



# On Predicating

Is it done non-committally?

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## Abstract

Two proponents of the Act-Based view on propositions, Hanks and Soames, have taken two different stances on how we should view predication. Soames views it as a non-committal act and Hanks views it as a committal act. Hanks has argued that Soames's view is incoherent. In this essay, I evaluate Hanks's argument and see if it is a successful attack on Soames's theory. We will see that Hanks's argument are actually two, one which has multiple ways one could understand it, and that the arguments are forceful against Hanks, because of the similarity between his and Soames view. The first of Hanks's arguments will fail, because it rests on a faulty assumption. The second of his arguments could lead to a dilemma for Hanks if interpreted in a strong way. If interpreted in a weak way, we will see one way in which Hanks could defend himself, but that Soames can do the same. Thus the second argument also fails.

## 1 Two Views on Propositions

Sitting in the lecture hall on a rainy day, a student looks out the window. She asserts to her classmates "It is raining outside" and they nod in agreement. Intuitively what the student and her classmates think is the same thing as she asserted; their beliefs have the same content as the meaning of her assertion. But even if they are thinking the same thing, they are thinking separately. We need an explanation for how the students' beliefs can have the same content while being separate beliefs. Something similar goes for the student's assertion. Thinking that it is raining and saying that it is raining are two different phenomena. We need an explanation for how the assertion can mean the same thing as the content of the belief.

One could begin solving this problem by claiming that there is an entity separate from the beliefs that can be shared by them. Call such an entity a *proposition*. Using propositions we can explain how the students believe the same thing: they are all believing the same proposition. Since the proposition is separate from their beliefs, it can be shared by them.<sup>1</sup> We can give a similar

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<sup>1</sup>This is the Frege's view of proposition as Hanks interprets it (Hanks, 2015, p. 1-5)

explanation for the assertion. When we say that the student is asserting that it is raining, we are relating her to the same proposition as she believes. Since the proposition is separate from the assertion and the belief, it can be shared between them. The student asserts the same thing as she believes, because she asserts the same proposition.

The proposition that it is raining is true and it is so because of the actual weather. The same goes for the students' beliefs (and assertions). But it seems strange that they would be true independent of each other; one of them has to be true in virtue of the other. Now which one would that be? Is the belief true in virtue of the proposition? Or is the proposition true in virtue of the belief?

These two positions differ in what they view as the primary bearers of truth and falsity. Traditionally, one views propositions as *the primary truth-bearers*, that is, we explain truth and falsity for everything other than propositions with propositions.<sup>2</sup> For instance, we would explain why an assertion is true or false by referring to the proposition it expresses. If the assertion expresses a true proposition, it is true. If the assertion expresses a false proposition, it is false. The same goes for beliefs, judgments, and everything else that could be said to be true or false. If the content of the belief, judgment, etc., is a true proposition, then that belief or judgment is true.

After giving this explanation for the truth and falsity of beliefs, judgments, assertions, etc., a proponent of this view still has to explain what makes a proposition true or false. They would explain that propositions are true or false depending on certain conditions—its *truth-conditions*. If a proposition's truth-conditions are met, then that proposition is true; if they are not, then that proposition is false. For instance, the proposition *that it is raining outside* is true if and only if it is raining.<sup>3</sup> This proposition have this truth-condition, other propositions such as *it is snowing outside* will have others. This raises the issues of what makes one proposition have some truth-conditions and not some others. Why is the proposition *that it is raining outside* true when it rains, but not when it snows?

In this discussion, this problem of how a proposition gets its truth-

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<sup>2</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>I am ignoring complexities of time and geography.

condition has the misleading name *the problem of the unity of the proposition*. It has this name because an explanation of how the parts of a proposition fits together would suffice as an explanation for its truth-conditions.<sup>4</sup> The truth-conditions would be that the things in the world that corresponds to the parts are structured in the same way as proposition. But even if we deny that propositions have parts we still have to explain how they get their truth-conditions.<sup>5</sup> Hence the misleading name.

If we view propositions as primary truth-bearers, we cannot explain how propositions get their truth-conditions by referring to any truth-evaluable act we perform (such as asserting, judging, etc.) since propositions are primary to those acts.<sup>6</sup> This means that we have to look for solutions independent of any truth-evaluable actions. Such solutions have been provided (by Frege, Russell, and King), but according to Hanks they fail.<sup>7</sup> He believes that the problem of the unity of the proposition gives us reason to reject the idea that propositions are the primary truth-bearers.<sup>8</sup> Lets for the sake of argument assume that he is right and that we should take his preferred view, that actions, such as judging or asserting are the primary truth-bearers. This would be to accept the view that Reiland (2022) calls *the Act-Based View of Propositions*.<sup>9</sup>

Asserting and judging are in one sense very different phenomena. To assert one speaks and to judge one thinks. But if I were to assert that some apple is red and judge that same apple to be red, I would have, in another sense, done something similar. In both instances I have, among other things, performed the same type of action—that of ascribing redness to an apple. The Act-Based view claims that propositions are these types of ascribing actions.

