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A CRITIQUE OF A NECESSITIST ARGUMENT BY TIMOTHY WILLIAMSON

UMA CRÍTICA DE UM ARGUMENTO NECESSITISTA POR TIMOTHY WILLIAMSON

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ABSTRACT:

In 'Modal Logic as Metaphysics', Timothy Williamson presents an argument for necessitism based on the Converse Barcan Formula (CBF): $\exists v\, \Diamond A \rightarrow \Diamond \exists v\, A$. By sub-stituting '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' for '$A$' he arrives at: $\exists x\ \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$. He claims that the antecedent formulates the contingentist view that something could have not existed; but the consequent is inconsistent. Williamson's argument collapses once the ambiguity concerning the scope of the modal operator is removed: CBF would apply to $\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y\ x=y]$', where the square brackets indicate the scope of the modal operator: 'something possibly has the property of being identical to something nonexistent' – if this reading was accepted as grammatically correct in a formal language; however, this is not the contingentist thesis, but is inconsistent; whereas '$\exists x, \Diamond[\neg\exists y]\ x=y$', or '$\exists x, \Diamond\neg\exists y$: $x=y$' does formulate the contingentist thesis: something is identical to something which in some possible world does not exist. But CBF does not apply to these expressions. Some other misunderstandings concerning the Barcan Formula and the Principle of Existential Generalization can also be resolved after this.

KEY WORDS:

Necessitism, contingentism, Barcan formula, de re modality, existential gen-eralization.

RESUMO:

Em 'Modal Logic as Metaphysics', Timothy Williamson apresenta um argumento a favor do necessitismo baseado na *Converse Barcan Formula* (CBF, Formula de Barcan Inversa): $\exists v\, \Diamond A \rightarrow \Diamond \exists v\, A$. Ao substituir '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' por '$A$' ele chega a: $\exists x\ \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$. Ele afirma que o antecedente formula a visão contingentista de que algo poderia não ter existido; mas o consequente é inconsistente. O argumento de Williamson entra em colapso quando a ambigüidade relativa ao escopo do operador modal é removida: CBF se aplicaria a ‘∃x ◊[¬∃y x=y]’, onde os colchetes indicam o escopo do operador modal: ‘algo possivelmente tem a propriedade de ser idêntico a algo inexistente’ – se esta leitura fosse aceita como gramaticalmente correta em uma linguagem formal; contudo, esta não é a tese contingentista, mas é inconsistente; enquanto ‘∃x, ◊[¬∃y] x=y’ ou ‘∃x, ◊¬∃y: x=y’ formula a tese contingentista: algo é idêntico a algo que em algum mundo possível não existe. Mas a CBF não se aplica a essas expressões. Alguns outros mal-entendidos relativos à Fórmula Barcan e ao Princípio da Generalização Existencial também podem ser resolvidos depois disso.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:
Necessitismo, contingentismo, fórmula de Barcan, modalidade de re, generalização existencial.

Ten years back, Timothy Williamson published a highly stimulating, thoughtful and ingenious book with the title ‘Modal Logic as Metaphysics’[1], in which he endorses necessitism: the thesis that necessarily everything is necessarily something. However, his first and principal argument is short and simple.

Williamson starts the exposition of this argument with the Barcan formula (BF) which, in current usage of the term, refers to the schema: ◊∃ν *A* → ∃ν ◊*A* (p. 30f). He explains that necessitists and contingentists divide over this formula (36). I will come back to this dispute later. Then, for the argument itself, Williamson changes from BF to its converse form (CBF): ∃ν ◊*A* → ◊∃ν *A* (38f). Together with Ruth Barcan-Marcus, Williamson argues for the validity of CBF independently of BF, on the grounds that ‘*A*’ strictly implies ‘∃ν *A*’, as it is provable in Barcan’s system. I will come back to the validity of this implication in the last part of this article. *If* we accept ‘*A* → ∃ν ◊*A*’ unrestrictedly, then, by way of the rule that, if it is provable that *A* strictly implies *B*, then it is provable that ◊*A* strictly implies ◊*B*, we arrive at: ◊*A* → ◊∃ν *A*. Then, by the rule that: if ‘*C* → *D*’ and the variable ν is not free in *D*, then: ‘∃ν *C* → *D*’, we obtain CBF: ∃ν ◊*A* → ◊∃ν *A* (38). Williamson then goes on to argue on the basis of CBF.

