

Soames's Deflationism About Modality

Tuomas E. Tahko

Received: 19 February 2012 / Accepted: 5 December 2012
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Abstract One type of deflationism about metaphysical modality suggests that it can be analysed strictly in terms of linguistic or conceptual content and that there is nothing particularly *metaphysical* about modality. Scott Soames is explicitly opposed to this trend. However, a detailed study of Soames's own account of modality reveals that it has striking similarities with the deflationary account. In this paper I will compare Soames's account of a posteriori necessities concerning natural kinds with the deflationary one, specifically Alan Sidelle's account, and suggest that Soames's account is vulnerable to the deflationist's critique. Furthermore, I conjecture that both the deflationary account and Soames's account fail to fully explicate the metaphysical content of a posteriori necessities. Although I will focus on Soames, my argument may have more general implications towards the prospects of providing a meaning-based account of metaphysical modality.

1 Introduction

Scott Soames has long been a loud critic of the deflationary trend concerning metaphysical modality. At its extreme, the type of deflationism about modality that Soames resists considers all necessary truths to be analytic truths. He is especially concerned about the interpretation of metaphysical a posteriori necessities proposed by the two-dimensional framework of modal semantics (e.g. Jackson 1998, Chalmers 2006a). While I agree with Soames on the topic in spirit, ultimately both

T. E. Tahko (✉)
Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies, University of Helsinki,
P.O. Box 24, Unioninkatu 40 A, 00014 Helsinki, Finland
e-mail: tuomas.tahko@helsinki.fi
URL: www.ttahko.net

Soames and the deflationists neglect the fine-grainedness of the metaphysical content of a posteriori necessities.¹ However, Soames's critique of the two-dimensional framework is not the topic of this paper. Rather, I will focus on Soames's general account against *any* view that regards metaphysical modality as reducible to linguistic conventions or something merely epistemic (as the 'epistemic' variety of two-dimensionalism supposedly does). In this regard, it is illuminating to compare Soames's account to Alan Sidelle's (1989, 2002), which is among the most deflationary.

Soames is explicit about his anti-deflationary agenda. He claims that there is a fundamental metaphysical disagreement between himself and the deflationist, rather than just a linguistic quibble. Soames firmly asserts that linguistic analysis is not sufficient for the study of metaphysical modality, and that apriority cannot be reduced to analyticity. Here is an illustrative passage of Soames's metaphysical conviction (Soames 2006a, p. 307):

In my opinion, none of Kripke's many achievements is more important than his breaking the spell of the linguistic as the source of philosophically important modalities. In other work, I have tried to identify significant arguments of leading figures in the twentieth century that come to grief over the implicit identification of the necessary and the apriori with the analytic. However, there is more at stake than a collection of particular arguments. As long as these modalities are seen as varieties of *truth in virtue of meaning*, while meaning itself is viewed as essentially transparent to competent speakers, there will be no credible alternative to the old, confining orthodoxy of philosophy as linguistic analysis.

Soames insists that any kind of interesting philosophy will not fit into this deflationary, meaning-based model. It follows that Soames's grounds for this view cannot be based merely on an analysis of meaning or content, for this would beg the question against the deflationist. Soames is explicitly committed to non-linguistic modalities and a non-linguistic understanding of the a priori. I sympathise with his approach, but it seems to me that Soames fails to fully respect these commitments. The general issue that I wish to discuss concerns the methodology of defending substantial metaphysical principles that are a priori, but non-analytic. Can this be done with a meaning-based account?

Recently, E. J. Lowe (2007a) has brought the significance of the entire descriptivist/anti-descriptivist debate regarding this issue into question. Lowe thinks that *both* descriptivists and anti-descriptivists are committed to the idea that modal truths can be reduced to a combination of semantic theory and empirical science. Soames himself defends a type of anti-descriptivism, inspired by Kripke. Soames has replied to Lowe's concern (Soames 2007a), arguing that the disagreement between himself and Lowe is not as deep as Lowe suggests, and that in fact they are in the same boat when it comes to the defence of metaphysically substantial

¹ See Tahko (2009) for an account of this metaphysical content.

anti-deflationary modalities.² Regardless of this debate between Soames and Lowe, I believe that there are further reasons to think that Soames's account is unable to sustain a defence of metaphysical, non-analytic a priori principles of the type required by an anti-deflationary account of modality.

