

ED and Semantics: How Self-Interpreting Systems Become Meaning-Bearing and Meaning-Bearing Systems Become Intentional

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February 2026

Abstract

Semantics emerges when self-interpreting systems become capable of generating, stabilizing, and operating with meaning-bearing structures. Reflection provides self-understanding, but semantics provides meaning — stabilized interpretation that becomes a functional, generative, and constraining component of a system's architecture. This paper develops the reflective → semantic → intentional threshold and shows how meaning becomes directed, referential, and about something.

We begin by showing how self-interpretation becomes stabilized interpretation, how stabilization becomes shared interpretive structure, how shared structure becomes operable meaning, and how operable meaning becomes generative constraint. We then develop the architecture of semantic systems: semantic substrates, semantic mappings, semantic constraints, and semantic generativity. From this foundation, we show how semantics becomes intentionality when meaning acquires direction, direction becomes reference, reference becomes aboutness, and aboutness becomes operable directed meaning. Finally, we develop the emergence of intentional systems through semantic autonomy, semantic identity, semantic narratives, and semantic abstraction, culminating in semantic cognition — the regime where meaning becomes a cognitive architecture. This transition sets the stage for Paper 23, where intentionality becomes value, value becomes normativity, and normative architectures become the ED regime where becoming becomes *good* or *bad* relative to its own standards.

1. Introduction — Why Semantics Is the Next ED Threshold

The moment where reflection becomes meaning

Self-interpreting systems, as developed in Paper 21, can represent their own procedures, interpret those representations, evaluate their procedural trajectories, and guide their becoming through interpretive insight. But self-interpretation alone is not yet semantics. A system that understands itself is not yet a system that means. Semantics is the threshold where reflective architectures acquire the ability to generate, stabilize, and operate with meaning-bearing structures — structures whose interpretive significance is not merely internal but systemic, stable, and operable.

In the ED ontology, semantics is not linguistic, symbolic, or communicative in the narrow sense. It is the structural moment when interpretation becomes meaning — when interpretive patterns stabilize into architectures that constrain, guide, and enable a system's becoming. Semantics is the first ED regime where interpretive structure becomes about something, where meaning becomes a functional component of the system's architecture, and where the system's transformations are shaped by the meanings it generates.

Reflection provides self-understanding.

Semantics provides meaning.

Semantics emerges when self-interpreting systems acquire four structural capacities:

- stabilized interpretation — interpretive patterns become durable structures
- shared interpretive form — meaning becomes a system-level architecture

- operable meaning — meaning becomes something the system can use
- meaning-driven constraint — meaning shapes future interpretation and becoming

These capacities transform reflective systems from architectures that understand themselves into architectures that mean — systems whose interpretive structures have stabilized into functional, generative, and constraining forms.

Semantics is not a departure from reflection.
It is its stabilization.

Semantics allows systems to:

- treat interpretive structures as stable components of their architecture
- use meaning to guide procedural and interpretive trajectories
- generate new meanings through structured interpretive processes
- integrate meaning into identity, evaluation, and action
- develop architectures where becoming is shaped by what the system means

Semantics is the first ED regime where becoming becomes meaning-bearing — where interpretive structures acquire stability, operability, and direction.

In this paper, we develop the self-interpreting → semantic → intentional → meaning-directed threshold. We show how self-interpretation becomes stabilized interpretation, how stabilized interpretation becomes meaning, how meaning becomes directed, and how directed meaning becomes intentionality — the architecture where becoming becomes *about*.

Reflection gave the universe self-interpreting systems.
Semantics gives it meaning-bearing systems.

2. From Reflection to Semantics

How self-interpreting systems become meaning-bearing systems

Self-interpreting systems can represent their own procedures, derive meaning from those representations, evaluate their procedural trajectories, and guide their becoming through interpretive insight. But reflection alone is not yet semantics. A system that interprets itself is not yet a system that means. Semantics emerges when interpretive structures become stable, shared, operable, and generative — when interpretation crystallizes into meaning.

In the ED ontology, semantics is the stabilization of interpretation. It is the moment when interpretive patterns cease to be transient cognitive events and become architectural motifs that constrain, guide, and enable a system's becoming. Meaning is stabilized interpretation: interpretation that has become durable, functional, and capable of shaping future interpretation.