In the first part of this article, I want to argue that Williamson’s argument is not valid *even if* we accept CBF – as most people do.

For his argument Williamson substitutes ‘¬∃y x=y’ for ‘*A*’ in CBF and arrives at: ∃x ◊¬∃y x=y, as antecedent. This implies, of course: ◊∃x ¬∃y x=y (p. 38). Now Williamson claims that the antecedent, ‘∃x ◊¬∃y x=y’ is appropriate to express the thesis of the contingentist, that x could have been nothing, for any ordinary material object, and he insinuates that this is obvious for any “typical contingentist” (ibid.). But, of course, the consequent: ◊∃x ¬∃y x=y, is unacceptable, because ‘∃x ¬∃y x=y’ expresses

[1] Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

"something is nothing". This is "inconsistent in standard non-modal first-order logic with identity, and therefore impossible" (ibid.). What verdict could be more devastating than this?

I want to argue that there is good reason for the contingentist to claim either that '∃x ◊¬∃y x=y' is *not* appropriate to express their position *right from the outset* – or that it *is* appropriate, but CBF does not apply. For this argument, I need to rely on two distinctions. The first is between propositional modality and predicative modality. In the first case, that which falls into the scope of the modal operator is a proposition, in the second case, it is a predicate. The first is known as de dicto modality. The second is *part of* de re modality. However, since an expression of predicative modality does not represent a proposition by its own, an expression of de re modality only results if a quantifier binds the variable which occurs free in the respective predicative expression, like, e.g., in: There is someone who could be married, '∃x ◊Fx', where 'F…' stands for the predicate '… is married'. The expression of predicative modality by its own is: '*x* possibly married', or: '◊Fx'.

The second distinction is that between a relation and a relational property. '… is married to …' is a relation, '… is married to Anna' is a relational property. Formally, we can treat both as (predicative) functions, where the first function has two empty spaces and the second has only one. A relational property results from a relation when one of its empty spaces is appropriately filled or saturated.

Once we have made these distinctions, it is obvious that, *apparently*, we can read '∃x ◊¬∃y x=y' in two ways. We can *either* read: ∃x ◊[¬∃y] x=y, (where the square brackets indicate the scope of the modal operator), where the scope of the modal operator extends *only* over '¬∃y' (that is, in the sense of: ∃x, ◊¬∃y: x=y); *or* we can read: ∃x ◊[¬∃y x=y], where the scope of the modal operator extends over '¬∃y x=y'. We may exclude the second option based on the syntactical rules of our formal language. However, in this case it will still be valid what I will say about the first option: that CBF cannot be applied to it. To make this clearer, I will continue discussing the two readings.

In the first case, we have a relation (a function with two empty spaces, '…=…') which is saturated by x and y. In the second case, we have a relational property, '¬∃y …=y', which is saturated by x. In the first case, where the scope of the modal operator extends only over the expression '¬∃y', that expression represents a proposition: 'There does not exist any y'. Consequently, the term '◊¬∃y' is an example of *propositional* modality or of modality *de dicto* (which, in this case, occurs as part of a larger proposition). In the second case, where the scope of the modal operator extends over the expression '¬∃y x=y', that expression is not a proposition, but a predicate since x occurs free within it. Consequently, '◊[¬∃y x=y]' is an example of predicative modality (if we accept this reading as syntactically correct), which, only together with ∃x forms an expression of *de re* modality: ∃x ◊[¬∃y x=y].