Perhaps the most detailed account that Soames has given about the metaphysical status of modal statements are the last three chapters of his *Beyond Rigidity* (2002, ch. 9–11). His analysis of the difference between the following identity sentences is of particular interest (Soames 2002, p. 272; my numbering):

- [1] For all x , x is a drop of water iff x is a drop of a substance molecules of which contain two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.
- [2] For all x , x is a drop of water iff x is a drop of the substance instances of which fall from the sky in rain and fill the lakes and rivers.

Presumably, (1) is metaphysically necessary, while (2) is contingent. On the face of it, (1) appears to be a *de dicto* claim, but Soames makes it clear that he believes there to be an underlying *de re* element—this is what distinguishes (1) and (2) (Soames 2002, p. 273; my numbering):

What distinguishes [1] and [2]? Why are we inclined to think that the former is necessary, whereas the latter is not? The answer has to do with what we believe about substances. As Nathan Salmon pointed out years ago, we believe that it is a feature of any genuine substance S that whatever its molecular structure turns out to be, all possible instances share that structure (and all possible instances are instances of S).

Soames seems to think that what makes (1) a *metaphysical* necessity, if anything, is the underlying assumption concerning chemical substances. Namely, substances have their molecular structures essentially. Soames is following Salmon's *Reference and Essence* (1982/2005) here. Now, Soames goes on to ask (2002, p. 273): 'What exactly are substances, and how do we arrive at our modal intuitions (pretheoretic beliefs) regarding them?'. This is of course where one ought to give the metaphysical story, but, as we will see, the story that Soames gives is remarkably close to the one familiar from his supposed opponents.

Before I proceed, I should note that the discussion that follows applies directly only to natural kind terms. I make no attempt to extrapolate my arguments to apply to cases beyond natural kind essences. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, in my view, the case of natural kind terms is by far the most plausible example of

² Lowe (2007b) continues the debate by building a case against Soames's and the Kripkean analysis of a posteriori necessities based on a critique of the typical inference pattern concerning the logic of essence assumed by Soames. This is inspired by Kit Fine's (e.g. 1994) work on the logic of essence. The Finean view is that essence is ontologically prior to modality and hence the essence of an object cannot be reduced to its *de re* modal properties. Accordingly, there are good reasons to think that Soames and Lowe are *not* in the same boat, since they seem to disagree about the relevant logic of essence. Lowe goes on to suggest that *general* essences of particular substances like water may in fact be knowable a priori. My critique of Soames's account does not depend on these specifics, although I am sympathetic to the Finean analysis of essence and modality. I have discussed these issues in more detail in Tahko (2009).

genuinely realist essentialism. Essentiality of origin, for instance, faces criticisms quite independent from the ones that I will discuss.³ So do other typical examples of *de re* modality. Accordingly, I will focus on what I consider to be the strongest case that Soames—or anyone claiming to be a genuine realist about essentialism and in favour of substantial metaphysical modalities—could present. This means that my conclusions will apply, strictly speaking, only to natural kinds, although I believe that a more general case could be constructed without great difficulty, provided that I am correct about the special role of natural kind essentialism. It should also be noted that Soames himself is primarily concerned with the case of natural kind terms.⁴

In what follows, I will first reconstruct Soames's analysis of a posteriori necessities in the second section and then compare it with Alan Sidelle's in the third section. In the fourth section I will review Soames's position between the three views under consideration: full-blooded (Sidelle-type) deflationism, two-dimensionalism, and full-blooded essentialism. The upshot is that although Soames is on the right track in challenging the deflationary approach to a posteriori necessities, his own account fails to fully explicate their metaphysical status and may even be considered to offer grist for the deflationist's mill.

2 Soames's Account of the Necessary A Posteriori

Consider Soames's reconstruction of the Kripkean picture of the necessary a posteriori (Soames 2006a, p. 293):

Let p be a true proposition that attributes a property (or relation) F to an actually existing object o (or series of objects), conditional on the object (or objects) existing (while not attributing any further properties or relations to anything). Then, p will be an instance of the necessary *aposteriori* if (a) it is knowable *apriori* that F is an essential property of o , if F is a property of o at all (or a relation that holds essentially of the objects, if F holds of them at all), (b) knowledge of o that it has F , if it exists (or of the objects that they are related by F , if they exist) can only be had *aposteriori*, and (c) knowing p involves knowing of o (or of the objects) that it (they) have F , if it (they) exist at all. (o can be an individual or a kind.)