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<sup>4</sup>Hanks, 2022, p. 268.

<sup>5</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 51, 54–55, 59.

<sup>8</sup>Hanks, 2018, p. 131.

<sup>9</sup>Hanks, a supporter of the view, calls it *the Classificatory Picture of Propositions* (Hanks, 2018, p. 131). I choose Reiland's name over Hanks's because Reiland's name is more generic. Hanks's name favours his own view on assertions and beliefs: as classifying acts (Hanks, 2018, p. 131).

They call these ascribing actions ‘predication’. When we assert, predict, judge, believe, etc., that the apple is red, we predicate redness of that apple. This does not mean that we first perform a predication and then an assertion, but that the same utterance is both an assertion and a predication. But the proponents of the Act-Based view disagree on how we should understand predication. On the one hand there is Soames who claims that predication is a *non-committal act*.<sup>10</sup> When we predicate a property of an object, we do not commit to a position on whether that object has that property or not. To commit to a position, we must also endorse the predication. On the other hand there is Hanks who claims that predication is a *committal act*. When we predicate, we do commit to the position that the object has that property; no need for endorsing. Hanks (2015, 2016) has argued against the idea of a non-committal predication. In this essay, I will evaluate Hanks’s argument.<sup>11</sup> Is it a successful argument against Soames or not? But before doing this, I will flesh out the Act-Based view of propositions.

## 2 The Act-Based view of propositions fleshed out

In our example with the students, we had to explain two related issues. The first was how the students could all think the same thing; the second was how the student’s utterance meant the same as what she thought. On the Act-Based view, they solve the first issue in two steps. First they claim that thinking that it is raining is to predicate raininess of the weather. Then they say that because the students are all performing the same *type* of predication, they are thinking the same thing. When it comes to second problem, they solve this by first claiming that the meaning of the utterance “It is raining” is the action of predicating raininess to the weather. Since both the utterance and the thought are the same type of predication, the utterance means the

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<sup>10</sup>Soames, 2016, p. 1370.

<sup>11</sup>Throughout his works, Hanks describes Soames’s predication as *neutral* and *non-committal*, but he does not show how these two terms differ. I am therefore only using ‘non-committal’ for consistency.

same thing as the content of the thought. On the Act-Based view, meaning of utterances and contents of thoughts are acts of predication.

Some favour the Act-Based view over the traditional view, because they think that the latter cannot deal with the unity of the proposition problem. But proponents of the Act-Based view have to show how their view solves it. They have to explain how a proposition, which according to them is a type of action, can have truth-conditions. To them, predicating acts are the primary truth-bearers. This means that everything that could be said to have truth-conditions, have them in virtue of a predication. For instance, if I assert that there is coffee in my mug, then that assertion gets its truth-conditions from the predication which I also perform. So a proposition must have its truth-conditions in virtue of some predicating. My assertion got its truth-conditions from me predicating at the same time, but propositions do not perform any action. How can propositions get their truth-conditions if they do not predicate?<sup>12</sup>

Both Hanks and Soames answer this problem in the same way. Propositions have truth-conditions because their token acts of predication do; propositions have them in a derivative sense.<sup>13</sup> The idea is that a proposition inherits the truth-conditions from its tokens. It is not strange to think of other types doing this, for instance, we think of the Union Jack (the type) as red, white and blue in virtue of the tokens of the Union Jack being red, white and blue.<sup>14</sup> Or that bacteria (the type) are small. So why not think of propositions as having truth-conditions?

This seems to suffice as an answer to the problem of the unity of the proposition, but relies upon the idea that predication—an act—can be said to be true or false. This claim has been challenged. The critics claim that it is not the act of asserting something that is true, but that which is asserted.<sup>15</sup> According to them, we find it strange to say that someone's *saying* is true and more natural to say that *what someone said* is true. They think that

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<sup>12</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup>There might be a difference in the strength of their claim. Hanks seems to think that types have truth-conditions in a fully fleshed sense. Soames seems to hold a weaker position (Hanks, 2015, p. 75; Soames, 2010, p. 100–101).

<sup>14</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 66–67.

this intuition suffices to reject that predicating could be true.