Obviously, the meaning of both expressions is fundamentally different. In the first case, we have a relation (or at least something which, in this context, works like a relation – which is all that matters here), namely the relation of identity, which is saturated by an existing x and a possibly nonexistent y. The expression of modality de dicto '◊¬∃y' within the formula '∃x, ◊¬∃y: x=y' expresses, in Possible World Semantics (PWS), that there is *some* possible world where y does not exist. Of course, this expression does not say whether y does or does not exist in the *actual* world. Naturally, if '∃x, ◊¬∃y: x=y' should be true, y *must* exist in the actual world, as Williamson very well explains: the possibility of the nonexistence of y must be *counterfactual*. But '◊¬∃y' does *not* imply that y does not exist in the actual world. The expression '∃x, ◊¬∃y: x=y' just says, in normal language, that some (actually) existing x and some y which does not exist in all possible worlds are identical to one another. This is, in fact, an appropriate expression of the thesis of contingentism: There (actually) are things which do not necessarily exist.

In the second case, i.e., in '∃x ◊[¬∃y x=y]', we have a relational property which is saturated by an existing x, resulting in an expression of modality de re. In normal language, we can formulate: There is an x which possibly has the (relational) property '¬∃y …=y'. In PWS, we can formulate: There is an x such that there is some possible world where that x exists as having the property '¬∃y …=y'. Now we look at that property. What is that property, as expressed in normal language? It is the property of being identical to something which does not exist.[2] Of course, nothing *existing* has this property. Because everything that exists is identical (only) to something which exists, i.e., to itself (which exists). '¬∃y …=y' can only be the predicate of something that does *not* exist, or more clearly, *there exists nothing* which has that property. Consequently, modally speaking, *it cannot be the case* that any (existing) x has the property '¬∃y …=y', that is, it is *not possible* for x to have that property, there is no possible world where x exists as having the property of being identical to something which does not exist. Hence, '∃x ◊[¬∃y x=y]' is *false*. It is inconsistent *right from the outset*. It is *not* an adequate expression of the contingentist thesis, right from the outset.

CBF correctly formulates the transformation of possibility de re into possibility de dicto (though only incompletely in the sense that the existence in the actual world of the individual in questions is lost

[2] That is: this expression makes perfect sense *if* we accept it as syntactically correct in our language. We may very well exclude it as syntactically incorrect. Then we cannot express relational properties of this kind in that language, at least not in this simple, straightforward way. But this will not change the implications of the other reading of '◊∃x ¬∃y x=y', which Williamson defends.

in the translation). Hence, the inference: $\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y\ x=y] \rightarrow \Diamond\exists x\ \neg\exists y\ x=y$, *would* be a correct application of CBF *if* we accepted this expression in our language. But the result of this application only confirms that nothing can have the property of being identical to something nonexistent, in no possible world. It does not follow from this that that to which it is identical must exist in every possible world: the truth (or untruth) of '$\exists x, \Diamond\neg\exists y$: $x=y$' is not affected, in any way, by the inconsistency of '$\Diamond\exists x\ \neg\exists y\ x=y$', and of '$\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y\ x=y]$', since it says something completely different from these.

Now the question is: how should we read '$\exists x\ \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$' in the context of Williamson's argument? He arrives at '$\exists x\ \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$' by substituting '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' for '$A$' in CBF: $\exists v\ \Diamond A \rightarrow \Diamond\exists v\ A$. However, in the antecedent of CBF, 'A' *as a whole* falls into the scope of the modal operator. Therefore, we must read the substitution in such a way that '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' *as a whole* falls into the scope of '$\Diamond$'. Consequently, we *must* read: $\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y\ x=y]$. We *cannot* read '$\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y]\ x=y$' *if* we want to read '$\exists x\ \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$' as the result of substituting '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' for 'A' in CBF. Or the other way round: we *cannot* apply CBF to '$\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y]\ x=y$'. That is: *if* we read '$\exists x\ \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$' in the sense that the scope of the modality operator extends *only* over '$\neg\exists y$', *then* we cannot apply CBF to it, since the scope of the modality operator evidently matters for substitution. *If* we do not allow for the expression: $\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y\ x=y]$, for syntactical reasons, then we are not allowed to substitute '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' for 'A' in CBF – for these very syntactical reasons. What we *cannot* do is substitute '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' for 'A' in CBF and then read the result as: $\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y]\ x=y$, because then we would be changing the scope of the modal operator. This would be like substituting '2 + 3' for 'x' in '5 * x', and then read: 5 * 2 + 3, instead of 5 * (2 + 3).

