the only thing I think of in the first person way is myself, and likewise for objects I cognize using my name. Of course, these ways of cognizing will not be extensionally equivalent for you.

The key point to notice is that when ways of thinking W, $W*$ are extensionally equivalent for a subject, that subject will have a given attitude toward things he thinks of in way W (on the present wide scope interpretation) iff he also has that attitude toward the things he thinks of in way $W*$. But that means that, in the case of propositions which differ only with respect to ways of cognizing which are extensionally equivalent for the relevant subject, condition (2*) will be equivalent to condition (2). It follows that, even if [J3] does not imply [Closure], it does imply the following restricted closure principle:

> [RC3] If a subject judges p and entertains q then, if p is representationally identical to q and p, q differ only in ways of cognizing that are extensionally equivalent for that subject, she also judges q.

But this restricted closure principle, like [Closure] and the other restricted principles we have considered, is false. A subject can entertain both (3P) and (4P), but judge only the former, despite the fact that these propositions are representationally identical, even if the 'Millian modes of presentation' HESP and PHOSPH are extensionally equivalent for that subject.[15]

So far our focus has just been on the particular account of judgement offered by Soames. But the problems encountered by our two interpretations of [J3], I think, show that there is a general problem for the complex act theorist here. It is very plausible, as Soames says, that subjects should be able to make judgements without having thoughts about cognitive acts. But then our account of judgement can't be given in terms of the subject having attitudes about the proposition judged—since this is itself a cognitive act. So it must be a matter (as [J1–3] say) of the subject having certain attitudes about, or dispositions with respect to, one or more constituents of the proposition.

But then we face a dilemma. Either these attitudes and dispositions entail that the subject has thoughts about the ways of thinking which figure in the relevant proposition, or they do not. The former option—the rejection of [Innocence]—is independently implausible, since one can think about an object in a certain way without

[15] There's an additional, but related, problem as well. In some cases, distinct ways of cognizing may not be extensionally equivalent, but it might still be the case that the subject in question has no attitudes toward the objects which he cognizes in one way which he does not have toward the objects which he cognizes in the other way. Let's say that distinct ways of cognizing are *practically equivalent* for a subject iff they are so related. If two propositions are representationally identical and differ only in ways of cognizing which are practically equivalent for the subject, then if a subject entertains both and judges on, it will follow from [J3] that she judges both. But this sort of closure principle will be false, for reasons familiar from the closure principles discussed in the main text.

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having thoughts about that way of thinking. And second option, as we've seen, mistakenly entails that subjects who entertain certain distinct but representationally identical propositions, and judge one of them, also judge the other. The specifics of the closure principle entailed will vary depending on the theory; but neither [Closure] nor any of the restricted closure principles [RC1–3] appear at all plausible.

3 Which cognitive acts can be parts of propositions?

Let's turn now to question (ii) mentioned above: the question of whether just any way of thinking about an object or property can be part of a proposition. To focus this question, consider the act of thinking of some object o while eating a Twinkie, and then predicating redness of that object. That act may be represented as follows:

$$\text{PRED}\langle \text{redness}, o\rangle \oplus \text{cognizing-while-eating-a-Twinkie}(o)$$

Call this 'the Twinkie act.' The Twinkie act is clearly a genuine act which subjects can perform; but is it a proposition?

The defender of a complex act theory of propositions might react to the Twinkie act in one of two ways. She might say that 'cognizing-while-eating-a-Twinkie' is not, in the relevant sense, a way of cognizing, and hence does not count as a cognitive act, and that for this reason the Twinkie act is not a proposition. Call this a *conservative* view of cognitive acts. On the other hand, she might adopt a *liberal* view of cognitive acts, accept that 'cognizing-while-eating-a-Twinkie' is a genuine, if perhaps uninteresting, cognitive act, and recognize the Twinkie act as a proposition.

There are obviously a wide range of views one might take here, which fall on a spectrum between a maximally permissive view which would permit any way of cognizing to be part of a proposition, and a very conservative view which would let in only a short list of cognitive act types. In the remainder of this section, I'll try to show two things: first, that a maximally liberal position is unacceptable; and, second, that it is difficult to formulate a stable conservative view which both avoids the problems of liberalism, and makes room for distinct but representationally identical propositions.