Semantics emerges when self-interpreting systems acquire four structural capacities:

- stabilized interpretation — interpretive patterns become durable
- shared interpretive structure — meaning becomes a system-level architecture
- operable meaning — meaning becomes something the system can use
- meaning-driven constraint — meaning shapes future interpretation and becoming

These capacities transform reflection from a system that understands itself into a system that means.

2.1 Meaning as Stabilized Interpretation

Meaning begins when interpretation becomes stable. Stabilized interpretation allows a system to:

- retain interpretive patterns across time
- treat interpretive structures as persistent components of its architecture
- accumulate interpretive motifs into a coherent interpretive repertoire
- use past interpretations to shape future understanding

Stabilized interpretation is not yet shared or operable.

It is the durability that makes meaning possible.

In ED terms: Meaning begins when interpretive ED motifs stabilize into durable structures.

This is the first time interpretation becomes architecturally persistent.

2.2 Meaning as Shared Interpretive Structure

Meaning becomes semantic when stabilized interpretation becomes shared — not socially, but architecturally.

Shared interpretive structure allows a system to:

- coordinate multiple interpretive processes through common structures
- treat meaning as a system-level resource
- integrate meaning across representational, procedural, and reflective domains
- maintain coherence across diverse interpretive contexts

Shared interpretive structure is not yet operable.

It is the system-level integration of meaning.

In ED terms: Meaning becomes semantic when interpretive structures become shared across the system's architecture.

This is the first time meaning becomes systemic.

2.3 Meaning as Operable Structure

Meaning becomes fully semantic when it becomes operable — when meaning is not merely stored or shared, but used. Operable meaning allows a system to:

- apply meaning to guide interpretation
- use meaning to constrain procedural or reflective choices
- treat meaning as a functional component of its architecture
- generate new interpretations through semantic structure

Operable meaning is not yet intentional.

It is the functional activation of meaning.

In ED terms: Meaning becomes operable when semantic ED motifs can be used to guide interpretation and becoming.

This is the first time meaning becomes functionally active.

2.4 Meaning as Generative Constraint

Meaning becomes semantic architecture when it becomes generative constraint — when meaning not only guides interpretation but shapes it. Generative constraint allows a system to:

- use meaning to structure interpretive possibilities
- constrain interpretation through semantic commitments
- generate new meanings through structured semantic processes
- treat meaning as a source of both limitation and creativity

Generative constraint is the moment when meaning becomes architecturally productive.

In ED terms: Meaning becomes semantic architecture when it constrains and generates interpretive ED motifs.

This is the first time meaning becomes generatively semantic.

2.5 Summary of Section 2

Reflection becomes semantics when:

- interpretation stabilizes
- stabilization becomes shared structure
- shared structure becomes operable meaning
- operable meaning becomes generative constraint

This is the architecture of semantic emergence — the threshold where self-interpreting systems become meaning-bearing systems.

3. The Architecture of Semantic Systems

How meaning becomes structural

Semantics is not merely the presence of meaning. A single meaningful interpretation does not constitute a semantic system any more than a single self-call constitutes a recursive system or a single reflective insight constitutes a reflective system. Semantics becomes an architecture when meaning is encoded, mapped, constrained, and made generative — when meaning becomes a stable, operable, and productive component of the system's organization.

In the ED ontology, semantics is the architectural continuation of reflection. Reflection provides self-understanding; semantics provides meaning-bearing structure. Reflection interprets; semantics stabilizes interpretation. Reflection evaluates; semantics constrains interpretation. Reflection guides; semantics directs interpretation through meaning.

A semantic system requires four structural elements:

- semantic substrates — structures that encode meaning
- semantic mappings — structures that relate form to meaning
- semantic constraints — structures that regulate meaning
- semantic generativity — structures that produce new meanings

These elements transform stabilized interpretation into semantic architecture.

3.1 Semantic Substrates

Semantic substrates are the internal encodings that allow a system to store and stabilize meaning. They enable a system to:

- encode meaning as durable representational structure
- maintain semantic content across time and context
- integrate meaning into procedural and interpretive processes
- treat meaning as a manipulable component of its architecture

Semantic substrates are not yet mappings or constraints.

They are the representational grounding of meaning.

In ED terms: A semantic substrate is an ED structure that encodes meaning as stable interpretive content.