The key here is condition (a).⁵ Soames says very little about to what condition (a) is supposed to amount, but if there is to be any genuinely *metaphysical* (that is, essentialist, non-linguistic) content in a posteriori necessities, then surely condition (a) will be where this content is to be found, as it involves a priori knowledge about essential properties. This is what Salmon, to whom Soames refers as someone who got the picture just about right, takes to be a mark of the metaphysical. So, if we

³ For further discussion on the essentiality of origin, see Ballarín (2011).

⁴ I would like to thank an anonymous referee for bringing this issue regarding the scope of the paper to my attention. I discuss these matters in much more detail in Tahko (2012).

⁵ See also Soames (2011).

consider the classic case of water and H_2O , how does condition (a) pan out? Well, suppose that water is a genuine, mind-independent natural kind, and we know that instances of water are made up of H_2O molecules. If it is knowable a priori that the natural kind water has its actual composition essentially—even though empirical work is needed to determine of what individual instances of water are made—then ‘Water is H_2O ’ is an example of an a posteriori necessity. This is the Kripkean account of a posteriori necessities according to Soames (2006a, 2011). In fact, Soames suggests that there are two different routes to a posteriori necessities in Kripke’s work, but he thinks that only the one presented above is sound, so I shall focus on this case.

It is not Kripke’s analysis of the necessary a posteriori that I am interested in, but rather Soames’s own position that supposedly completes Kripke’s ‘unfinished semantic agenda’. What is Soames’s take on the case of ‘Water is H_2O ’? From his *Reference and Description* (2005), we find an interesting passage concerning Putnam’s Twin Earth scenarios (Soames 2005, p. 191)⁶:

I don’t know enough chemistry to be able to tell you whether any of the metaphysically possible molecular structures we are aware of—significantly different from H_2O but constructed out of basic elements we know about—could reproduce all the normal observational and functional properties of water. Surely, it can’t be ruled out a priori that there are none, and philosophical discussions of this issue never specify empirical reasons for ruling this out. Thus, it is not obvious—to me at least—that Putnam’s familiar scenarios represent genuine metaphysical possibilities.

This passage is merely a side remark on the interpretation of Putnam’s Twin Earth scenarios. But it is relevant for my purposes that Soames considers the existence of metaphysically possible molecular structures that could replicate the chemical properties of H_2O to be a question for empirical research, not for metaphysical a priori work. This is presumably what condition (c) of the previous analysis amounts to, at least on a charitable reading of Soames. If chemists can determine that to produce the chemical properties of water—which are necessary for the existence of water—it must have the molecular structure H_2O , then ‘Water is H_2O ’ expresses a necessary a posteriori truth. Here Soames emphasises the importance of the empirical part of the story rather than condition (a), where we should find the metaphysical content of the story. Yet, the passage above suggests that it cannot be ruled out a priori that there are no compounds other than H_2O that have water-like properties. This is the reason for Soames saying that it is not clear to him that the Twin Earth scenarios represent genuine metaphysical possibilities.

⁶ It should be noted here that Putnam (1990) later specified his views about how the Twin Earth scenarios should be understood. In fact, Putnam’s later views take him towards the sort of deflationary line that Soames is explicitly opposed to, but Putnam does attribute a type of metaphysical view to Kripke. I take it that Soames is sympathetic to the Kripkean picture rather than Putnam’s later view, and hence I will assume the Kripkean reading in my discussion of the Twin Earth scenarios, whether or not this is faithful to how Putnam intended them to be interpreted.

We can now distinguish two different ways in which the a priori content could be understood⁷:

- INST We know a priori that, necessarily, only the actual molecular composition of any chemical substance can produce the chemical properties (i.e. phenomenological properties) of that substance
- IDENT We know a priori that chemical substance A is identical with chemical substance B iff they share their molecular composition