Hanks rejects the idea that it is always strange to ascribe truth to actions. He says that when we say for example “You truly asserted that snow is white”, we ascribe truth to the assertion. The adverb ‘truly’, according to him, ascribes a property to the action, similar to ‘quickly’ and ‘loudly’.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not Hanks’s response succeeds is outside the scope of this essay, so I will assume it to be successful.

### 3 Hanks’s argument(s)

Hanks believes that Soames’s view of predication is incoherent. He has argued for this in two different places, first in *Propositional Content* (2015), then in *On Cancellation* (2016). These are best understood as two different arguments, even though Hanks portrays them as one. They have the same goal: both of them try to show that predication cannot be both non-committal and truth-evaluable; but they differ in how they try to achieve it.

In his first argument, Hanks says that when we assert and predicate incorrectly, it is natural to say that we made a mistake. For instance, if I assert and predicate raininess of a sunny day, I am mistaken. Hanks claims that the fact that I am mistaken implies that I took a stance on what the weather is. How else can it be said that I made a mistake? But if Soames is correct, Hanks says, I am not taking any stance with my predication. So Soames has to incoherently claim that I am making a mistake about the weather while not taking any position on what the weather is.<sup>17</sup>

To summarize, Hanks argues that if a person S predicates F of an object *a*, which is not F, then:

1. S’s act of predication is false
2. S’s act of predication is incorrect.
3. S made a mistake.

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<sup>16</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 36–37.

4. S must have taken a position about whether  $a$  is F.

5. S's act of predication was [...committal].<sup>18</sup>

Hanks's second argument has to do with how we evaluate the truth of a predication. He says that truth is accuracy of that predication.<sup>19</sup> If we represent the object accurately then the predication is true; if we represent the object inaccurately, then the predication is false. Soames agrees with this picture. He says that when we predicate and represent the object as it really is, then that predication is true.<sup>20</sup> But if predicating takes no position on how the object is, we are not representing the object in any way when we predicate, so it cannot be said that we are doing something accurately or inaccurately. I agree with Hanks that it seems strange for something non-committal to be evaluated for accuracy (or inaccuracy). To bolster the idea, I think we can look at one of Soames's examples of non-committal predication: imagining.<sup>21</sup> I can imagine me being a good guitar player, but despite this not being the case, we would not say that I am doing something inaccurately. Or if I look up at a cloud and imagine it as a boat, we would not say that I am inaccurately representing the cloud. I am not thinking that I am a good guitar player or that the cloud is a boat; I am only *imagining* it.<sup>22</sup> It seems then that being truth-evaluable and being non-committal are inconsistent properties.

I believe that this argument can be improved. If we take the argument

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<sup>18</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 37.

<sup>19</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 66; Hanks, 2016, p. 1387

<sup>20</sup>Soames, 2016, p. 1370.

<sup>21</sup>Soames, 2022, p. 283.

<sup>22</sup>I might be wrong about imagining can be done accurately or inaccurately. As Felix Larsson points out, there might be cases where we can imagine something accurately. If my vacation might turn out exactly as I imagined it, this would be such a case. Or (more likely) if it turned out badly, I might say that it was not as I imagined. I still believe that there are clear cut cases where accuracy or inaccuracy does not apply to someone imagining, such as the cases presented in the text, but it might be a bit strong to claim that accuracy never applies to imagination. I suspect that the reason for there being unclear cases is that 'imagine' might be ambiguous and sometimes means something closer to 'predict'. For instance, "I imagine it being great" means something close to that I predict that it (e.g. my vacation) is going to be great.



as is, there might be a way out for Soames if he leans on the fact that in most cases where we predicate, we also take a position on how the object is. Usually when we predicate we also assert or judge, which are committal acts. This makes the action we perform a committal act and it can therefore be evaluated for truth without inconsistency. However, if we re-frame the argument as being about primary truth-bearing, this escape closes. If predication is the primary truth-bearer, this explains how assertions and judgments can be true or false. Assertions and judgments cannot then be a part of the explanation for how predication can be true or false. This would result in a circular explanation.

Henceforth, I will only discuss the improved version of the argument. To summarize it, if a person S predicates F of an object *a*, then:

1. S's act of predication is true or false in a primary sense.
2. S's act of predication is true if accurate; false if inaccurate.
3. If S is not committed to a position, S's action cannot be evaluated for accuracy.
4. If S's act of predication is non-committal, it cannot be evaluated for truth or falsity.

## Evaluation of the arguments

Green (2018) argues that Hanks falsely assumes that when we predicate falsely, we make a mistake. There are situations, Green says, where we make a false predication but are not mistaken, for instance, if we were to grant something for the sake of argument.<sup>23</sup> For example, a teacher assuming something to show that it is incorrect is not making a mistake in her assumption. Green claims that even Hanks agrees with this.<sup>24</sup> So according to Green, Hanks's argument fails in showing that Soames's predication is incoherent.

