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Toward a New Theory of Moderate Contingentism: Individuals *just are* Realized Essences

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Abstract. In this paper, we propose a new actualist and contingentist modal metaphysics – fundamental essentialism – according to which individuals *just are* realized essences. Orthodox possible worlds semantics is incompatible with actualism and contingentism since Kripke models in which paradigmatic contingentists propositions are true require possible worlds whose domain contain merely possible individuals. In light of this problem, Plantinga has developed modal metaphysics based on essences, but it has been claimed by Fine, Williamson, and others, that it cannot be upheld because of the problem of unexemplified essences. We answer the latter problem by claiming that individuals just are realized essences. Then, justifying our theory further we refute Williamson's deductive argument for necessitism. Afterward, we show in what sense fundamental essentialism is contingentist metaphysics.
Keywords: Contingentism, Actualism, Possible Worlds Semantics, Unexemplified Essences, Necessitism

Naujos nuosaikiojo kontingentizmo teorijos link: individai *ir yra* realizuotos esmės

Santrauka. Straipsnyje siūloma nauja aktualistinė ir kontingentistinė modalinė metafizika – fundamentalusis esencializmas, – kuria remiantis individai *ir yra* realizuotos esmės. Standartinė galimų pasaulių semantika yra nesuderinama su aktualizmu ir kontingentizmu, kadangi Kripkės modeliuose, kuriuose paradigminiai kontingentistiniai teiginiai yra teisingi, esama galimų pasaulių, kurių domenai įtraukia vien galimus individus. Kaip atsaką į šią problemą Plantinga sukūrė esmėmis grįstą modalinę metafiziką, bet, Fine'o, Williamsono ir kitų autorių teigimu, dėl neinstancijuotų esmių problemos ši teorija negali būti teisinga. Straipsnyje atsakome į pastarąją problemą teigdami, kad individai ir yra realizuotos esmės. Siūlomą teoriją grindžiame paneigdami Williamsono deduktyvų samprotavimą, turintį pagrįsti necesitizmą. Tuomet parodome, kokia prasme fundamentalusis esencializmas yra kontingentistinė metafizika.
Pagrindiniai žodžiai: kontingentizmas, aktualizmas, galimų pasaulių semantika, neinstancijuotos esmės, necesitizmas

Introduction

Actualism is the thesis that (unrestrictedly) everything that is, in any sense of *is*, actually exists. Contingentism is the thesis that what individuals exist is a matter of contingency. There are two brands of actualistic contingentism – *full-blooded contingentism* and *moderate contingentism*. According to the former, it is contingent what individuals exist and the same holds for higher-order entities[1]. According to the latter, although it is contingent what individuals exist, it is necessary what higher-order entities exist[2].

Both full-blooded necessitists[3] and full-blooded contingentists[4] have argued that moderate contingentism cannot be upheld because of the problem of unexemplified essences. In this paper, we provide new moderate contingentist modal metaphysics – dub it *Fundamental Essentialism* – which, we claim, can answer that problem. According to fundamental essentialism, individual things *just are* realized essences[5]. An essence of Socrates is what it is to be that thing and Socrates himself is realized essence. We take the realization of essence to be a property of it, hence, on the proposed account, Socrates is a property of a property, that is: Socrates *just is* realized Socrateity.

We motivate the theory of fundamental essentialism via the theoretical virtues it has. First, besides solving the problem of unexemplified essences, our proposed theory enables us to answer other core problems that contingentists face: we can solve the classical objection to orthodox possible worlds semantics with variable domain models and actualistic quantifiers (Kripke 1963), the objection being that if the semantic framework is interpreted realistically, then it cannot accommodate both contingentism and actualism; also, we can rebut Williamson's (2013: 295–296) deductive argument for necessitism. Secondly, unlike other contingentist theories, our theory depends neither on free logic, nor on the restriction of the rule of necessitation, nor on treating some of the features of the models for modal logics as representationally insignificant. Hence fundamental essentialism challenges Williamson's claim (2013: 42) that contingentist must either adopt free logic or restrict the rule of necessitation.

