

The Varieties of Necessity, by Kit Fine
Problèmes de Métaphysique
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Are all necessary truths and necessary connections reducible to a single form of necessity?

Fine's Claim: There are three main forms of necessity—the metaphysical, the natural, and the normative—and none of them is reducible to the others or to any other form of necessity. Thus, what it is for a necessity or possibility of any of these forms to obtain does not consist in the obtaining of some other form or forms of necessity or possibility.

1. Necessities

Why should we think there are different kinds of possibility or necessity?

Q_a: Is it possible to get from London to New York in under an hour?

A₁: No, it is impossible given the currently available means of transport.

A₂: Yes, it is scientifically possible.

Q_b: Is it possible to get from the earth to the sun in under 2 hours?

A₃: No, it is scientifically impossible.

A₄: Yes, it is logically possible.

Modal Monism: There is a single underlying modal notion in terms of which all others can be defined or understood.

(1) Relativisation

A proposition is a ϕ ly necessary truth iff it is logically necessary *relative to* or *conditional upon* the basic ϕ truths.

(2) Restriction

A proposition is ϕ ly necessary if it is metaphysically necessary and if, in addition, it is a ϕ truth. (Fine thinks this works for logical, mathematical and conceptual necessity).

Problems:

- What would the set of ϕ truths be for metaphysical necessity as defined by (1)?
Suggestions: the essential truths, conceivability, truths about experience...
- Natural and Normative necessity are resistant to such definitions.

Strategy:

- Show that natural and normative necessity are broader than metaphysical necessity, and so cannot be restricted forms of metaphysical necessity.
- Show that natural and normative necessary cannot be treated by relativisation.

2. Natural Necessity: Subsumption

Natural necessity: the form of necessity that pertains to natural phenomena.

(1) Restriction strategy.

A proposition is naturally necessary if it is metaphysically necessary and if, in addition, it is a truth about natural kinds.

PRO:

Kripkean strategies: If something looks like mass behaving according to different laws of nature, it is not mass, but something else, say, schmass. Just as if something looks like water, but is made of XYZ, it is not water, but something else, say, twater.

Natural necessities are just metaphysical necessities, i.e. essentialist truths arising from the identity of natural kinds.

CON:

Consider: "There is no schmass". This is a natural necessity but a metaphysical possibility.

Either mass can behave differently or it can't. If it can, then those worlds in which it can are metaphysically possible but naturally impossible; if it can't, then those worlds in which it seems to be in fact schmassy worlds which are metaphysically possible but naturally impossible. Therefore, not all natural necessities are metaphysical necessities.

Other counterexamples:

- Every object is one of the kinds P, Q..., where P, Q... is an exhaustive list of all the kinds there actually are.
- Supposing determinism is true, every event has a cause.
- The inverse square law is a prevailing law.

The Moral: We should not go back to pre-Kripkean intuitions, but rather just be more discriminating about what is to be counted as metaphysically contingent or not.

Additional claim: There are no *de re* natural necessities.

Analysis: a metaphysical *de re* necessity regarding the nature of things + a natural *de dicto* necessity that things of that kind behave in a particular way.

Natural necessity cannot be defined in terms of a restriction of metaphysical necessity.

3. Natural Necessity: Definition

(2) Relativisation strategy.

A proposition is a naturally necessary truth iff it is logically necessary relative to or conditional upon the basic truths about the status and distribution of natural properties and relations.

Proposal: a world is a naturally possible world just when it is a metaphysically possible world in which only those kinds which are actually instantiated are instantiated.

"The natural possibilities for a given world will turn upon the status and distribution of its natural properties and relations."