In case someone is not convinced that: *if* '$\exists x\ \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$' is to be read in the sense of the contingentist theses that something existing is identical to something which may not exist, *then* the scope of '$\Diamond$' extends *only* over '$\neg\exists y$', consider the following: '$\exists x\ \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$' in this reading should be equivalent to '$\Diamond\neg\exists y\ @\exists x\ y=x$', where '@' is a rigidifying operator that always returns the semantic evaluation to the world of utterance (the 'actuality-operator', cf. 35), i.e., it should be equivalent to: something which may not exist is identical to something existing. However, it is obvious that in the latter formula only '$\neg\exists y$' falls into the scope of the modality operator, and it is equally obvious that CBF cannot be applied.

If, on the other hand, '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' is substituted for 'A' in '$\exists v\ \Diamond A$', it falls into the scope of the modal operator *as a whole*, i.e., '$\exists x\ \Diamond[\neg\exists y\ x=y]$'. It does not matter if we accept the latter reading as syntactically correct in our formal language or not. If we do *not* accept it, then we simply cannot express in our language what would be the result of substituting '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' for 'A' in '$\exists v\ \Diamond A$'. *If* we accept this formulation, then it is a (relational) predicate predicating x, and as such the formula is clearly inconsistent.

If, on the other hand, the contingentist defends that '$\exists x, \Diamond\neg\exists y: x=y$', it does *not* follow that '$\Diamond(\exists x \neg\exists y\ x=y)$', because CBF is not applicable. This means, on the other hand, that 'A' in CBF: $\exists \nu \Diamond A \rightarrow \Diamond\exists \nu A$, must be a predicate with exactly one unbound variable (which is bound by $\exists \nu$), which then (automatically) falls into the scope of '$\Diamond$' as a whole. That is, CBF is only applicable to expressions of modality de re. Hence, *if* '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' is not considered to be a predicate, it *cannot* be substituted for 'A' in CBF.

Before I address another aspect of Williamson's argument, I want to comment shortly on the dispute about BF (p. 30-36), even though this question is not decisive for the argument. If we use the distinctions made above, it could seem that, BF: $\Diamond\exists \nu A \rightarrow \exists \nu \Diamond A$, expresses the translation of *possibility de dicto* concerning ν into possibility *de re* of ν. However, intuitively, it does not do so in a complete way, because the consequent states the (actual) existence of ν, whereas the antecedent only states its existence in *some* possible world (not necessarily including the actual word). Hence, BF is *not* universally true, at least not conforming to normal modal linguistic practice. If there is *some* possible world where the king of France in 2024 is bald (i.e., where he exists as being bald), it does not follow that *in the actual* world, the king of France in 2024 exists as possibly being bald.

As Williamson shows, the problem for the contingentist arises if, contrary to this, we *do* accept BF as a universal principle, *and then* (once again) substitute '$\neg\exists y\ x=y$' for 'A' in BF. Then we arrive at: '$\Diamond\exists x \neg\exists y\ x=y \rightarrow \exists x \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$'. Of course, '$\Diamond[\exists x \neg\exists y\ x=y]$' is inconsistent, but we can make it clear that the world where x exists and the world where y does not exist need not be the same world, by inserting '@' (see above). Then we get, '$\Diamond\exists x\ @\neg\exists y\ x=y$', which seems like an adequate formulation to express that things may have existed which actually do not exist. E.g., the universe might have contained more particles than it actually contains. Or there might have been a child of J.F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, which, in fact (in the actual world), does not exist (cf. 35). But conforming to BF, '$\Diamond\exists x\ @\neg\exists y\ x=y$' implies '$\exists x \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$', i.e., if Kennedy's and Monroe's child *could* have existed counterfactually, then, it *does* exist (such that it could have not existed). This is a consequence the contingentist typically wants to avoid. Of course, '$\exists x \Diamond\neg\exists y\ x=y$' is *inconsistent* conforming to what we already discussed (i.e., if read as: $\exists x \Diamond[\neg\exists y\ x=y]$); it is *not* an adequate formula to express the contingentist claim. However, even if, for the sake of the argument, we forget about this (or read: $\exists x, \Diamond\neg\exists y: x=y$) and simply take the consequent as such, the argument is invalid, since BF is invalid: There is no way sheer possibility de dicto should imply actual existence, at least not conforming to normal linguistic practice.