Fundamental essentialism is a descendant of Plantinga's (1974, 1976) and Jager's (1982) moderate contingentist theory (PJ, for short), so most of our discussion proceeds by way of showing how our proposed theory betters PJ. First, (§1) we rehearse the problem that led to PJ, viz. the aforementioned classical objection to orthodox possible worlds semantics. Then, (§2) we show how PJ answers this objection, and (§3) we spell out the problem of unexemplified essences that is said to haunt moderate contingentists.

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[1] Defenders include Adams 1981, Fine 1977, Stalnaker 2012. For a detailed exploration of the view see Fritz & Goodman 2016 and Fritz 2018a, 2018b.

[2] Defenders include Platinga 1974, 1976, Jager 1982, Pérez Otero 2013, Skiba 2022.

[3] See Linsky & Zalta 1994: 442, Williamson 2013: 267–277. Full-blooded necessitists hold that it is necessary what individuals exist and it is necessary what higher-order entities exist. Defended by Linsky & Zalta 1994, 1996 and Williamson 2002, 2010, 2013.

[4] See Adams 1981: 11–18, McMichael 1983: 55–61, Fine 1985: 148–155, Menzel 1990: 365–367.

[5] Hence fundamental essentialism is what Bennett (2006: 271) called the "simplified view [of Plantinga's theory – *P. G.*]". We justify our proposed new name for this theory in §4.

Afterward, (§4) we formulate the theory of fundamental essentialism and we show how it enables us to answer both the classical objection and the problem of unexemplified essences. Then, (§5) we refute Williamson's deductive arguments for necessitism, and (§6) we ask whether fundamental essentialism is a contingentist metaphysics.

1. Classical Objection to Orthodox Possible Worlds Semantics

The problem of creating semantics for modal logics that would accommodate contingentist and actualistic metaphysics – the problem that has been with us ever since the inception of modal logics – persists to this day. Already Prior (1957: 48) worried that "ordinary modal logic is haunted by the myth that whatever exists exists necessarily", and more recently what Prior called a myth has been declared a fact by necessitists. Necessity of what individuals exist is something that we as contingentist cannot swallow and hence we need to look for a model theory without such a consequence.

Originally Kripke (1963) promised a remedy for the predicament that Prior found himself in – orthodox possible worlds semantics with variable domain models and actualistic quantifiers was born. But now within orthodox semantics, the problem of *possibilia* looms large. As Fine (2002: 161) puts it, in this semantics

> we presuppose an ontology of possibilia twice over. For first, we countenance various possible worlds, in addition to the actual world; and second, each of these worlds is taken to be endowed with its own domain of objects. These will be the actual objects of the world in question, but they need not be actual *simpliciter*, i.e. actual objects of *our* world.

And *possiblia* are something that we as actualists cannot swallow and hence we need to look for model theory without such a consequence.

The first case of *possibilia* that Fine mentions, namely merely possible *worlds*, is quite unproblematic. We can remain actualists while committing ourselves to their existence because we can draw a distinction between worlds that exist (are actual) and a world that obtains (is actualized)[6]. So in the case of possible worlds, we actualists rebut the charge of committing ourselves to *possibilia* by claiming that possible worlds are not *possibilia*.

So far, so good. However, the second case of *possibilia* mentioned, namely merely possible *individuals*, is more troublesome. How can we take the proposition

(1)   there could have been an individual distinct from all actual individuals,

to be true, without committing ourselves to merely possible individuals? One might call an argument that this cannot be done within orthodox possible worlds semantics – the classical objection to it. The story goes as follows[7].

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[6] As suggested by Plantinga 1974: 51, 1976: 144, 1983: 4, Stalnaker 2012: 8–9, McMichael 1983: 50–52.

[7] We tell the story roughly as it is told by Plantinga 1976: 139–142. For similar lines of thought, see Jager 1982: 335–337, Linsky & Zalta 1994: 440, Williamson 2000: 206–207, 2014: 222–223, Jacinto 2016: 24–26.