Green's response only affects the first of Hanks's arguments. The second one does not rely on the assumption that to predicate falsely is to make

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<sup>23</sup>Green, 2018, p. 113–114.

<sup>24</sup>Green, 2018, p. 114.

a mistake. Only the first of Hanks's arguments rests on this assumption, but it is much weaker than what Green thinks it is. Hanks does not think that a false predication always is a mistake, only in some cases. Those cases are when we not only predicate, but also assert.<sup>25</sup> In those cases, we think that if someone predicates falsely then they make a mistake. Hanks thinks that a non-committal predication cannot explain why this would be the case. Green misinterprets Hanks as claiming that *in all cases* a false predication is a mistake. It is then a mistake on Green's part to claim that Hanks's argument fails because it says that the teacher is mistaken. Hanks's argument does not apply to that case.

This does not mean that Hanks's first argument succeeds. We can agree that in a situation where we both predicate and assert, if I say "It is raining" when it is sunny outside, I am making a mistake. But this mistake does not have to depend on the fact that I predicated falsely. We can claim that I made a mistake because I *asserted* falsely and since I take a position when I assert, there is nothing incoherent about claiming that I made a mistake. Hanks falsely assumes that my mistake must be *solely* because I predicated falsely. His argument thus fails.

This leaves us with Hanks's second argument that predication cannot be both non-committal and the primary truth-bearer. For this argument to succeed, Hanks would have to be right that accuracy of predication requires that we commit to a position. If this is true, a non-committal predication could not be accurate nor inaccurate. And since accuracy of predication is truth (according to Hanks and Soames), predication could not be true or false—and therefore not the primary truth-bearer. To give weight to his claim about accuracy, Hanks compares predicating to sorting.<sup>26</sup> Predicating a property of something is, in some sense, to sort that object into the set of things that have that property. So his comparison does not seem out of place. But there are two ways in which one can interpret his sorting example, one weak and one strong. I will begin with the weak version.

Imagine sorting differently colored marbles.<sup>27</sup> You pick up one of them

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<sup>25</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup>Hanks, 2016, p. 1387.

<sup>27</sup>The sorting example Hanks uses in is about sorting differently shaped blocks. I have

and put it in the blue pile. This act can be evaluated for accuracy—if the marble has the right color for that pile, then the sorting is accurate. When you moved the marble, Hanks claims, you commit yourself to the position that it is blue. Your position that this is the right place for the marble is what gets evaluated for accuracy. Accuracy thus require you to commit to a position.

Hanks seem to favour a stronger version of the example. He puts emphasis on the fact that sorting the marble cannot be done without committing yourself to a position. As he sees it, non-committing to a position would mean not moving the marble. If you do not move the marble, you do nothing and your act cannot be evaluate for accuracy, since there is no act. But on this version of the example, accuracy is superfluous; the impossibility of performing a non-committal predication suffices for rejecting Soames’s predication.

This version of the sorting analogy brings about a much stronger claim than the first. On the weak version, you could sort the marble non-committally, if you moved the marble with no intention of placing it in what you think is the right pile. In doing so, you would not take any stance whether this was the right place for it or not. Not taking any stance would mean that your action could not be evaluated for accuracy. It can neither be accurate or inaccurate. Of course, there may be a correct place for the marble to be, but in performing your action you never intended to place it there. Therefore your action could not be said to be (in)accurate. Sorting in this way would be like shooting an arrow blindly. Even if it hit the target perfectly, we would not say that the shoot was accurate, since the bowman had no intention of hitting the target. Thus, the weak version only shows that a non-committal predication could not be evaluated for accuracy. And since accuracy is truth and inaccuracy falsity, non-committal predication cannot be true or false.

On the strong version, it would be impossible for you to sort non-committally. If you moved the marble to a pile without any intention of that being the right place, then whatever it could be said that you are doing, it would not be sorting. To sort, you have to commit. This version also brings about a new way of understanding Hanks’s second argument. According to the weak

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chosen to use his example in Hanks (2018), since I find that simpler.

version, predication cannot be both non-committal and truth-evaluable, because the evaluation requires a commitment. This version depends on truth being accuracy. According to the strong version, predication cannot be both non-committal and truth-evaluable, because if it is non-committal, it is not predication. This version sidesteps the discussion of truth completely. Thus depending on how we interpret the sorting example, the second argument could be understood in different ways with different commitments.