BUT two possible worlds might *merely* differ as to what is a natural necessity

Newtonian and Schmewtonian Worlds

1. w_N is a Newtonian world with mass, bodies etc. subject to Newtonian laws.
2. w_M is a Schmewtonian world with schmass, schbodies etc. subject to variants of Newtonian laws.
3. Nothing in the natural laws of either w_N or w_M requires that there be any bodies or schbodies; they just require that if they do exist, the laws apply to them.
4. So there is an empty world v_N which is a natural possibility for w_N .
5. So there is an empty world v_M which is a natural possibility for w_M .
6. If a world v is a natural possibility for a world w , then v will verify all of the natural necessities of w .
7. All of the natural necessities of w_N hold in v_N .
8. All of the natural necessities of w_M hold in v_M .
9. It is a natural possibility of v_N that there be bodies and mass.
10. It is a natural possibility of v_M that there be schbodies and schmass.
11. v_N and v_M are alike with respect to the distribution of natural properties and relations, yet different with respect to their natural possibilities.
12. v_N and v_M differ only with respect to their natural possibilities.

Epiphenomenal worlds with the same physical laws but different mental laws.

1. w_D is a metaphysically possible world in which mind-body dualism is true, consisting of mental_D and physical_D events, where Epiphenomenalism is true: the mental_D and physical_D events of w_D are each subject to their own laws with no nomological interaction between them.
2. w_E is a metaphysically possible world where Epiphenomenalism is true. The physical_E events are subject to essentially the same laws as the physical_D events in w_D , but the mental_E events are subject to different laws to the mental_D events in w_D .

3. Physical_D events in w_D and physical_E events in w_E are of the same kind.
4. Mental_D events in w_D and mental_E events in w_E are not of the same kind.
5. It is a natural possibility in both w_D and w_E that, under given physical conditions, there be nothing mentalistic in the world.
6. Thus there is a mind-free world v_D that is a natural possibility for w_D and a physically similar mind-free world v_E that is a natural possibility for w_E.
7. If a world v is a natural possibility for a world w, then v will verify all of the natural necessities of w.
8. All of the natural necessities of w_D hold in v_D.
9. All of the natural necessities of w_E hold in v_E.
10. It is a natural possibility of v_D that there be mental_D events.
11. It is a natural possibility of v_E that there be mental_E events.
12. v_D and v_E are alike with respect to the distribution of natural properties and relations, yet different with respect to their natural possibilities.
13. v_D and v_E differ only with respect to their natural possibilities.

“If these counterexamples are correct, then they tell not only against the property-based definitions, but also against any other account that would make the natural possibilities supervene, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, upon the non-nomic facts.”

Further Objections

Even if we had an extensionally correct and non-circular account of natural necessity, it still would not be likely to provide an adequate definition.

Proposed form of definition: a proposition is a natural necessity iff it is entailed by the proposition that K₁, K₂,...are the only kinds there are.

- Just because a proposition is extensionally correct, does not mean that it provides a definition.
- How can we make natural necessity a special form of necessity? Relativisation appears to trivialize natural necessity.

Responses

- Triviality: Perhaps we can explain why natural necessity is not trivial or cheap in terms of the status of natural kinds as opposed to less natural groupings. If you already take natural kinds to be important, why not take the necessity that is relative to them to be important too?
- Counterexample 1: It seems likely that any possibility will be a natural possibility for an empty world, as there is nothing there to constrain things. However, it remains that it should be naturally necessary that there be no mass and naturally necessary that there be no schmass, yet naturally possible that there be schmass and naturally possible that there be mass. Could there be just one empty world, with different natural possibility accessibility relations? I.e. it is naturally_N possible that there be mass, naturally_M necessary that there be no mass, and naturally_∅ possible that there be anything whatsoever. So there are not two worlds differing in their natural possibilities after all. There is only one (empty) world with different possibilities *relative to* different sets of natural kinds.
- Counterexample 2: If mental events are not relevant to the status and distribution of natural properties and relations, why should we taken them to be relevant to natural possibilities? Why can't we conclude that v_D and v_E are the same natural possibility for the other worlds—the natural possibility where there are no mental events, and that there being mental_E events and mental_D events are both natural possibilities for this world?

4. Normative Necessity: Naturalism

Normative necessity: non-accidental, counterfactually robust, moral generalizations.