According to orthodox semantics, proposition (1) is true in w_0 *iff* there is a possible world w ($\neq w_0$)[8] such that in w there exists an individual that is distinct from every individual in w_0. Hence the set of actually existing individuals (D_{w0}) is a proper subset of the global domain (U), the latter being the union of all local domains in the model. Therefore, there is a set U that has a member b such that b is not a member of D_{w0}. Since b is a member of U, b is something; hence, by actualism, b actually exists. However, b is not a member of D_{w0} and D_{w0} contains everything that actually exists, hence b does not actually exist. Therefore, we conclude that b both actually exist and it does not actually exist. Since we are actualists and contingentists, we take actualism and (1) to be true. Thus the derived contradiction points to the orthodox semantics itself as a culprit and, therefore, it is to be rejected.

The essence of this objection is that for someone who is an actualist, models of modal logic have to consist of the materials available in the actual world. Hence, as Linsky & Zalta (1994: 440) puts it, even if formally we restrict our quantifiers to range over only worldbound entities, as actualistic quantifiers do, we still quantify over merely possible individuals in the metalanguage of the orthodox semantics, and thus we are ontologically committed to their existence.

Because of the classical objection, some have suggested that we should take Kripke models to be, in some respects, representationally insignificant (Stalnaker 2012), while others think it supports, at least to some degree, the claim that necessarily everything exists of necessity (Williamson 2013). However, Plantinga and Jager claim that it is possible to develop realistically interpreted Kripke-style possible worlds semantics that accommodates both contingentism and actualism. We proceed (§2) to look at what they have to offer.

2. PJ's Modal Metaphysics and the Classical Objection

The basic philosophical idea of PJ is the following: we provide possible worlds semantics via necessary existent essences of individuals and not individuals themselves. Essence, on their account, is an essential and necessarily unique property of an individual, i.e. a property E is an essence *iff*

   a) E is exemplified in some possible world,

and in any possible world for all x

   b) if x has E, then x has E essentially (viz. in all possible worlds where x exists, x has E), and

   c) in no world anything distinct from x has E (Jager 1982: 337).

The essence of an individual, by definition, uniquely tracks it: an essence is exemplified in w *iff* the individual, whose essence it is, exists in w; and this essence cannot be an essence of anything else. This allows PJ to take the domain of a possible world as a domain of

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[8] Throughout the article, we take "w_0" to (rigidly) designate the actual world. Also, we assume that accessibility relation on a set of possible worlds is a universal relation, and thus we omit it in our discussion.

exemplified essences therein. Thus, in the official formal semantics of PJ developed by Jager (1982), quantifiers range over essences and not over individuals themselves. Furthermore, since essences exist necessarily, in a model we have a constant domain D and then we simulate variable domains within the constant domain, viz. let there be a function that assigns to each world w a domain D_w ($\subseteq$ D) of essences that are exemplified in w.

Within PJ account we say that

(1)   there could have been an individual distinct from all actual individuals,

is true in w_0 *iff* there is w ($\neq w_0$) such that in w some essence E is exemplified, but E is not exemplified in w_0. For if there is an essence that is exemplified in w, but not in w_0, then had w obtained, some individual not identical to anything in the actual world would have existed. Essences exist necessarily, therefore all of them exist actually, and thus the global domain of the model causes no problems. The upshot of PJ account is that if we have essences, we can accept our contingentist assumptions and that only leads us to unexemplified essences, but not to merely possible individuals. However, there are reasons to doubt whether unexemplified essences are metaphysically respectable.

3. The Problem of Unexemplified Essences

Say that "X is an essence of y" *iff* $\Box\forall x(Xx \leftrightarrow x = y)$. By accepting higher-order necessitism, moderate contingentists accept that necessarily, for any y necessarily there is an essence of y. Henceforth, let S stand for an essence of Socrates, let s denote Socrates, and let w denote a world where s does not exist. But now, in the vocabulary of Williamson (2013: 269), how is it that S locks onto s in w? This is a challenging question for moderate contingentists, and there are few precisifications of what this challenge amounts to[9].

On the first one, one is challenged to provide metaphysical grounds for $\Box\forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ holding in w. That is, one must provide a sentence Q such that: $\Box\forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ holds in w because Q (where "because" is understood metaphysically). The sceptic will point out to us that $\Box\forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ holding in w cannot be because S is suitably related to s – in w there is no Socrates to be related to anything. He will go on to tell us that we have nothing much left to fill the role of Q.