The two versions merit different responses. To the strong version, one could respond by postulating a way of hypothetically sorting the marble. By putting the marble in a pile in this hypothetical way we do not commit ourselves to the position that this is the correct pile for that marble. We just present this as a hypothetical place for the marble to be. For us to be committed to this position, we also have to confirm that this is the right place for the marble.<sup>28</sup> Then it is possible to perform the sorting but not committing oneself. Just do the first hypothetical sorting. Moving from the analogy to predication, we claim that predication is just like this hypothetical sorting. It is non-committal and it requires endorsement to be committal.

Hanks responds to this hypothetical sorting suggestion by claiming that it mixes up the explanatory order. He says that we can only understand a hypothetical sorting in terms of the real one (try, he says, to explain hypothetical sorting without referring to actual sorting). On this suggestion, we would reverse the order. We would understand what it means to sort the marble in terms of a hypothetical sorting and this cannot be done.<sup>29</sup>

To the weak version of the argument, we have multiple ways of responding. We could try to explain accuracy in a non-committal way. Or we could try to explain truth without accuracy. Both of these suggestions would be cumbersome and involve changing major elements in Soames's theory. But there might be a better way for Soames, a way in which he could avoid Hanks's arguments completely.

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<sup>28</sup>Hanks, 2016, p. 1387.

<sup>29</sup>Hanks, 2016, p. 1388.

## 4 The similarity of the different views of predication

In the argument against Hanks, Green used an example of a teacher assuming a claim for the sake of argument. Both Green and Hanks agreed that she did not commit to a position with this assumption. But when the teacher assumed, she predicated. If predication commits one to a position, as Hanks has argued, this should not be possible. So Hanks have to explain how the teacher does not commit.<sup>30</sup>

Hanks solves the problem by introducing the idea of *force cancellation*. He says that when the teachers says “Suppose that...”, while making her assertion, it creates a *cancellation context*, where predication no longer counts as assertion, just like how a chess master’s move does not count if it is done in a teaching context.<sup>31</sup> When the master shows the beginner how to move the knight, that move does not count as a real move. When a speaker predicates in a cancellation context, that predication does not count as a real predication. In a cancellation context one’s predication is *canceled*. Only by performing a non-canceled predication does one commit to a position. So when the teacher makes her assumption, her predication gets canceled and she does not commit herself to the claim that she is assuming.

There are more ways in which one can create a cancellation context. For instance, by asserting a disjunction one also creates a cancellation context. If I assert that I am hungry or I am tired, then the predication of hungriness and the predication of tiredness of myself get canceled. Another way is by asserting an implication, such as asserting that if Erik sees badly, then he wears glasses. Then the predication of bad sight and the predication of glasses-wearing of Erik gets canceled. Cancellation contexts do not have to be triggered by verbal cues. Other facts about the situation can cause a

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<sup>30</sup>This problem is called *The Frege-Geach Point*. It says that if some force is part of a proposition, then every utterance of that proposition must have the same force (Recanati, 2016, p. 1404–1405). Translating this into Hanks’s terms we get that if an act of predication is committal, it should be committal every time it is performed.

<sup>31</sup>Hanks, 2015, s. 94–5, 111.

cancellation context, such as being an actor or a stage, or by making a joke.<sup>32</sup>

By introducing the idea of cancellation, Hanks's theory is starting to look very similar to Soames's. Both agree that propositions are types of predicating acts. Both agree that truth is defined by accuracy of predication. Both agree that by predicating in some cases one commits to a position and in other cases one does not. This have made some wonder whether there actually is a difference between them. This challenges Hanks to explain what differentiates his canceled predication from Soames's non-committal predication. And this challenge has been raised from different philosophers.

One of these is Reiland (2012).<sup>33</sup> He says that the two ways we could understand canceled predication is either as a non-committal predication *à la* Soames or as no predication at all.<sup>34</sup> The latter of these would make Hanks's theory untenable. It would mean that no predication occurs when I assert with the utterance "I am hungry or I am tired", since both the predication of hungriness and the predicating tiredness of myself get canceled. On the Act-Based view meaning is predication, so a lack of predication makes the utterance meaningless. But the utterances "I am hungry" and "I am tired" are clearly meaningful on their own and when brought together in the 'or'-statement, so Hanks's theory would be absurd. Then the only tenable option is the first, to understand canceled predication as the same as Soames's.

Recanati (2016) has given a response to Reiland challenge. But he frames the difference between Hanks and Soames in an another way than by commitment: by force. One can distinguish between *the force* and *the content* of an utterance. In short, the content is what is said and the force is how one says it.<sup>35</sup> The same content can be expressed with different force, for example "Is John going to the store?" and "John is going to the store" has the same content by differ in force. The first utterance has the force of a question, the second of a assertion.<sup>36</sup> The difference between Hanks and Soames can be expressed using this distinction: Hanks believes that predication is forceful

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<sup>32</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 91.