It certainly is possible to construct a consistent formal system where BF is valid as a general principle, but such system will not be able to express our normal linguistic modal practice. Specifically, it will not be able to model the translation of possibility de re for something into possibility de dicto concerning that something and vice versa. – This concludes my excursus on the dispute about BF.

In 38f., Williamson substantiates his argument in a way that might be seen as an additional argument, therefore I will comment on it as well. I will simplify his explanation a bit. Williamson comes back to '*A* → ν*A*' which he already used passim to derive the validity of CBF, following Barcan-Marcus, within the system conceived by her. Williamson now argues for the validity of '*A* → ν*A*' *independently* of her: This formula expresses the 'principle of existential generalization' in standard non-modal first-order logic. As it is such a principle, Williamson feels authorized to apply the rule of necessitation to it in *modal* logic: □(*A* → ν*A*).

However, if we take this principle to be *simply* valid for existential propositions, it obviously implies necessitism directly, for then 'the king of France in 2023 does not exist' implies: 'Somebody exists who does not exist'.[3] Therefore, normally people accept that it holds only in the case where a term in '*A*' *names* and, furthermore, *occurs referentially* with regard to the *actual world*.[4] The last clause only matters if we move from non-modal to modal expressions or to fictional expressions. However, it is obvious that from 'Socrates possibly is a philosopher' we cannot infer 'someone exists who is a philosopher', but only 'someone exists who possibly is a philosopher' and from 'possibly Socrates exists who is a philosopher' we can only infer 'possibly someone exists who is a philosopher'. And obviously we cannot infer from 'Sherlock Holmes is a detective' that somebody exists who is a detective. However, this latter example shows that we cannot blindly apply formulae to linguistic expressions which seem to satisfy the formal conditions of that application.[5]

Williamson, arrives, via substitution of '¬∃y x=y' for '*A*', at: □(¬∃y x=y → ∃x ¬∃y x=y), and thus, reasonably, at the universal generalization: ∀x □(¬∃y x=y → ∃x ¬∃y x=y). But in '¬∃y x=y' 'x' is not *a name which occurs referentially*. Therefore, it is *not* the case that: ¬∃y x=y → ∃x ¬∃y x=y, but it is the case that: ¬∃y x=y → ¬∃x ¬∃y x=y, and hence, for short: ¬∃y x=y → ¬∃x. If, in contrast, we would say: ¬∃y a=y, where 'a' *names and refers* to Anna (in the actual world), then '¬∃y a=y' is *simply* false. There *does* exist an y such that y is identical to Anna, i.e., Anna. However, this is no problem for the

[3] It seems a little strange to me that Williamson does not use this argument, once he has subscribed to the universal validity of '*A* → ν*A*'. Maybe this is because this argument is a little too simple to be convincing – and, instead of doing so, rises doubt about the universal validity of '*A* → ν*A*'.

[4] Willard Van Orman Quine; Roger F. Gibson (ed). Quintessence: Basic Readings from the philosophy of W.V. Quine. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2008. Cf.: 'V.24. Reference and Modality', here: p.366; cited from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existential_generalization .

[5] One *can*, of course, defend that fictional characters exist, just as real characters. But then it is necessary to distinguish fictional existence from non-fictional existence in *some* way, otherwise the theory will be-come absurd. I.e., one cannot apply existence *blindly* to fictional objects.

contingentist. If ‘Anna’ is a name and it refers (with regard to the actual world), then Anna exists in the actual world – her (actual) existence is granted, but not by her identity or by the principle of existential generalization or by necessitism, but simply by the condition that ‘Anna’ is a name and that it refers (with regard to the actual world). However, the fact that the name ‘Anna’ cannot be given and refer without Anna existing in the world with regard to which it actually refers, does in no way imply that the name ‘Anna’ must refer to someone *existing in every possible world.*

If, instead of a name which occurs referentially, we use ‘x’, we still can formulate: $\Box(\exists y\ x{=}y \rightarrow \exists x\ \exists y\ x{=}y)$. However, as in this case ‘x’ is not a term which is guaranteed to refer (in the actual world – or any other), it does not guarantee *by itself*, independently of that formula, that there is an x, such that x=y (whereas it cannot be the case that there is no a, *if we take ‘a’ to be a name and to occur referentially in the actual world* in a true sentence).