The second one begins with the thought that necessarily if a property exists, it has well-defined conditions of satisfaction[10]. S has conditions of satisfaction in w only if $\Box\forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ holds in w because the latter formula specifies what it takes to satisfy S. According to that formula, S has conditions of satisfaction such that necessarily for any x, x satisfies those conditions of satisfaction *iff* the denotation function assigns the same

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[9] For more throughout developments of the problem, see Adams 1981: 11–18, McMichael 1983: 55-61, Fine 1985: 148–155, Menzel 1990: 365–367, Pérez Otero 2013: 403, Williamson 2013: 267–277, Skiba 2022: 3–10, 20–23. The first precisification we will discuss is due to Skiba 2022: 3–10; the second one is due to Williamson 2013: 274–275.

[10] Well in a relevant plenitudinous sense of "property" we might think that "'well-defined application conditions' is barely more than a notational variant of 'property'" (Williamson 2013: 275). I agree with that, but the argument to be given requires only that one accept the conditional claim given here.

value to x and s. However, in w there is no Socrates, and hence denotation function has nothing to assign to s. But if so, then S has no conditions of satisfaction in w. Therefore, S does not exist in w.

Recently few answers to the problem of unexemplified essences were proposed by Pérez Otero (2013) and by Skiba (2022). We will not engage with them here in-depth, but we note a few drawbacks of their positions.

Otero (2013: 404) accepts that there are necessary existent microphysical individuals such that, roughly speaking, each possible individual is essentially uniquely related to some such microphysical individuals. He calls this thesis *modal metaphysical atomism*. The idea behind it is this: if one has some necessary existent individuals to which, for example, this knife k is essentially uniquely related, then one will be able to specify an essence of k in worlds where k is not. These individuals better not be the handle and the blade of k, since all of these could have been nothing by contingentists light. So better go and look what this handle and blade are made of, and go even further till you hit microphysical constituents. When you do so, claim that they exist of necessity. Claim the same for the constituents of each actual individual and of each individual that could have existed but does not.

There are a few problems with this account: first, Otero holds that what microphysical individuals exist is necessary but it is contingent what ordinary individuals exist. However, he does not explain what is the metaphysical basis for such difference. So even if we grant Otero (2013: 405) the claim that "there is no rationale for the contingentist about individuals to think that *all basic* microphysical entities must be contingent", still we might wonder: is it the size of microphysical individuals that accounts for their existential modal profile? Or is it the fact that everything else is made of them? If either, then how do these features imply something about their existential modal profile? After all, the distinction between microphysical and ordinary individuals is not as deep as, say, that between pure sets and social objects. The existential modal profiles of the latter might be thought to uncontroversially follow from their respective natures. Secondly, there is no good independent evidence for modal metaphysical atomism, except that it allows us to solve the problem of unexemplified essences (this Otero himself accepts, see 2013: 404–405).

Another answer to the problem of unexemplified essences was recently developed by Skiba (2022). His position is very promising, and I do not find any drawbacks to the way he solves the problem under the first precisification. Hence I will not discuss how he does it. However, I do find some problems with the way he solves the problem under the second precisification (or something very akin to it). Hence let us focus on that one. First, he says that "the position in which term t occurs in sentence $A(t)$ is existence-demanding just in case $A(t)$ logically entails $\exists x\, t = x$" (Skiba 2022: 26). Secondly, he provides good independent reasons to think that only *predications* are existence-demanding. Thirdly, he notes that $\Box \forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ is not a predication. Thus $\Box \forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ can hold in w without Socrates existing in w.