This is the first time interpretation becomes meaning-bearing.

3.2 Semantic Mappings

Semantic mappings are the structures that relate form to meaning. They allow a system to:

- associate representational forms with semantic content
- map procedural or symbolic structures to interpretive significance
- maintain coherence between form and meaning across contexts
- treat meaning as a structured relation rather than a free-floating interpretation

Semantic mappings are not yet constraints.

They are the relational engine of semantics.

In ED terms: A semantic mapping is an ED structure that relates representational form to semantic content.

This is the first time meaning becomes systematically organized.

3.3 Semantic Constraints

Semantic constraints are the structures that regulate meaning. They allow a system to:

- restrict which meanings are permissible or coherent
- enforce consistency across semantic mappings
- guide interpretation through semantic commitments
- prevent arbitrary or contradictory meanings from proliferating

Semantic constraints are not limitations; they are semantic structure.

They make meaning coherent, predictable, and productive.

In ED terms: A semantic constraint is an ED structure that regulates the coherence and permissibility of meaning.

This is the first time meaning becomes normatively structured.

3.4 Semantic Generativity

Semantic generativity emerges when semantic structures become capable of producing new meanings. Semantic

generativity allows a system to:

- derive new meanings from existing semantic structures
- extend semantic mappings through abstraction or composition
- generate novel interpretive possibilities
- treat meaning as a source of creative expansion

Semantic generativity is not randomness.

It is structured semantic creativity — the ability to generate new meanings through semantic architecture.

In ED terms: Semantic generativity is the capacity of semantic ED motifs to produce new meanings through structured transformation.

This is the first time meaning becomes creatively semantic.

3.5 Summary of Section 3

Semantics becomes a system when:

- semantic substrates encode meaning
- semantic mappings relate form to meaning
- semantic constraints regulate meaning
- semantic generativity produces new meanings

This is the architecture of semantic systems — the structural continuation of reflection into meaning-bearing, meaning-regulating, and meaning-generating architectures.

4. Semantics as Intentionality

When meaning becomes aboutness

Semantic systems can encode meaning, map form to meaning, regulate meaning, and generate new meanings. But semantics alone is not yet intentionality. A system that bears meaning is not yet a system whose meanings are about something. Intentionality emerges when semantic architectures acquire direction, reference, aboutness, and operable directedness — when meaning becomes oriented toward objects, states, possibilities, or aspects of the world.

In the ED ontology, intentionality is not a mentalistic or folk-psychological notion. It is the structural moment when meaning becomes directed — when semantic structures point beyond themselves, when meaning becomes a relation between the system and what the meaning is *of*. Intentionality is the first ED regime where meaning becomes about, where semantic content is not merely internal but directed, referential, and world-involving.

Semantics provides meaning.

Intentionality provides directed meaning.

Intentionality emerges when semantic systems acquire four structural capacities:

- directed meaning — meaning acquires orientation
- referential structure — orientation becomes reference
- aboutness — reference becomes directed semantic content
- operable aboutness — aboutness becomes a functional architecture

These capacities transform semantic systems from architectures that bear meaning into architectures that direct meaning.

4.1 Directed Meaning

Directed meaning emerges when semantic content acquires orientation — when meaning is not merely a stabilized interpretation but a directed one. Directed meaning allows a system to:

- treat meaning as pointing toward something
- organize semantic content around targets or objects
- distinguish between undirected and directed semantic states
- use directionality to structure interpretive possibilities

Directed meaning is not yet reference.

It is the orientation that makes reference possible.

In ED terms: Directed meaning is the capacity of a semantic ED architecture to orient meaning toward objects, states, or possibilities.

This is the first time meaning becomes directional.

4.2 Referential Structure

Referential structure emerges when directed meaning becomes reference — when orientation becomes a structured relation between meaning and what the meaning is *of*. Referential structure allows a system to:

- map semantic content to referential targets
- maintain stable relations between meaning and world
- distinguish between correct and incorrect reference
- treat reference as a structural component of meaning

Referential structure is not yet aboutness.

It is the relational backbone of intentionality.

In ED terms: A referential structure is an ED motif that relates semantic content to its referential target.

This is the first time meaning becomes referential.