Soames seems to think that INST is false. In the previous passage he states that we cannot rule out, a priori, that there are no metaphysically possible molecular structures that could reproduce the chemical properties of H₂O. Soames leaves open whether future chemistry might establish that there are no such molecular structures, but he clearly thinks that this is not a matter for a priori inquiry, and hence he would not accept INST. However, the Twin Earth scenarios seem to concern IDENT rather than INST, since what is at stake are our intuitions in cases where we *do* encounter substances such as XYZ that replicate the chemical properties of water. So, in the Twin Earth scenarios, it is assumed that there could be a chemical substance, XYZ that replicates the chemical properties of H₂O, and our intuitions about the folk notion of ‘chemical substance’ guides us towards the conclusion that Twin Earth water (XYZ) is not water. For the thought experiment to get off the ground at all, it must be assumed that XYZ could produce the same chemical properties as H₂O—and the question is simply whether this substance would be water. In his discussion of the Twin Earth scenarios, Soames is right to draw attention to the open question regarding the metaphysical possibility of another compound replicating the chemical properties of water, but this is not simply a question for chemistry, contrary to what he suggests. Indeed, it seems to me that Soames is very close to the heart of the matter in the passage quoted above, but he dismisses the concern without a detailed discussion.

Because the Twin Earth scenarios are clearly concerned with IDENT, it may appear that this sense of the a priori content is all we need to consider, and the majority of the literature does just that. Soames as well continues the discussion as if nothing serious could hang on this issue. However, I conjecture that we should focus on INST if we are truly interested in an *anti*-deflationary account of modality. The reason for this is exactly the one that Soames brushes aside: the metaphysical possibility of the Twin Earth scenarios has not been established. This possibility hangs on the status of INST. INST suggests that we can rule out, a priori, the metaphysical possibility of the Twin Earth scenarios. However, this is not the end of the discussion, for INST would also constitute a case to the effect that the chemical properties of a chemical kind are essential for that kind. If INST is true, we know a priori that only H₂O can be watery.

What about IDENT? If two distinct molecular compositions could produce the same chemical properties (in the actual world or in another metaphysically possible

⁷ I present a detailed analysis of related principles in Tahko (2012). Here I’m bracketing several important issues in the philosophy of chemistry (such as the case of isomers) to simplify matters, but I discuss these in more detail in the mentioned paper.

world), then what reasons would we have to think that IDENT is true? Short of an *intuition*, there do not appear to be any such reasons. In fact, there are many who do not even share this intuition, most notably philosophers of chemistry, but also metaphysicians (e.g. van Brakel 1986; Needham 2011; Lowe 2011). Arguably, we need something more to establish the metaphysical necessity of identity statements like 'Water is H_2O '. My suggestion is that it is the *combination* of INST and IDENT that we need. This line of thought can be summarised as follows:

1. IDENT is the traditional source of the metaphysical necessity of 'Water is H_2O '
2. IDENT is generally supported with nothing more than an *intuition*, but experts on the topic, philosophers of chemistry in particular, do not share this intuition
3. INST, however, *strongly corroborates* IDENT, so if we can establish INST, we have a good case for IDENT
4. Accordingly, since INST constitutes a good case in support of IDENT, the combination of INST and IDENT would suffice to establish the metaphysical necessity of 'Water is H_2O '

Strikingly, this gives us the same result as the Twin Earth scenario concerning water about which Soames was concerned, but without assuming the questionable metaphysical possibility of XYZ. But how exactly does INST corroborate IDENT? Well, if we know a priori that there is a 1:1 mapping of molecular composition and chemical properties, as INST states, then chemical substances A and B are identical if and only if they have the same molecular composition—two chemical substances surely cannot be identical unless they have the same chemical properties.⁸ The modality involved with IDENT, as Soames reads it, is metaphysical. Putnam (1990, p. 61) has questioned the supposed role of metaphysical modality in this picture, distancing himself from Kripke and the idea that it is *metaphysically* as opposed to just *physically* impossible for water to be XYZ. That is, Putnam thinks that Twin Earth should be regarded as a remote location in the actual world rather than a different metaphysically possible world. But Soames would presumably not be happy with this approach: Putnam (p. 64) concludes that we should focus on 'linguistic intuitions' as opposed to 'metaphysical intuitions' regarding natural kinds. Recall that Soames is explicitly Kripkean about this issue, and Putnam reads Kripke to be committed to the metaphysical reading of the Twin Earth scenarios. As we saw above, Soames is not optimistic about our ability to determine whether the scenarios are metaphysically possible by a priori means. This, on the other hand, seems to conflict with the Kripkean approach. The Kripkean approach holds that we are not in any position to decide upon which linguistic convention to adopt before we have mapped our *metaphysical* options—even though too much weight may have been put on 'metaphysical intuitions'. This constitutes further evidence that the intuitive case in favour of IDENT is insufficient—and the dismissal of INST on these grounds is much too quick.