The worry I have with this answer is that it depends on free logics and on instrumental treatment of models of modal logic. In w, $\Box \forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ holds, however, we cannot

infer that $\exists y \Box \forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = y)$ holds in w (the free logic part). Regarding instrumental interpretation: suppose $\Box \forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ holds in w (remember in w Socrates is not). Since w is accessible to w, thus $\forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ holds in w. Thus on any x-variant variable assignment function, $\underline{a}[x/d]$, the following holds: $\mathrm{den}_{\underline{a}[x/d]}(x) \in V(S)$ if and only if $\mathrm{den}_{\underline{a}[x/d]}(x) = \mathrm{den}_{\underline{a}[x/d]}(s)$. Denotation function assigns Socrates to s. Denotation function is a function. Functions are certain relations. Relations are certain sets of ordered n-tuples. Ordered n-tuples are certain unordered sets. So one can cut the pie anyway one likes, Socrates is a member of some set in a possible world w. So if $\Box \forall x(Sx \leftrightarrow x = s)$ holds in w and if one interprets the semantics realistically, one will have to say that Socrates is a member of some set in w. However, Skiba (2022: 26) accepts that "Socrates $\in A$" is a predication and thus existence-demanding. Therefore, he has to interpret his semantics instrumentally. If Skiba is willing to go for free logics plus instrumental interpretation of possible worlds semantics, as it seems he must, I have no other objection except that he is willing to go for free logics plus instrumental interpretation of possible worlds semantics[11]. I will offer another way that involves neither.

4. The Theory of Fundamental Essentialism

It does seem odd that in worlds where Socrates is not, necessary and sufficient conditions for Socrates' existence (*existence-conditions*, for short) do not exist. For it seems that these worlds that are devoid of Socrates are precisely such that the conditions under which Socrates would exist are not fulfilled or realized. That is, it seems that there are existence-conditions for Socrates (i.e. Socrateity exists), but the world is not that way as to realize them. Moreover, if in some possible world there are not any existence-conditions for Socrates, then it seems it is impossible for Socrates to exist since there are no circumstances, no way for a world to be such that the existence-conditions for Socrates would be realized because these putative existence-conditions do not exist.

What has gone wrong here, I claim, is due to the fact that individuals are detached from their essences. Socrateity, to put it metaphorically, only follows Socrates wherever he goes in the modal dimension and repels everyone else. But even if it is necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of Socrates in any possible world that Socrateity be exemplified, nonetheless we are told Socrates is something and Socrateity is something else. I believe Plantinga, Jager, and others assume that individuals are bearers of properties that themselves are not properties (call such bearers of properties *basic*). Such basic bearers of properties, I believe they assume, are both conceptually irreducible and also metaphysically speaking they are not to be reduced to something else. So, for example, Stalnaker (2012: 36/n10) tells us that "by "individual" here, I mean things that are not

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[11] Plantinga's solution (1985: 333–337) to the problem of unexemplified essences has the same drawback. In w, according to him, S has the essential property of *necessarily being an essence of (only) s if at all*, and that is not existence-entailing with respect to Socrates. All the same, I say, one will have to provide conditions of satisfaction for this property in w, and thus one will have to say that Socrates is in some set in w, and hence one will have to conclude that Socrates exists in w.

themselves properties, propositions, or relations", and he certainly accepts that individuals are bearers of properties. Hale (2013: 220) says that the essence or "[t]he nature of a thing, x, is a special kind of property <…> – property which anything must have if it is to be x, and possession of which constitutes being x". Socrates is that which possesses Socrateity and he is constituted by this possession. Once again, Socrates is one thing and Socrateity another. But what is Socrates himself? It seems he is a bearer of properties that is not a property, a relation, or a proposition; that is, Socrates is a basic bearer of properties.

Well, maybe as moderate contingentists we should get rid of this way of thinking. Perhaps we should reject the assumptions they make about individuals. The proposal we offer is this: follow PJ in claiming that there are essences, but do not follow them in postulating basic bearers of those essences. When one says the essence of Socrates is so and so, then, on the proposed account, one should take Socrates himself *just to be* so and so *being the case*. When one says that the essence of Socrates is to be a human being that has originated from a particular sperm cell S and a particular ovum O, then one should accept that Socrates just is the part of reality that is that way[12]. The important point is that, on the proposed account, the realization of essences results in concrete individuals[13], but I claim these concrete individuals are not additional entities – they *just are* realized essences[14]. Since *essences* are understood as *fundamentum* out of which or from which individuals are built, we call the issuing theory *Fundamental Essentialism*[15].

4.1. What is Realization?

We have to say something about realization. We say that an essence is realized iff *the way of being that essence is* is the case. Now if we would try to cash out the locution *is the case*, we would inevitably come back to realization. Hence, we will say that realization is a primitive notion of our theory, although we will now try to elucidate it somewhat.