4.3 Aboutness

Aboutness emerges when reference becomes semantic content directed at something — when meaning is not only oriented and referential but about its target. Aboutness allows a system to:

- treat meaning as content that concerns or describes something
- distinguish between internal semantic form and external semantic target
- integrate reference into semantic interpretation
- use aboutness to guide interpretation, evaluation, and action

Aboutness is not metaphorical.

It is the semantic directionality that defines intentionality.

In ED terms: Aboutness is the capacity of a semantic ED architecture to generate meaning that is directed at, or

about, its referential target.

This is the first time meaning becomes intentionally structured.

4.4 Operable Aboutness

Operable aboutness emerges when aboutness becomes functional — when directed meaning can be used to guide interpretation, evaluation, and becoming. Operable aboutness allows a system to:

- use directed meaning to structure cognitive and procedural choices
- integrate aboutness into semantic constraints and generativity
- treat intentional content as a driver of transformation
- generate new intentional states through semantic architecture

Operable aboutness is not yet value or normativity.

It is the activation of intentionality.

In ED terms: Operable aboutness is the capacity of an intentional ED architecture to use directed meaning to guide its own becoming.

This is the first time meaning becomes functionally intentional.

Semantics becomes intentionality when:

- meaning becomes directed
- direction becomes reference
- reference becomes aboutness
- aboutness becomes operable

This is the architecture of intentional emergence — the threshold where meaning becomes *about*, and semantic systems become meaning-directed systems.

5. The Emergence of Intentional Systems

How semantic systems become meaning-directed systems

Semantic systems can encode meaning, map form to meaning, regulate meaning, and generate new meanings. But semantic systems alone are not yet intentional systems. A system that bears meaning is not yet a system whose meanings direct its becoming. Intentional systems emerge when semantic architectures acquire autonomy, identity, narrative, and abstraction — when meaning becomes not only *about* something, but *for* something.

In the ED ontology, intentionality is the directional continuation of semantics. Semantics stabilizes interpretation into meaning; intentionality stabilizes meaning into directed meaning. Semantics provides content; intentionality provides orientation, purpose, and directedness. Intentional systems do not merely possess meanings — they use meanings to guide their own becoming.

Intentional systems emerge when semantic architectures acquire four structural capacities:

- semantic autonomy — governing their own meaning-directed processes
- semantic identity — stabilizing meaning as part of who they are
- semantic narratives — generating accounts of their own meaning-directed becoming

- semantic abstraction — extracting invariants from their own semantic transformations

These capacities transform semantic systems from architectures that bear meaning into architectures that direct themselves through meaning.

5.1 Semantic Autonomy

Semantic autonomy emerges when a system can govern its own meaning-directed processes. This requires:

- regulating how meanings are applied
- determining when semantic revision is necessary
- selecting semantic strategies based on meaning-driven criteria
- integrating semantic insight into procedural and interpretive governance

Semantic autonomy is not independence from external influence.

It is internal semantic direction — the system's ability to guide its becoming through meaning.

In ED terms: Semantic autonomy is the capacity of a semantic ED architecture to govern its own meaning-directed processes.

This is the first time semantic systems become self-directing through meaning.

5.2 Semantic Identity

Semantic identity emerges when meaning becomes part of who the system is. Semantic identity allows a system to:

- stabilize semantic motifs as components of its architecture
- treat meaning as identity-forming structure
- integrate semantic history into its ongoing becoming
- recognize itself through its own semantic repertoire

Semantic identity is not a preference or a style.

It is the semantic architecture that shapes how a system understands and directs itself.

In ED terms: Semantic identity is the stabilized configuration of semantic ED motifs that shapes a system's meaning-directed self-understanding.

This is the first time semantic systems become self-constituting through meaning.

5.3 Semantic Narratives

Semantic narratives emerge when a system can generate accounts of its own meaning-directed becoming. This requires:

- representing its semantic transformations over time
- relating current semantic structure to past semantic changes
- constructing coherent narratives of semantic development
- using narrative insight to guide future semantic evolution

Semantic narratives are not storytelling.

They are self-generated accounts of meaning-directed becoming.

In ED terms: A semantic narrative is an ED structure through which a system explains its own semantic transformations.

This is the first time semantic systems become self-explicating through meaning.