(1) Restriction Strategy

A proposition is normatively necessary if it is conceptually (and thus metaphysically) necessary and if, in addition, it is a moral truth.

Is normative necessity a species of metaphysical necessity?

Naturalism: Any moral property will be coextensive, as a matter of conceptual necessity, with some natural property.

The argument:

P(W): lying is wrong

Nx: a natural property

1. \boxed{n} P(W) (Assumption)
2. \boxed{c} $(x)(Wx \leftrightarrow Nx)$ (Naturalism)
3. \boxed{n} $(x)(Wx \leftrightarrow Nx)$ (All conceptual necessities are normative necessities, given that all normative possibilities are conceptual possibilities)
4. \boxed{n} P(N) (1,2,3)
5. \boxed{c} P(N) (A normative necessity concerning a purely naturalistic proposition such as P(N) must also be a conceptual necessity)
6. \boxed{c} P(W) (2,5)

“In this way, any normative necessity can be shown to be a conceptual necessity (and hence also to be a metaphysical necessity under the traditional view).”

Two general assumptions:

Inclusion: Every conceptual necessity is a normative necessity.

Conservativity: Every naturalistic normative necessity is a conceptual necessity.

“If these assumptions are themselves taken to hold of conceptual necessity, then it may be shown to be a conceptual necessity that any given normative necessity is a conceptual necessity.”

In any case, there are reasons not to favour Naturalism.

E.g. the *in virtue of* relation between the natural and normative properties seems to collapse the latter into *consisting in no more than* the former.

5. Normative Necessity: Neo-naturalism

If normative features have some kind of hidden nature, perhaps we can make sense of normative necessity as a form of (non-conceptual) metaphysical necessity.

A proposition is normatively necessary if it is metaphysically necessary and if, in addition, it is a truth about whatever actually fills a normative functional role.

The naturalistic property corresponding with the good is whatever fulfils the good-making role.

(*) for any x, x is good iff x has the property that actually fits the good-making role.

The normative necessities will then be merely those metaphysical necessities that arise from looking at the naturalistic content of the ethical predicates, without regard to how that content might have been fixed.

Neo-naturalism 1: world-bound normative conditional truths that are a posteriori – whether a property P fits the good-making role is a contingent and a posteriori matter.

The intolerable dilemma:

- The good-making role is ego-centric in the sense of being indexed to the speaker.
The property *I* would value (under ideal circumstances).
No genuine possibility of moral disagreement.
- The good-making role is not ego-centric; it is either indexed but not to the speaker or not indexed at all.
The property *we/everyone* would value (under ideal circumstances).
Possibility of moral disagreement, but the non-empirical character of ethical judgment is lost.

Neo-Naturalism 2: the good-making role is not part of our understanding of the word ‘good’, it is not determined conceptually, but rather empirically, via causal links between our use of the word and the real world, such as with water and H₂O.

BUT how can the reference of the terms hook up to the real world, yet our justification for believing a substantive body of ethical truths not require any access (or any substantive access) to that world?

Fine’s conclusion: naturalism, in either its traditional or contemporary versions, is unable to rescue the doctrine that normative necessity is a species of conceptual or metaphysical necessity.

(2) Relativisation Strategy.

A proposition is a normatively necessary truth iff it is logically necessary relative to or conditional upon the basic moral truths.

What about necessity relative to the moral laws? But how can we define the moral laws without appeal to the notion of normative necessity?

Normative necessity is another basic form of necessity.

6. Modal Pluralism

Perhaps one or other of these notions can be defined as the restriction of a more comprehensive notion of necessity.

BUT we do not thereby capture the *relevant* modal force.

Striking difference in character of these different necessities is the main block.

“I conclude that there are three distinct sources of necessity—the identity of things, the natural order, and the normative order—and that each gives rise to its own peculiar form of necessity. Neither form of necessity can be subsumed, defined, or otherwise understood by reference to any other forms of necessity; and any other form of necessity, if my survey is complete, can be understood by reference to them.”