We take the existence of essences to be necessary, but their realization contingent, thus we must say that realization is not the same as existence. Also, we cannot say that realization is instantiation since the standard way to understand instantiation is to say

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[12] One might ask, precisely what are the conditions which are to be met if Socrates is to exist? Well, it depends on the philosophical views one endorses. If one thinks Socrates is matter arranged so and so, then one will specify conditions for Socrates' existence accordingly. If one thinks Socrates is such and such an immaterial soul, one will specify conditions for Socrates' existence differently.

[13] Perhaps not always. Realization of the essence of the number two, of the null-set, if such there be, does not result in concrete objects. Most probably, realization does not apply to these kinds of entities.

[14] Our notion of "just is" is not identical to the notion of "just is" as developed by Rayo (2013) and Dorr (2016). As far as I see it, they both assume individuals are basic bearers of properties. Given that assumption, our statement that individuals just are realized essences could not be expressed. Our notion of "just is" is much closer to some claims that Argle (a fictional character) makes in dialogue "Holes", see Lewis & Lewis 1970. At one point, Argle claims that holes are perforated surfaces' and he adds that "When *I* say that there are holes in something, I mean nothing more nor less than that it is perforated" (Lewis & Lewis 1970: 206). Rephrasing Argle to fit our context, I say (N. B. without quotation marks): when *I* say that there is an individual, I mean nothing more nor less than that essence is realized.

[15] This redeems a promissory note in the introduction. Fundamental essentialism as developed here is not to be confused with the acceptance of what Skiba (2022: 14–15) calls "fundamental essences".

that it is a property of having a non-empty extension; a property, that is, of having some *individual* in the extension. Since, according to fundamental essentialism, individuals just are realized essences, realization cannot be instantiation.

Luckily, at the beginning of (§1), we have observed that a somewhat similar notion is employed in the context of metaphysics of possible worlds. We have said that all possible worlds exist necessarily, although only one *obtains*. For example, Stalnaker (2012: 8–9) claims that

> An actualist needs the distinction between existing and being exemplified in order to be able explain the sense in which a merely possible world exists (a property the world might have had exists) and the sense in which it does not (no world that is that way exists).

Certainly, if Stalnaker would cash his notion of a world "being exemplified" in terms of basic bearers of properties and in terms of whether or not these basic bearers of properties satisfy certain conditions, then the distinction he draws is not quite the distinction we intend to draw between existing and realization. As a matter of fact, he does exactly that

> What are possible worlds properties of? They are properties of the total universe. One may question whether there is such a thing as the total universe to be what has these properties, but I will assume that one can intelligibly speak of a universe that is (in the sense of "exemplifies") a way things might be (Stalnaker 2012: 12).

Although he is quick to add that

> If there is no such entity, perhaps we can speak of possible states of the world as being exemplified, or not, but not *by* anything (ibid.).

And that is exactly what we are looking for. Even if someone does not agree that possible worlds understood as properties are exemplified but not by anything, I think he should concede that it is at least intelligible to consider this alternative that Stalnaker entertains. But then moving from Stalnaker's macro-level of possible worlds and total universe to the micro-level of essences and individuals, we claim that essences are exemplified, or not, but not *by* anything. Even if someone does not agree with us, I think he should concede that it is intelligible to consider this alternative.

(A side note on terminology: if one thinks something (a world, an essence) is exemplified but no by anything, then, I suggest, in place of "exemplified" one should use another term, since "exemplified" will inevitably trigger a "having a non-empty extension" interpretation. Another term I think will do is, of course, "realized").

Formally, we treat fundamental essentialism as follows: we assume constant domain models and add a realization function, which for every $w \in W$ assigns D_w such that $D_w \subseteq D$. Informally realization function assigns to every world w a set of realized essences in w, i. e. a set of individuals that exist in w (we also assume that everything in D belongs to some D_w). Then, we add variable assignment and denotation functions in the usual way

and we say: M, w, $\underline{a} \vDash Rt$ if and only if $\text{den}_{\underline{a}}(t) \in D_w$.[16] We interpret R as a predicate that expresses the property of realization.