<sup>33</sup>Reiland actually frames this as a counter-argument to Hanks's solution to the Frege-Geach problem (Reiland, 2012, p. 243).

<sup>34</sup>Reiland, 2012, p. 242–243.

<sup>35</sup>Green, 2018, p. 99.

<sup>36</sup>Recanati, 2013, p. 622.

and Soames that predication is force-neutral.<sup>37</sup> According to Hanks then, we always assert (and commit) when we predicate in a non-canceled context. According to Soames, we need an extra step to add the force and make the predication an assertion. According to Recanati, if he can show that canceled predication still is forceful, then he has showed that canceled predication differs from Soames's force-neutral (non-committal) predication.<sup>38</sup>

He does this by reintroducing a distinction from Hare between different types of forces: *tropic* and *neustic*.<sup>39</sup> Recanati says that the tropic force determines the mood of the utterance. A declarative utterance, such as "John will go to the store", has a difference tropic force than an imperative utterance, such as "Go to the store John!". The neustic force, according to Recanati, commits the speaker to the utterance.<sup>40</sup> In the non-canceled case, predication has both of these forces, but a canceled predication, Recanati says, only has the tropic force and no neustic force.<sup>41</sup> This makes the canceled predication non-committal, but still forceful, and since it is forceful, it differs from Soames's predication.<sup>42</sup>

Recanati might be right that canceled predication differs from Soames's, but the way in which they differ is not interesting. They are still very similar in that they are both non-committal acts of predication. When it comes to the tropic force, I see no problem with Soames accepting that his predication also has it. Actually it would be strange if Soames said that predication did not have this force, since it determines the mood of the utterance. Recanati does not think Soames can accept that predication is forceful in this way, but he is not explicit in why he thinks this. I interpret him as thinking that the forces are dependent on each other, that we can only understand a predication which only has one force through a predication which has both forces.<sup>43</sup> But I do not see why this have to be the case. Cannot Soames

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<sup>37</sup>Recanati, 2016, p. 1404–1405.

<sup>38</sup>Recanati, 2016, p. 1407.

<sup>39</sup>Recanati, 2016, p. 1407.

<sup>40</sup>Recanati, 2016, p. 1407. Recanati uses 'subscribe' and not 'commit' in his description, but he thinks that they mean about the same thing (Recanati, 2016, p. 1413).

<sup>41</sup>Recanati, 2016, p. 1407–1408.

<sup>42</sup>Recanati, 2016, p. 1410.

<sup>43</sup>I interpret him as thinking this way, since he thinks that illocutions (that have both forces) are primary to locutions (which only has tropic force) (Recanati, 2016, p. 1408–

claim that predication has tropic force and when we endorse it gets neustic force? Why does the explanation have to be that neustic force is something that gets removed and not added? Recanati does not say why.

One might think that Soames cannot claim that predication has tropic force, since it would violate the force-content distinction. But I believe that this does not have to be the case. Soames can claim that the tropic force is a feature of predications and not propositions. And if he interprets the force-content distinction as on the level of propositions (types) and not on the level of predications (tokens), one can still distinguish between force and content. But he does not lose much if he were to claim that propositions also have the tropic force. This would only mean that he would agree that there are different types of propositions for different types of moods. And Hanks already claims this.<sup>44</sup>

Recanati's attempt at saving Hanks does not work. It does not give us sufficient reason to think that canceled predication differs from Soames's non-committal predication. Hanks will have to save himself, which he has tried to do in *On Cancellation* (2016). His argument is brief; he says that Reiland has misinterpreted what he means with canceled predication. According to Hanks, Reiland assumes that something disappears from predication in a cancellation context. Hanks says that this is not the case. As he sees it, nothing about the predication changes in a cancellation context. Canceled predication is just predication; it is just as committal as predication in the non-canceled case, but the context makes it so the speaker does not commit.<sup>45</sup>

I interpret Hanks as saying that the main difference between him and Soames is how predication becomes non-committal. On Hanks's view some external factor has to neutralize the commitment; on Soames's view nothing has to change about the predication: it already is non-committal. This distinguishes the theories in the non-committal predication cases. If we add the cases where predication is committal, we get the full representation of these views. On Hanks's view nothing changes in committal predication; on Soames's view some external factor has to add commitment. We can

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1409)

<sup>44</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 26–27.