Traditionally, the Twin Earth scenarios (or the underlying intuitions) are considered to constitute a strong case in favour of the metaphysical necessity of 'Water is H_2O '. But now it appears that the starting point of the scenarios is

⁸ I elaborate on this in Tahko (2012).

questionable, since they simply assume that there could be a substance like XYZ that replicates the chemical properties of H_2O . If it turns out that such substances exist, *then* we may rely on the intuitive notion of ‘chemical substance’ that picks out the same molecular structure in all counterfactual scenarios—this is what the Twin Earth scenarios effectively test. However, this will not give us the essentialist result that Soames claims to be defending. Rather, adopting IDENT on the basis of a linguistic intuition affirms conventionalism: the notion of ‘chemical substance’ reflects our psychological biases rather than a genuine, mind-independent natural kind. This is surely not what Soames had in mind. Instead of a metaphysical analysis of INST, what we see in Soames’s work is a linguistic analysis of IDENT.

It is in chapters 9–11 of his *Beyond Rigidity* (2002) that Soames pursues this topic. Soames analyses the following identity sentence (ibid., p. 272)⁹:

- [1] For all x , x is a drop of water iff x is a drop of a substance molecules of which contain two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.

Soames describes how we introduce a natural kind term such as ‘water’ with the intention that it is a ‘substance term’, i.e., applies to everything that shares the molecular structure in the original sample that we decided to call ‘water’. According to Soames, we do not need to know what that structure is when we introduce the term, all that matters is that we intend to use the notion in a way that respects the original intuition. Specifically, we are interested in the ‘deep structure’ of water rather than its contingent features, such as the fact that it rains from the sky. We may subsequently learn more about the substance in question, e.g., that the ‘deep structure’ of water is H_2O , but this is the point where the metaphysical story ends (Soames 2002, pp. 273–5).

There are some obvious problems with this simplified account, which is why Soames goes on to refine the account. Soames suggests that we should not identify natural kinds with properties, but rather with intensions, i.e. ‘functions from worlds to extensions’ (ibid., p. 277). This produces a revised account (Soames 2002, p. 278):

[I]t seems plausible to suppose that just as knowing that the F is G is not in general enough to know of the object o that is denoted by the description that o is G , so knowing that x is a drop of a substance molecules of which contain two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom is not enough to know of the intension I_w (i.e., the kind water) determined by the compound predicate that x is an instance of I_w . If this is right, then [1] is both necessary and a posteriori.

The revised account combined with what Soames calls ‘Extended Millianism’—namely, the thesis that a simple natural kind predicate’s meaning is the natural kind that it designates—gives us a fairly good idea of Soames’s view of the metaphysical status of modal statements. The key element in his view appears to be that identity sentences like (1) are *linguistically* guaranteed to be necessary if true. That is, we

⁹ This is the same as (1) in the first section.

know a priori that if water is H_2O , then water is necessarily a substance, molecules of which contain two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. In terms of semantics, there are obvious complications in identifying water (the liquid) with H_2O , since water comes in many forms, such as ice and steam. But these complications can be addressed if we take into account that 'water' can be interpreted as referring either to the substance water, i.e., as a singular term, or as a mass term. We are interested in the *substance* water which encompasses all forms of it (Soames 2002, ch. 11). So, the a priori part of the story seems to appeal to our Twin Earth intuitions, as noted in the case of IDENT. In fact, this is why Soames also thinks that some supposed examples of the necessary a posteriori, such as the identity sentence 'Woodchucks are groundhogs', and also identity sentences concerning co-referential names, such as 'Hesperus is Phosphorus', are really examples of the necessary a priori (ibid., Soames 2011). After considering all these caveats, Soames concludes as follows (Soames 2002, p. 306):

[S]ome but not all necessary theoretical identity sentences involving natural kind predicates may be regarded as linguistically guaranteed to be necessary if true in the following sense: the claim that they are necessary is a consequence of the assumption that they are true, together with a description of their semantic properties (including the claim that the natural kind predicates they contain have been successfully introduced in a manner fulfilling the semantic presuppositions governing their introduction).

