

Necessary Existents

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The thesis

Necessarily, everything exists.

The arguments

1. S5 is the right modal logic and " $\Box \exists x \alpha \rightarrow \exists x \Box \alpha$ " is one of its theorems (the Barcan Formula).
2. By counterfactual foundations of modality: to say that something possibly exists is to say that if such-and-such were the case, *it* would exist. By saying what *it* would be if such-and-such were the case (namely existing), we commit ourselves to *it*'s existence.
3. By argument:
 - (1) Necessarily, if I do not exist then the proposition that I do not exist is true.
 - (2) Necessarily, if the proposition that I do not exist is true then the proposition that I do not exist exists.
 - (3) Necessarily, if the proposition that I do not exist exists, then I exist.
 - (4) Hence, necessary I exist.

In favour (Williamson 2002)

1. (1) and (2) are instances of
 - (1+) Necessarily, the proposition that *p* is true iff *p*.
 - (2+) Necessarily, if the proposition that *p* is true then the proposition that *p* exists.
 - (3+) Necessarily, if the proposition that *P(o)* exists then *o* exists.
2. The distinction between truth-in-worlds and truth-of-worlds poses no threat to either (1+) nor (2+) for
 1. (2+) concerns truth-in-worlds; and
 2. (1+) also concerns truth-in-worlds, because it is supported by the facts
 - that we use a notion of valid argument as one in which the truth of the premisses necessitate the truth of the conclusion; and
 - that if this notion would not use truth-in-worlds but truth-of-worlds, it would explain validity in terms of the concept of a possible world; and
 - the concept of a possible world should be explained in terms of the concept of validity.
3. (3+), for directly referential terms "*o*", follows from the facts
 - that "*x* refers to *o*" stands for an essential property of the things *x* of which it is true; and

- that “the proposition that $P(o)$ ” is a rigid designator.
4. The conclusion is acceptable if understood as using the logical sense of “exist”.

Against (Rumfitt 2003)

1. (2) is a misleadingly nominalized rendering of quantification into sentence position.
2. We have to recast the proof as
- (1') Necessarily, if I do not exist then it is true that I do not exist.
 (2') Necessarily, if it is true that I do not exist then it is either true or false that I do not exist.
 (3') Necessarily, if it is either true or false that I do not exist then I exist.
 (4') Hence, necessarily I exist.
3. The argument equivocates between (for (2')):
- (a) It is *e*-necessary that: if it is true that I do not exist then it is either true or false that I do not exist. (i.e. its negation entails a contradiction)
 (b) It is *c*-necessary that: if it is true that I do not exist then it is either true or false that I do not exist. (i.e. its negation commits us to suppose a contradiction)
- (2') is acceptable for *e*-necessity, but (3') only holds with *c*-necessity. But metaphysical necessity does not follow from *c*-necessity:
- (Neptune) (N1) Suppose Neptune did not exist.
 (N2) Now, if Neptune did not exist, the observed irregularities in the orbit of Uranus would not be caused by the presence of another planet.
 (N3) So the irregularities are not caused by the presence of another planet).
3. The argument equivocates between (for (1')):
- (i) the redundancy sense of “true”: necessarily, if I do not exist then I do not exist.
 (ii) the non-redundancy sense of “true”: necessarily, if I do not exist, then a group of thinkers will be able to attain a common understanding of the question whether I do not exist.
- (1') is acceptable in the redundancy sense, but then (3') is question-begging. For (3'), we need the non-redundancy sense, but then (1') is no longer acceptable.