<sup>45</sup>Hanks, 2016, p. 1389.



represent the different views in a table:

	Hanks	Soames
Non-committal predication	Predication + external factor	Predication
Committal predication	Predication	Predication + external factor

But now we see the main challenge. Both views have to explain how predication sometimes can be committal and sometimes non-committal. Hanks and Soames only differ in what end they start their explanations. Hanks starts with the committal case and Soames with the non-committal, but why should we think that the different starting points lead to fundamentally different theories?<sup>46</sup> In absence of such reasons, we can take the two theories to be similar. What Hanks portrays as an ocean between them, turns out to be nothing but a mere puddle. They are not that different.

## 5 Hanks's arguments revisited

The similarity between the views should cause us to consider whether Hanks's arguments against Soames also affects himself.<sup>47</sup> Hanks has argued why his first argument does not affect him. This argument says that predication has to be committal, otherwise we could not say that someone who predicates falsely is mistaken. He only thought that this argument applied to cases where the speaker also asserts. Since the speaker would not assert their predication in a cancellation context, this argument is not applicable to those cases. Hanks even claims something stronger. He thinks that the concept of mistake is inapplicable in cancellation context.<sup>48</sup> This means that we cannot be mistaken in a cancellation context.

Hanks gives us reason to believe that the first argument does not affect him, but this argument was not as successful against Soames as Hanks

<sup>46</sup>I want to thank Felix Larsson for this point.

<sup>47</sup>Note that even if we concluded that the theories were fundamentally different, Hanks still would have to show how his argument do not affect him. This because he claims that there is non-committal predication (canceled predication); the same thing he says is incoherent.

<sup>48</sup>Hanks, 2015, p. 39.

thought. He assumed that the only way to explain mistakes was with false predication. But nothing stops Soames from explaining mistakes with false assertion or judgment. That Hanks's theory avoids this argument should not impress us. It was a faulty argument to begin with.

The second argument is much scarier for both of them. It does not rest on any faulty assumption about mistakes. Exactly how we should understand it depends on how we interpret the sorting example. On the one hand we could claim that we can perform a sorting action and not commit, but then there is no position to evaluate for accuracy. Since Hanks and Soames think truth and falsity is accuracy of predication, the predication cannot be evaluated as true or false (it lacks truth-values). On this interpretation there is an action, but its not truth-evaluable. This is the weak understanding of the argument. One the other hand we could claim that it is impossible to perform a sorting action and not commit. The predication cannot be evaluated as true or false, since *there is no action at all*. This is the strong understanding of the argument.

Hanks favor the strong understanding of the two version and he has argued why it does not affect him. He says that the reason canceled predication do not fall for the same argument is because they are not *pure acts of predication*.<sup>49</sup> That they are impure, he says, means that our concept of them depends on the concept of pure predication; we cannot understand canceled predication without reference to pure predication.<sup>50</sup> Hanks says that pure predication is always committal, to claim otherwise would be incoherent, but that does not inhibit impure predication from being non-committal. He compares the pureness of predication to that of poisonous liquid.<sup>51</sup> A glass with the poisonous liquid does not have to be poisonous if mixed with enough water. Likewise, a predication does not have to be committal if sufficiently impure. The poisonousness of the liquid does not mean that every glass with it is poisonous and, in the same way, the committal nature of predication does not mean that every act of predication is committal. Thus there can be impure cases of non-poisonous liquid and non-committal predication.

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<sup>49</sup>Hanks, 2016, p. 1393.

<sup>50</sup>Hanks, 2016, p. 1388.

<sup>51</sup>Hanks, 2016, p. 1393.

But these cases do not speak against the fact that the liquid is inherently poisonous and that predication is inherently committal. It is impossible to perform a pure predication and not commit to any position, as the sorting example shows, but it is possible to perform a impure act of predication and not commit.

According to Hanks them, it is possible for canceled predication to be non-committal, since it is impure. But as Green (2018) points out, if Hanks says that canceled predication can be non-committal, he agrees that non-committal predication is possible. Since canceled predication is a type of predication and it is possible to perform it, non-committal predication is possible. This would mean that Hanks is wrong about non-committal predication being impossible and he would have to abandon his argument against Soames. Green says that Hanks could claim that canceled predication is not a type of predication, but something else. But Hanks would then have to claim that canceled predications are meaningless.<sup>52</sup> This would mean that if I were to assert with the utterance “Erik sees badly or he sees well”, the “Erik sees badly” and “he sees well” parts of the utterance would be meaningless, since no predication occurs. This would be absurd.

If Hanks interprets the sorting analogy strongly, he is in deep trouble. He have to choose between abandoning the argument or make his own theory absurd. He should choose the first alternative, but this means admitting that his argument against Soames fails. We should note that this only happens if he chooses the strong understanding of the argument. He could still choose the weak version. Choosing this version does not immediately get him out of trouble, since he still have to show that his own theory does not fall for this understanding of the argument.