Regarding the case of 'Water is H_2O ', Soames clarifies that he does not think that 'water' and ' H_2O ' mean the same thing, as the latter is semantically complex and rather means something like: '*something molecules of which consist of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom*' (2002, pp. 308–309). Accordingly, Soames thinks that the previous analysis does apply to 'Water is H_2O ' and goes on to give a summary of the relevant semantic presuppositions (ibid., p. 310).

We could sum up Soames's account roughly as follows: 'water' designates a unique substance, the microphysical structure of which, whatever it is, is shared by the samples of water that we ostensibly stipulate to be water.

What is alarming here is that the central idea emerging from Soames's account would appear to be an analytic principle concerning the linguistic usage of the term 'water' rather than a metaphysical a priori principle like the one proposed in INST. The upshot is that the genuinely metaphysical content of a posteriori necessities—the essentialist a priori part familiar from Salmon—has been lost (Soames 2007b, p. 7):

'Water' was stipulated to designate whatever underlying physical characteristic it is that is shared by (nearly) all members of the class of paradigmatic water-samples that explains their most salient features – the fact that they boil and freeze at certain temperatures, that they are clear, potable, and necessary to life, etc.

According to Soames, when this stipulation is combined with our empirical information about water, it follows that water is necessarily H_2O .

3 The Deflationary Account of the Necessary A Posteriori

Let us see how Soames's account compares with the deflationary approach. Sidelle's analysis of 'Water is H_2O ' is illuminating in this regard. Here is a representative passage from Sidelle (2002, p. 319)¹⁰:

[E]ach necessary a posteriori truth should be seen as derived from a combination of an analytic principle of individuation that has empty spaces to be filled in by empirical findings and a particular empirical finding that of itself carries no modal weight. For example, in the case of water's being necessarily H_2O , the analytic principle might be 'Nothing counts as water in any situation unless it has the same deep explanatory features (if any) as the stuff we call "water"', and the empirical fact, which makes the result a posteriori, is that the deep explanatory feature of the stuff we call 'water' is being composed of H_2O .

If we compare this passage from Sidelle with the previous passage from Soames, the similarity between the accounts is remarkable. The analytic principle which Sidelle suggests is almost identical to the stipulation that Soames discusses; Soames talks about the underlying physical characteristics shared by water samples, whereas Sidelle talks about the deep explanatory features of the stuff we call 'water'. In each case, this general principle is augmented by the empirical discovery that water is composed of H_2O . For Sidelle, this process is very simple: each example of the necessary a posteriori can be divided into an a priori principle concerning the type of empirical fact required to generate a necessary truth—the deep explanatory features—and the empirical discovery of the relevant fact. Quite correctly, Sidelle claims that on this account 'the modal force' of a posteriori necessities comes from the a priori principles. However, nothing in Sidelle's story suggests that these a priori principles concern metaphysical, essentialist truths such as the one formulated in INST. Rather, they are analytic principles true in virtue of our linguistic conventions. Soames does not go this far, at least not explicitly, as he does not give a Sidelle-type conventionalist account of analyticity. Even though Soames does not follow Sidelle to full-blooded deflationism about modality, he has already gone too far to avoid deflationism altogether.

Sidelle goes on to present the analysis of a posteriori necessities in terms of our semantic intuitions, quite like we saw in the case of the Twin Earth scenarios. Recall that the Twin Earth scenarios take the a priori part of the a posteriori necessities to amount to us knowing that it is the 'deep structure' of water that makes it the stuff we call 'water', as in IDENT above. Similarly, Sidelle takes our counterfactual judgements in Twin Earth scenarios to reflect our linguistic conventions, according to which it is the 'deep structure' of water that makes it water. To clarify: the debate, as Sidelle sees it, concerns the meaning of the term 'water', and it is the meaning of the term that determines how we apply it in counterfactual scenarios such as the Twin Earth scenarios. The only type of necessity that Sidelle is willing to admit here

¹⁰ See also Sidelle (1989) for a much more detailed account, I cannot do full justice to his account here, but I hope to present a sufficient outline of it to be able to compare it with Soames's account.

is the necessity of the general analytic principle that reflects our linguistic conventions. The principle asserted in IDENT is assumed.