4.2. Answering the Classical Objection and the Problem of Unexemplified Essences

Our answer to the classical objection is straightforward: we claim that Socrates exists in w iff M, $w \vDash Rs$ (when s – essence whose realization is Socrates); Socrates does not exist in w iff M, $w \vDash \sim Rs$. Now proposition

(1) there could have been an individual distinct from all actual individuals,

says that in some world w some essence is realized and it is not realized in w_0, viz. (1) is true in w_0 iff M, w_0, $\underline{a} \vDash \exists x(\sim Rx \ \& \ \Diamond Rx)$.

The problem of unexemplified essences arose for moderate contingentists just because they presupposed an individual (understood as a basic bearer of properties) and its essence as two distinct entities. According to the theory of fundamental essentialism, there are only essences that are either realized or not. Thus there is no obstacle for essences to exist without being realized. In other words, one could say, we simply reject a premise on which the problem rests.

We now turn to see (§5) how fundamental essentialism allows us to refute Williamson's deductive argument for necessitism. Afterward, (§6) we ask whether fundamental essentialism is a contingentist metaphysics.

5. Refuting Williamson's Deductive Arguments for Necessitism

Most of Williamson's arguments for necessitism are abductive in nature, yet to engage with them appropriately would require another entry. Thus, it will be illustrative to engage with his deductive arguments for necessitism. One of them is the following (Williamson 2013: 295–296):

(2) necessarily, if Socrates is nothing, then the proposition that Socrates is nothing is true;

(3) necessarily, if the proposition that Socrates is nothing is true, then the proposition that Socrates is nothing is something;

(4) necessarily, if the proposition that Socrates is nothing is something, then Socrates is something;

(5) ∴ necessarily, Socrates is something.

Given the metaphysical picture we are defending, we must translate Williamson's argument into ours. For us, the proposition that Socrates is nothing states that the essence whose realization is Socrates is not realized. Let s denote this essence, let $\pi(A)$ mean "the proposition that A", and let $T(\pi(A))$ stand for "the proposition that A is true". Our translation proceeds thus:

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[16] Where t is a term, i.e. either a variable or a constant.

(2FE) necessarily, if ~*Rs*, then T(π(~*Rs*));
(3FE) necessarily, if T(π(~*Rs*)), then $\exists P(P = \pi(\sim Rs))$;
(4FE) necessarily, if $\exists P(P = \pi(\sim Rs))$, then *Rs*;
(5FE) $\therefore$ necessarily, *Rs*.

(2FE) and (3FE) seem to be hardly contestable, hence, we must say that (4FE) is false. But it is false, for if there is a possible world *w* where the proposition *s isn't realized* exists, it does not follow that *s* is realized in *w*. At the end of the day, the proposition that Socrates does not exist, is, on our account, a proposition *about* the essence whose realization is Socrates.

We, unlike others[17], refute Williamson's argument in a way that depends neither on free logic nor on the distinction between true in a world / true at a world.

6. Necessitism, Contingentism, and Fundamental Essentialism

We consider three critical questions regarding our proposed theory and its relationship with the necessitism-contingentism debate.

Is Socrates a Contingent Existent?

Objector: if A just is B and B exists of necessity, then A exists of necessity. You claim that Socrates, at the end of the day, just is an essence. However, on your account essences exist of necessity and hence you must conclude that Socrates exists of necessity. Therefore, you falsely claim that on your account Socrates is a contingent existent.

Answer: if this hole just is a perforated surface and this surface exists of necessity, it does not follow that this surface is perforated of necessity, and hence it does not follow that this hole exists of necessity[18]. Now

> when *I* say that there is an individual, I mean nothing more nor less than that there is a realized essence <…> I am sorry my innocent predicate confuses you by sounding like an idiom of existential quantification, so that you think that inferences involving it are valid when they are not <…> Agreeable fellow that I am, I wish to have a sentence that sounds like yours and that is true exactly when you falsely suppose your existential quantification over individuals to be true.