On the weak understanding of the sorting analogy, truth-evaluation requires that one commits to a position. This is because truth is the same thing as accuracy of the position and falsity as inaccuracy of the position. If one takes no position, nothing can be evaluated as true or false. Therefore predication cannot be both non-committal and truth-evaluable. If Hanks

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<sup>52</sup>I have altered Green’s dilemma slightly. He frames the horn that denies that canceled cases involves predication in terms of the problem unity of the proposition(Green, 2018, p. 119–129).

wants to claim that canceled predication is non-committal, he will have to say that it is *not truth-evaluable*.

If Hanks claims this, he will have to accept that not all predication is truth-evaluable. One might worry that this undermines predication as the primary truth-bearers, but being the primary truth-bearers only requires that ones truth-values does not hinge on something else being true or false. It does not require that every instance of the thing has a truth-value. Thus the fact that only some of predication are truth-evaluable does not undermine the status of predication as the primary truth-bearer.

One might also worry that the fact that not every predication is truth-evaluable undermines the unity of the proposition. Hanks argued that proposition, thought of as types of predication, have truth-conditions because the tokens of the proposition have truth-conditions. If only some predications (the tokens) have truth-conditions, this might undermine proposition having them. One cannot claim that the Union Jack (the type) has holes, because some of its tokens do. Why should we allow proposition to inherit truth-conditions, if only some of the tokens have them? Since it is outside the scope of this essay, I cannot determine if this actually a problem or not. For now, it will be enough for Hanks to say that as long as some predications of a type have a truth-conditions and no predication of the same type have contradicting truth-conditions, the proposition inherits those truth-conditions.<sup>53</sup>

Finally one might worry that since canceled predication lacks truth-values, truth-functionality of more complex statements break. Say that I assert with the 'or'-statement "Erik sees well or he has glasses". One might define its truth-conditions by the truth-values of the predicating good sight of Erik and the predicating of glass-wearing of Erik. For the 'or'-statement to be true, at least one of those predications has to be true, otherwise the 'or'-statement is false. But since these predications are canceled, they do not have truth-values, and the 'or'-statements truth-conditions cannot be defined in this way.

One might answer by pointing out that if the predications were not canceled, they would have truth-values. Why can we not define the truth-conditions of the 'or'-statements with them? This might be done, but one

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<sup>53</sup>I want to thank Martin Kasã for this point.

would have to explain the relation between me asserting the ‘or’-statement and the hypothetical commitments. Since this is outside the scope of the essay, I will leave this issue for another day.

Summing it all up, Hanks can avoid his own argument if he claims that canceled predication lack truth-values. What we should ask ourselves is whether Soames can do the same. Soames could claim that predication only have truth-values if it is also endorsed. He has to be more careful than Hanks. He could not say that we commit by endorsing, since this would make the endorsement the act which brings about the commitment and therefore should be evaluated for accuracy. Instead he should say that endorsing changes something about the predication. He could, using Recanati’s versions of the force distinction, say that when we endorse a predication, we add neustic force to it. This would make the predication committal. In doing this, he would join Hanks in claiming that only some predications have truth-values, those predications which are also committal, and escape Hanks’s argument as he did. If Hanks avoids his own argument in this way, he provides a path for Soames to do it as well.

## 6 Concluding remarks

In this essay, I wanted to answer the question whether Hanks’s argument against Soames was successful or not. In doing this we discovered that Hanks’s argument was actually two. We saw that the first argument was faulty, because Hanks assumed that mistakes were solely dependent on false predication. In doing so Hanks made a mistake, because nothing stops Soames from explaining mistakes with false assertion. When it came to the second argument, we saw that there was two ways in which one could understand it. Understanding the argument in a strong way, Green showed that Hanks was struck by a dilemma. He either had to abandon the argument or make his own theory absurd. Understanding the argument in a weak way, we saw that Hanks could rescue his own theory, but by doing this, he saved Soames as well. So the answer to my question will be that Hanks’s argument failed.

But even though his arguments were not successful, it showed us that there

are still issues for the Act-Based views. The first had to do with truth and the relation between predication and propositions. If only some predication have truth-conditions, then why should we believe that proposition have them? The second had to do with the truth of complex statements, such as ‘or’-statements. If the predications that occurs when asserting the complex statement lack truth-values, in what way should we then define the truth-condition of the complex statement? One solution might be that we can use hypothetical predication, but we saw that this requires more work. These issues were outside of the scope of this essay and will have to be solved some other time.

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