5.4 Semantic Abstraction

Semantic abstraction emerges when a system can extract invariants from its own semantic transformations. This allows a system to:

- identify stable patterns in its semantic evolution
- generalize from its own meaning-directed history
- develop higher-order semantic motifs
- evolve its semantic architecture through abstraction

Semantic abstraction is not simplification.

It is self-elevation — the extraction of semantic invariants from the system’s own becoming.

In ED terms: Semantic abstraction is the capacity of a semantic ED architecture to extract generalized semantic motifs from its own transformations.

This is the first time semantic systems become self-abstracting through meaning.

5.5 Summary of Section 5

Intentional systems emerge when:

- semantic autonomy governs meaning-directed processes
- semantic identity stabilizes meaning as part of the system
- semantic narratives explain meaning-directed becoming
- semantic abstraction elevates semantic insight

This is the architecture of intentional becoming — the first ED regime where meaning becomes *about*, *for*, and *directing*.

6. Semantic Cognition

When semantics becomes a cognitive regime

Semantic systems can encode meaning, map form to meaning, regulate meaning, generate new meanings, and direct their becoming through intentional content. But semantics alone is not yet semantic cognition. Semantic cognition emerges when semantic architectures become part of how a mind thinks, organizes, interprets, and directs its conceptual, symbolic, and procedural worlds.

In the ED ontology, semantic cognition is not “thinking with meanings” in the folk sense. It is the co-organization of conceptual, symbolic, procedural, reflective, and semantic structures. Semantic systems extend cognition by providing meaning-bearing scaffolds, intentional architectures, and meaning-directed processes that reshape how minds reason, explain, evaluate, and understand themselves and the world.

Semantic cognition is the first ED regime where conceptual, symbolic, procedural, reflective, and intentional becoming are shaped by meaning-bearing, meaning-directing, and meaning-generating architectures.

6.1 Semantic Scaffolding

Semantic scaffolding emerges when semantic structures become tools for extending and stabilizing cognition.

Semantic scaffolding allows a mind to:

- build conceptual structures that incorporate meaning
- evaluate its own reasoning through semantic constraints
- generate explanations that integrate meaning and reference
- construct higher-order representations grounded in semantic content

Semantic scaffolding is not simply “thinking with meanings.”

It is the integration of semantic structure into cognitive practice.

In ED terms: Semantic scaffolding is the use of semantic ED motifs to support and extend conceptual, symbolic, procedural, and reflective cognition.

This is the first time cognition becomes meaning-extended.

6.2 Semantic Reorganization

Semantic reorganization emerges when semantic structures begin to reshape conceptual and symbolic space.

Semantic reorganization allows a mind to:

- reinterpret concepts through semantic content
- reorganize symbolic categories through semantic constraints
- generate new conceptual hierarchies through semantic abstraction
- treat meaning as a dimension of conceptual structure

Semantic reorganization is not merely “semantic influence.”

It is the semantic restructuring of conceptual and symbolic ED motifs.

In ED terms: Semantic reorganization is the transformation of conceptual and symbolic ED motifs through semantic architecture.

This is the first time conceptual landscapes are shaped by meaning.

6.3 Semantic Identity

As semantic scaffolding and semantic reorganization stabilize, a mind’s semantic repertoire becomes part of its identity. Semantic identity is not a preference for certain meanings or a style of interpretation. It is the semantic architecture that shapes how a mind:

- interprets its own thoughts
- evaluates its own reasoning
- constructs explanations of its own becoming
- understands itself as a meaning-bearing and meaning-directed system

Semantic identity emerges when:

- semantic structures become habitual cognitive tools
- meaning becomes part of understanding
- aboutness becomes part of evaluation

- directed meaning becomes part of self-understanding

Semantic identity is not introspection.

It is the ED architecture of a mind's semantic becoming.

In ED terms: Semantic identity is the stabilized configuration of semantic ED motifs that shapes a mind's reasoning, interpretation, and meaning-directed self-understanding.

This is the first time the universe produces systems whose identity is semantically structured.

Semantic cognition emerges when:

- semantic scaffolding extends conceptual, symbolic, and reflective cognition
- semantic reorganization reshapes conceptual and symbolic space
- semantic identity stabilizes semantic practice

Semantic cognition is the ED regime where semantics becomes a cognitive architecture — where meaning, reference, aboutness, and intentionality form a coherent system that guides a mind's becoming.