Accordingly, Sidelle's account is concerned exactly with the semantic presuppositions governing the introduction of the term 'water', which are also central to Soames's account. Yet, Soames wants to avoid Sidelle's conclusion. Unfortunately for Soames, the available options will not be to his liking. If we agree that the modal content of a posteriori necessities is grounded in a linguistic principle of the form that both Soames and Sidelle seem to suggest, then the only viable conclusion is that this principle is analytic.

4 Is Soames a Full-Blooded Deflationist?

Given what we have seen, should we conclude that Soames is a full-blooded deflationist about modality in the same sense that Sidelle is? Not quite. Even though there are clear deflationary elements in Soames's view, Sidelle goes one step further in his deflationism. Sidelle is not satisfied in just saying that all necessary truths are analytic truths—he goes on to explain what makes these truths analytic. A full-blooded deflationist will explain analyticity in terms of linguistic conventions, but this is not entailed by the analyticity of necessity.¹¹ An alternative to full-blooded deflationism would be to consider necessity analytic, but *not* in virtue of linguistic conventions. Rather, linguistic conventions may determine which necessary proposition is being expressed by a given statement, but the modal status of the proposition is not grounded in linguistic conventions. Based on this, it is possible to develop a two-dimensional approach to modality and the necessary a posteriori. This type of approach has its roots in Stalnaker (1978), and different varieties of it have been defended more recently by Jackson and Chalmers, among others. However, Soames is no friend of the two-dimensional framework. His *Reference and Description* (2005) is devoted to refuting it. One may nevertheless be tempted to conclude that Soames is surely closer to the two-dimensional approach than full-blooded deflationism. This may be true, but Soames himself would no doubt be equally troubled by this conclusion.

In a discussion note of Soames's book, Chalmers (2006b) suggests that Soames's own view is an interesting type of two-dimensionalism. Of course, Soames (2006b) denies this.¹² I will not attempt to assess whether or not Soames's view is a version of two-dimensionalism—I am not sympathetic to this approach either, so I have no horse in this race. In any case, it is clear that Soames considers both full-blooded deflationism about modality as well as the two-dimensional approach to be (perhaps equally) unattractive options. I have demonstrated that Soames's view is not amenable to full-blooded essentialism either; consequently, there is clear tension in Soames's views, even though he avoids full-blooded deflationism.

¹¹ See Barnes (2000: 283). I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pointing me towards this work, and for inviting me to explore the differences between the views of Soames and Sidelle in more detail.

¹² See also Soames (2010) for some relevant discussion.

This is the very conclusion that Soames was hoping to avoid. It seems that Soames has given us little more than what the deflationary picture offers, and hence we are at risk of identifying the a priori with the analytic and reducing metaphysical modality to linguistics—something that Soames wishes to avoid at all costs. Despite this, Soames explicitly opts for a *linguistic* analysis rather than a metaphysical one, although he claims that this helps us to narrow down ‘the range of feasible ontological alternatives’ (2007b: 1).

5 Conclusion

We have seen that Soames’s account of the necessary a posteriori bears significant similarity to the deflationary account familiar from Sidelle’s work while omitting a detailed discussion of the metaphysical, essentialist basis of the a priori content of modal statements, as illustrated by INST. This leaves the essentialist line open to an attack from the deflationists. It appears that Soames is at a crossroads: either he should concede to the deflationist and adopt the view that metaphysical modality reduces to linguistics and that the a priori can be identified with the analytic, or he should proceed to defend full-blooded essentialism and offer a detailed analysis of the underlying essentialist a priori principles.¹³ Given that Soames is one of the loudest critics of the deflationary approach—be it Sidelle-type deflationism or the two-dimensional approach—I would hope that he is more tempted by the latter option. This is by no means an easy task, which is why Soames’s attention towards it would be very welcome.

The upshot of this discussion is not just limited to Soames’s work. The arguments that I have presented give reason to suspect that *any* linguistic, meaning-based account of metaphysical modality will fail to capture the essentialist principles underlying genuinely realist approaches. While I have not attempted to extrapolate on this in the current paper, I believe that it is the logical conclusion. If this is correct, then the choice that Soames faces—between deflationism and full-blooded essentialism—may concern many others as well. The two-dimensional approach is particularly interesting in this regard.

Acknowledgments I am grateful to the anonymous referees for the journal for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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¹³ I have engaged in such an analysis in Tahko (2009, 2012). For further discussion on full-blooded natural kind essentialism, see Oderberg (2011) and Dumsday (2012).

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