3.1 Liberal views of cognitive acts

Soames is not a liberal. But liberalism is not as obviously bad as it may at first seem. While it may sound odd to say that the Twinkie act is a proposition, it is not clear that sounding odd is such a serious objection. As Soames says in another context,

> …I am not multiplying entities. The acts are real. …Calling them 'propositions' doesn't inflate one's ontology.[16]

Just so, we might say: the Twinkie act is real. Calling it a proposition doesn't inflate one's ontology.

[16] Soames (2015, p. 73).

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The real problem with liberalism is not that it sounds weird, and is not that it somehow leads to there being 'too many propositions', whatever exactly that would mean. The problem is that a wholly unrestricted view about which acts can be parts of propositions leads to some surprising, and I think difficult to accept, results about the mental lives of subjects.

If such a wholly unrestricted view of the parts of propositions were true, then it would follow that whenever someone entertains one proposition, she entertains indefinitely many. If I entertain the proposition that *o* is red, I might do so while eating a Twinkie, in my chair, during a presidential election season in the U.S., while there are an odd number of trees in Canada …and so on and so on. On the envisaged liberal view, these will all be distinct acts, and will all be propositions—so they will all be distinct propositions:

PRED⟨redness, o⟩ ⊕ cognizing-while-eating-a-Twinkie(*o*)
PRED⟨redness, o⟩ ⊕ cognizing-during-a-presidential-election-season-in-the-U.S.(*o*)
PRED⟨redness, o⟩ ⊕ cognizing-while-there-are-an-odd-number-of-trees-in-Canada(*o*)
…

And, given that to entertain a proposition is to perform it, I will—if liberalism true—be entertaining each member of this vast array of propositions.[17] This is hard to believe.

One might be inclined to resist this line of argument by distinguishing between two different sorts of agents.[18] On the one hand, we might have an agent who intends to perform an action which meets the following description: *thinking of o while eating a Twinkie*. On the other, we might have an agent who simply intends to think of *o* and, as things turn out, realizes this intention while eating a Twinkie. Armed with this distinction, one might then say that to entertain a proposition which involves a certain way of cognizing an object, one must, not just think of the object in the relevant way, but also intend to think of the object in the relevant way. And of course there is no

[17] One way to avoid this problem would be to take acts of thinking about objects in particular ways, not as parts of complex acts, but as modifications of targets of predication. On that sort of view, a proposition like (1P) would not be a complex act with the act of thinking of JS in a first person way as one of its constituents; rather, it would be an act of predicating the property of being on fire of the following entity: JS-as-thought-of-in-a-first-person-way. If the act theorist took this route, it is hard to see how we could get the problem with the Twinkie act started. We could begin by pointing out that the subject does cognize o while thinking of a Twinkie. We could then accept while-eating-a-Twinkie as a mode of presentation of o. But we would have no guarantee that the subject predicated redness of the entity 'while-eating-a-Twinkie(*o*).' If we accept that modes of predication can be modify targets of predications, then the fact that the subject predicates something of one mode of presentation of o will not entail that the subject predicates that property of some other mode of presentation of o. This is the analogue of the fact that, on standard Fregean views, believing a proposition in which an object is cognized via one sense is not sufficient for believing a corresponding proposition in which that same object is cognized via a different sense. The present problem is that once we treat the 'way of cognizing' as one sub-act of a complex proposition, then we cannot simply deny that the subject performs the relevant act. This would just be false; the subject described above does, after all, really cognize o while eating a Twinkie. Ultimately, I think that taking ways of thinking as modifications of targets of predication leads to many of the problems that plague more traditional Fregean views, as well as potentially violating the principle [Innocence] discussed above. I discuss the issue briefly in Speaks (ms).

[18] Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this.

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guarantee that, just because a subject thinks of *o* while eating a Twinkie, she must also have the intention *to think of o while eating a Twinkie*.

While this view would enable one to be a liberal without endorsing the claim that anyone who entertains any proposition entertains indefinitely many of them, the view is not a plausible one for the complex act theorist to endorse. The central reason is that it runs afoul of [Innocence]. Entertaining a proposition which involves a way of cognizing an object cannot require having intentions with respect to that way of cognizing; one can, for instance, entertain a first person proposition without having any thoughts or intentions with respect to the 'first person way of thinking.' So the liberal is, it seems, stuck with the view that anyone who entertains any proposition entertains indefinitely many others which are distinct from, but representationally identical, to it.