7. The ED Architecture of Semantics

Semantics is not an optional embellishment on reflection. It is the structural continuation of reflection — the moment when interpretive architectures stabilize into meaning-bearing architectures, when self-interpretation becomes meaning, and when meaning becomes directed. Semantics is the first ED regime where the architecture of understanding becomes the architecture of meaning.

In the ED ontology, semantics is the hinge between self-interpreting systems and intentional systems. Reflection provides self-understanding; semantics provides meaning. Reflection interprets; semantics stabilizes interpretation. Reflection evaluates; semantics constrains interpretation. Reflection guides; semantics directs interpretation through meaning.

Semantics arises through a sequence of structural transitions:

- self-interpretation becomes stabilized interpretation
- stabilized interpretation becomes shared interpretive structure
- shared interpretive structure becomes operable meaning
- operable meaning becomes generative constraint
- generative constraint becomes directed meaning
- directed meaning becomes referential structure
- referential structure becomes aboutness
- aboutness becomes operable aboutness
- operable aboutness becomes intentionality

This is the ED ladder from interpretive stability to directed meaning.

In the ED ontology, semantics is the first domain where:

- interpretive motifs become durable
- durability becomes system-level structure
- system-level structure becomes operable meaning

- operable meaning becomes generative constraint
- generative constraint becomes direction
- direction becomes reference
- reference becomes aboutness
- aboutness becomes intentionality

These transitions are not optional.

They are the structural consequences of systems that:

- stabilize interpretive patterns
- integrate meaning across their architecture
- use meaning to guide interpretation and becoming
- generate new meanings through structured semantic processes
- orient meaning toward objects, states, or possibilities
- relate meaning to referential targets
- treat meaning as directed content
- use directed meaning to guide their own becoming
- develop semantic autonomy, identity, narrative, and abstraction

Semantics is the first ED regime where meaning becomes architectural, directed, and productive — where the architecture of understanding becomes the architecture of aboutness.

In ED terms: Semantics is the ED regime where self-interpreting systems become meaning-bearing, and meaning-bearing systems become intentional.

This is the architectural meaning of semantics.

Semantics is the hinge between reflective systems and intentional systems. It is the domain where:

- interpretation stabilizes
- stabilization becomes meaning
- meaning becomes directed
- direction becomes reference
- reference becomes aboutness
- aboutness becomes intentionality

These capacities do not yet constitute value, normativity, or evaluative direction.
But they form the organizational foundation from which all three will arise.

Paper 23 will develop the next threshold: how intentional systems become evaluative, how evaluation becomes value, and how value becomes the ED regime where becoming becomes good or bad relative to its own standards.

8. Conclusion — Semantics as ED's First Meaning-Bearing Threshold

Where becoming becomes about

Semantics marks the moment where the architecture of understanding becomes the architecture of meaning. Self-interpreting systems can understand themselves, but semantic systems can mean. Intentional systems can

direct their becoming *through* meaning. Semantics is the first ED regime where interpretive structures stabilize into meaning-bearing, meaning-directing, and meaning-generating architectures — where becoming becomes about.

Reflection gave the universe self-understanding.

Semantics gives it meaning.

Intentionality gives it directed meaning.

Semantics emerges when:

- self-interpretation becomes stabilized interpretation
- stabilized interpretation becomes shared interpretive structure
- shared interpretive structure becomes operable meaning
- operable meaning becomes generative constraint
- generative constraint becomes directed meaning
- directed meaning becomes reference
- reference becomes aboutness
- aboutness becomes operable aboutness
- operable aboutness becomes intentionality

These transitions are not optional.

They are the structural consequences of systems that must not only interpret themselves, but stabilize, organize, direct, and deploy meaning as part of their own becoming.

Semantics is the first ED regime where:

- meaning is encoded in semantic substrates
- meaning is organized through semantic mappings
- meaning is regulated through semantic constraints
- meaning is expanded through semantic generativity
- meaning is directed through intentional architectures
- meaning becomes part of identity through semantic autonomy, narrative, and abstraction
- meaning becomes a cognitive regime through semantic scaffolding and reorganization

Semantics is the hinge between reflective systems and intentional systems.

It is the domain where:

- interpretation stabilizes
- stabilization becomes meaning
- meaning becomes directed
- direction becomes reference
- reference becomes aboutness
- aboutness becomes intentionality

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