Thus if Socrates just is realized essence and this essence exists of necessity, it does not follow that this essence is realized of necessity, and hence it does not follow that Socrates exists of necessity. Socrates is not identical to his essence. He just is realized essence and whether his essence is realized or not is a contingent matter. Therefore, Socrates is a contingent existent.

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[17] E. g. Fine 1985: 163–166, Rumfitt 2003, Efird 2010: 105–107.
[18] Remember Argle whom we have met in fn 14 above. In the quotation that follows we, once again, rephrase Argle to fit our context, see Lewis & Lewis (1970: 206–207).

Does Socrates Exist?

Objector: you have just claimed, that "I am sorry my innocent predicate confuses you by sounding like an idiom of existential quantification", so you do not believe that Socrates exists. You only believe that some essence has a property of realization.

Answer: My theory of individuals is that they are realized essences. If you insist that to be an individual is to be a basic bearer of properties, then I must agree that there are no individuals on my account. Of course, I will not agree with your claim, since it begs the question of whether individuals exist according to my theory by presupposing *your* theoretical account of individuals. Given my metaphysical theory of individuals, it is appropriate to define quantifiers for individuals as follows (superscript letter "^{I}" indicates that we quantify over individuals):

- $\forall^I xA$ stands for $\forall x(Rx \to A)$ (read: *all individuals are such that A holds*)
- $\exists^I xA$ stands for $\exists x(Rx \,\&\, A)$ (read: *some individual is such that A holds*)

According to my theory, Socrates just is realized essence; that essence is in fact realized; therefore, Socrates exists[19].

Is Fundamental Essentialism a Contingentist Metaphysics?

Objector: you develop constant domain models as adequate for your theory, thus according to you the formula

  NNE $\Box\forall x\Box\exists y(x=y)$,

is valid. Williamson (2010: 662–666) defined necessitists to be those who accept NNE. You accept NNE and thus you are necessitists.

Answer: I agree with you in one sense; I disagree in another. I claim that there are two different ways to understand necessitism and contingentism. Let me explain.

First of all, whether one is called a necessitist or a contingentist depends on whether one thinks that necessarily all *individuals* exist necessarily. One is necessitist if one thinks so; one is contingentist if one does not. Let us call these theses *the spirit of necessitism* and *the spirit of contingentism* respectively.

Secondly, we formalize these opinions using possible worlds semantics. Then, we say that, *since quantifiers range over individuals*, necessitism is a position whose proponents think that NNE and one qualifies as a contingentist if one thinks that ~NNE. We may drop our assumption that quantifiers must range over individuals. Then, we would claim that any position which accepts NNE is necessitism and any position which accepts ~NNE is contingentism, *whatever entities over which quantifiers range over are*. I think it is appropriate to name necessitism and contingentism thus understood *the letter of necessitism* and *the letter of contingentism*.

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[19] Needless to say, here we disregard temporal matters for convenience. To be more precise, Socrates existed some time ago, since his essence was realized some time ago; now he does not, since his essence is no longer realized.

According to our favored theory, individuals are realized essences. The spirit of necessitism concerns individuals. Hence within fundamental essentialism, it is appropriate to formulate the spirit of necessitism as

$$\text{NNE}^{\text{I}} \; \Box\forall^{\text{I}}x\Box\exists^{\text{I}}y(x{=}y)^{20}$$

We reject that NNE$^{\text{I}}$ should be taken as a valid formula in a metaphysically universal modal logic, and hence our proposed theory is contingentist in spirit. We agree that necessarily every essence necessarily exists, thus we accept NNE as a valid formula in a metaphysically universal modal logic, and hence our proposed theory is necessitist in letter. Conclusion: fundamental essentialism is contingentist in spirit, but necessitist in letter. I believe that the spirit, and not the letter, expresses the proper nature of these positions. Therefore, I conclude that fundamental essentialism is contingentist metaphysics.

If you insist that what is genuinely relevant to the necessitism-contingentism debate is only what I called the letter of these positions, then I *agree* that I am a full-blooded necessitist. But note, a full-blooded necessitist who truthfully claims that it is contingent what individuals exist.

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[20] I.e. in the official notation: NNE$^{\text{I}}$ $\Box\forall x(Rx \rightarrow \Box\exists y(Ry \; \& \; x = y))$.

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