Might the liberal just accept this result? There is a certain perspective, one might think, from which this does not seem so bad. After all, entertaining a proposition—in the present sense, where it is just a matter of performing the act to which the proposition is identical—is a technical notion. It is not a mental state which figures in commonsense psychology, and there is no reason why we should assume that we have reliable intuitions about how many propositions we entertain in the relevant, technical sense.[19]

This reply on behalf of the liberal is reasonable enough. The problem, though, is that it is hard to quarantine these problems to the attitude of entertaining a proposition.

We saw in §2 that it is difficult for the act theorist to avoid a closure principle which entails, given that a subject entertains some collection of representationally identical propositions and judges one, that that subject also judges the others. But, if liberalism is true, the argument just given shows that *whenever* a subject judges one proposition, that subject will also be entertaining indefinitely many other propositions representationally identical to it. And it will be extremely difficult to block the result that the subject will also be judging at least many of these other propositions. To see this, just consider the constraints imposed by our various restricted closure principles. The relevant 'extra' propositions will all be entertained at the same time (satisfying [RC1]), they will all be a cause of the formation or activation of the relevant dispositions (satisfying [RC2]), and at least very many of them will differ from the target proposition only via the substitution of ways of cognizing which are extensionally equivalent for the subject of the judgement (satisfying [RC3]).

So it is hard for the liberal to avoid the result that anyone who judges a proposition also judges very many other distinct but representationally identical propositions. And, while our focus has been on judgement, presumably the same will hold of other propositional attitudes as well.

Could the liberal simply bite the bullet here, and accept this as a surprising but not disqualifying consequence of her theory? I think that this is a difficult line to defend, for two reasons.

The first is that it entails a surprising dependence of one's mental life on external factors. If cognzing-while-there-are-an-odd-number-of-trees-in-Canada counts as a

[19] Thanks to Kris McDaniel for pressing this objection.

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way of cognizing, then it follows that, had there be one less tree in Canada, my beliefs about the coffee cup next to me would have been different. And that seems quite implausible.[20]

The second is that a proliferation of the propositions to which subjects stand in various propositional attitude relations threatens to undermine the point of introducing distinct but representationally identical propositions in the first place. Presumably we want to use such propositions to explain facts like the fact that when someone utters (3), it is apt to report his speech by saying

[11] He said that Hesperus is Hesperus.

but, in at least some contexts, not apt to report his speech by saying

[12] He said that Hesperus is Phosphorus.

And the explanation which the complex act theorist can offer is that, while the that-clauses in both (11) and (12) are associated with the bare singular proposition which predicates identity of the pair ⟨Venus, Venus⟩, the that-clause in (11) is associated with the act (3P), whereas the one in (12) is associated with the act (4P).[21]

The problem is that, if liberalism is true, there will be a great many other propositions associated both with (3), and with the that-clauses in (11) and (12). And this will make it extremely difficult to explain what makes an utterance of (11) seem apt, and an utterance of (12) seem inapt. For in that case there will be plenty of propositions associated with both (3) and the that-clause in (11), but not with the that-clause in (12); but there will also be plenty of propositions associated with (3) and the that-clause in (12), but not with the that-clause in (11). The availability of distinct but representationally identical propositions like (3) and (4) does promise to help with Frege's puzzle; but the availability of too many distinct but representationally identical propositions associated with these sentences makes the contrast between (11) and (12) harder, not easier, to explain.

3.2 Conservative views of cognitive acts

Soames is disinclined to regard the Twinkie act and its cousins as propositions. But since these are clearly acts one can perform, this conservative view leads to a question: what is the distinction between acts which are propositions, and acts which are not?

Soames' answer to this question is given by the following principle:

[20] One could also spin this as a worry about self-knowledge. If which propositions I judge depends on the number of trees in Canada, then one might think that I should be in a position to know, by introspection alone, the number of trees in Canada, which is of course absurd. To this the liberal might reasonably reply by pointing out that the issues here are parallel to well-known apparent incompatibilities between various externalist theses about mental content and plausible-seeming assumptions about the scope of introspective knowledge, and that whatever ends up being the correct solution to the latter problem will generalize to the present case.

[21] As above, we are staying neutral on the question of whether the contrast between (11) and (12) is to be explained in terms of semantics or pragmatics, and hence whether the apt/inapt distinction is a distinction between truth and falsity, or something else.

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> If A is a cognitive act that is a proposition, and B is a special way of performing A that is representationally identical to A …then B is a proposition only if it differs from A solely by containing one or more cognitive sub-acts the performance of which are the means by which one or more of the essential sub-acts of A are performed.[22]

This places a constraint on the acts which can be parts of propositions. In the case we are considering—ways of cognizing objects—the constraint may be stated as follows:

> [C1] A way of cognizing an object can be a part of a proposition only if it gives the means by which the subject cognized the object.

This appears to rule out some of the more ridiculous examples above. One can't answer the question 'By what means did the subject cognize *o*?' by saying 'While eating a Twinkie' or 'While there were an odd number of trees in Canada.'

As I see it, though, there are two reasons why [C1] is unsatisfactory. The first is that it lets in propositions which are in many ways quite like the ones used to make trouble for liberalism above. For consider a case in which I cognize Venus, uttering the name 'Hesperus.' How did I cognize Venus? We can answer this question by saying 'by using the name 'Hesperus.'' But there are plenty of other things we can say as well:

> by using this particular token of the name, 'Hesperus'
> by making a sound with such-and-such acoustic qualities
> by causing such-and-such vibrations in the surrounding air
> by the occurrence of a brain event with such-and-such physical properties

and so on. Obviously there will be very many different ways of filling in the 'such-and-such' in each of these cases which will yield a true claim about the means by which our subject cognized Venus. Hence, if [C1] is true, each of these will yield a different proposition. This is difficult to believe; we don't think that indiscriminable differences in the volume of a speaker's voice entail a difference in the propositions that speaker entertains and asserts.

If one is disinclined to regard the Twinkie act and the other acts mentioned in the preceding section as propositions, it seems natural to have the same attitude toward the acts just listed. The natural move, then is to strengthen [C1]; and some of what Soames has to say about certain cognitive acts suggests that he has something stronger than [C1] in mind. Here is an example:

> …let A be the act of predicating humanity (however cognized) of Plato (however cognized), and let B be the act of doing this while dancing. Any agent who performs either one of these acts represents Plato as being human, and nothing more; so the two acts are representationally identical. However, since dancing is not a cognitive means by which one identifies Plato as predication target, B is not a proposition, even though A is. Not being a proposition, B is not the object of propositional attitudes. Although whether or not one is dancing at t may causally influence what one is thinking at t, the mere fact that one is dancing isn't

[22] Soames (2015, p. 71).

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a constitutive determinant of either the representational or the cognitive content of one's beliefs or other cognitive attitudes.[23]

Here Soames requires, not just that dancing be a causal factor in one's cognizing the relevant object, but that it be a 'constitutive determinant' of it, which suggests a principle like the following:

[C2] An way of cognizing an object can be a part of a proposition only if it is a constitutive determinant of the content of the relevant attitudes.

The key question then is what it means for a way of cognizing to be a constitutive determinant of the content of the subject's attitudes. The problem, I think, is that it is hard to find an interpretation of this notion which both lets in the ways of cognizing that we need to make room for distinctions between propositions like (1P)/(2P) and (3P)/(4P), and rules out the sorts of ways of cognizing listed above.

One could, for instance, understand 'is a constitutive determinant of' as a kind of necessitation. On this interpretation, producing certain acoustic effects would not satisfy [C2], since the production of a given sound doesn't entail that the subject has any propositional attitudes at all. That is what we want. But it would also rule out first-person ways of thinking, and Millian modes of presentation, since you and I think of different objects when we employ the first person mode of presentation, and speakers of different languages might cognize different objects by using the term 'Hesperus.'[24]

So one sort of problem with principles like [C1] and [C2] is just that it is hard to see how to formulate a principle of this sort which lets in cognitive acts which we need to do certain sorts of theoretical work, and rules out the acts which we don't want to generate new propositions. But there is also, I think, a deeper problem—one which can be brought out by returning to the first potential theoretical virtue of act theories of propositions mentioned at the outset. This is the promise of act theories of propositions to explain how propositions come to have the representational properties which they possess.

On Soames' view, the explanation begins with the fact that subjects represent the world as being certain ways. When a subject predicates F of o, that subject represents o as being F. Acts—propositions—then have representational properties in a derivative sense. Just as acts are called intelligent if they 'would mark an agent as behaving intelligently,' so propositions are said to have representational properties, and truth conditions, in virtue of the way any possible subject who entertained that proposition would be representing the world as being a certain way.[25]

But now consider the Twinkie act. This is clearly an act, and it seems clear that any possible subject performing the act would thereby represent o as red. So it seems that

[23] Soames (2015, p. 71).

[24] Another principle is suggested by Soames' claim that propositions are 'purely representational' cognitive acts. (See, among other places, Soames 2015, p. 16.) One might then point out that producing certain sound waves is not a purely representational act, since it includes details which are not essential to the representational properties of the act. But of course that is also true of the act of referring to Venus by using the name 'Hesperus,' since one can use that name to refer to other things and can refer to Venus in other ways. Parallel points apply to the first person, and any ways of cognizing objects or properties.

[25] Soames (2015, p. 17).

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the Twinkie act should itself represent that *o* is red. This much, I think, Soames would grant. In the quote above, after all, he says that the act of predicating humanity of Plato while dancing 'is representationally identical to' the proposition that Plato is human; since the latter represents Plato as human, the former must have this representational property as well. Parallel reasoning applies to the Twinkie act. And presumably if the Twinkie act represents *o* as red, it also has truth conditions and, in particular, is true iff *o* is red.

Can one stand in relations like entertaining, or judging, to the Twinkie act? It is hard to see why not. To entertain a proposition, on act theories of propositions, is to perform it; and one can perform the Twinkie act. And if something in the ballpark of [J1–3] is correct, then one can stand in the judgement relation to the Twinkie act; one can, after all, perform the proposition in an affirmative manner, forming or activating the Twinkie-relevant dispositions. Analogous points would seem to apply to belief, desire, and other relations in which we stand to propositions.

So—assuming the view that acts have representational properties in virtue of the representational properties of agent who perform those acts—the Twinkie act has representational properties, truth conditions, and is such that subjects can stand in relations of judgement, belief, etc. to it. So it looks like the Twinkie act plays all the theoretical roles played by propositions. But then to claim that, despite this, it is not a proposition, seems like a merely verbal distinction.

One could block this line of argument in two steps. First, one might defend a thesis which—as [C1] or [C2] aim to—excludes the Twinkie act from the class of propositions. Second, one might build a requirement of proposition-hood into one's definitions of attitude relations. For example, one might say that to entertain a cognitive act is (i) to perform it and (ii) for the act to be a proposition; to judge a cognitive act is (i) to perform it in an affirmative manner and (ii) for the act to be a proposition; and so on. Then one could say that the Twinkie act doesn't play one of the key roles played by propositions, since it can't be the object of propositional attitude relations.

To me, though, this line of thought seems unsatisfying, largely because of the extremely heavy weight that it places on a principle like [C1] or [C2] to define, not just the class of propositions, but also the nature of propositional attitude relations. And principles like these seem worryingly arbitrary to do these jobs. We can imagine a spectrum of such principles, ranging from weak ones which merely require the relevant way of cognizing to play some causal role in the subject's mental life, to quite strong ones which require the way of cognizing to entail various features of that mental life. It is hard to see what would make one of these uniquely suited for the job.

. . .

This is obviously not, and is not intended to be, a knockdown argument against complex act theories which seek to make room for distinct but representationally identical propositions by finding different sub-acts in complex acts which share the same act of predication. But it does, I think, bring out two ways in which that view is so far incomplete. Once we allow that there can be pairs of propositions which are representationally identical but differ in at least one of their sub-acts, we need some account of how a subject could judge one and not the other, and some principled account of

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the acts which are at least potentially parts of propositions. This is an area in which act theorists need to say more than they have.

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