Does necessitation change anything in this? Certainly not if there is no name which occurs referentially (with regard to the actual world), for then ‘$A \rightarrow \nu A$’ is not applicable. However, if we take an expression which *does* predicate a name which refers with regard to the actual world, things get a little tricky. ‘Socrates is a philosopher implies someone is a philosopher’ is only valid in such worlds where ‘Socrates’ refers with regard to that world. In a world where Socrates does not exist and, hence, ‘Socrates’ does not refer with regard to that world but only with regard to some other world (e.g., our actual world), Socrates only *possibly* exists, and, hence, it only follows that *possibly* someone is a philosopher (see above). However, in any world where ‘Socrates is a philosopher’ is true with regard to that world, Socrates *does* exist, and, hence, the name ‘Socrates’ refers with regard to that world. Hence it is valid: ‘*Necessarily*: if Socrates is a philosopher, then someone is a philosopher’. Since this is a typical case of the application of ‘$A \rightarrow \nu A$’, it may *seem*, at first sight, that we can *simply* necessitate: $\Box(A \rightarrow \nu A)$.

However, it is evident that we cannot (if we do not *presuppose* necessitism). If we say: Socrates could have fled from Athens to avoid the cup of hemlock, this means, in PWS: there is a possible world where Socrates flees from Athens. Now, if ‘Socrates could have fled from Athens’ is true, then we can infer, that: someone exists who could have fled from Athens. I.e., ‘$A \rightarrow \nu A$’ is applicable, since ‘Socrates’ is a name and refers with regard to the actual world. However, if we necessitate this inference, we get that in every possible world where it is the case that Socrates could have fled from Athens, Socrates exists. I.e.: Socrates exists in every possible world to which there is *some* possible world where he has fled from Athens. At this point questions of modal accessibility come into play which I will ignore here – it seems to me that nothing is to be gained for the necessitist through them. *Normally*, we would say: with regard to *every* possible world, it is true, that there is *some* possible world where Socrates fled from Athens. However, this, *by itself*, does not implicate that Socrates exists in such a world where it is true, that there is *some* possible world where Socrates fled from Athens. Hence, the name ‘Socrates’ does not necessarily refer with regard to every possible world where it is possible that Socrates should have fled from Athens. Therefore, the necessitation of ‘*A* → ν*A’ is not unrestrictedly valid*, if *‘A* → ν*A*’ should work to express the principle of existential generalization *as we use it in normal linguistic practice*.

Of course, one can define a system, where ‘A → ν*A*’ *is* unrestrictedly valid, even if we allow modal expressions to enter ‘*A*’ (*without* modal expressions, i.e., within non-modal logic, ‘*A* → ν*A*’ *is* unrestrictedly valid *under the condition that a term names and occurs referentially*). But this system will not work to express the principle of existential generalization (as normally understood), because the validity of ‘*A* → ν*A*’ evidently hinges on the fact that ‘*A*’ talks about an individual which exists in the actual world, and this is the case if it predicates a name which refers with regard to the actual world (of course, indexical terms may also work, but formal logicians normally don’t like these). We *can* generalize that ‘*A* → ν*A*’ is valid in *every* world where that name refers with regard to that same world. However, if we talk about Socrates with respect to counterfactual possible worlds, we evidently, in normal linguistic practice, permit ourselves to talk about him with respect to *such* counterfactual possible worlds where he does *not* exist, and, hence, where the name ‘Socrates’ does not refer with regard to (something existing in) *that* world. Otherwise, we could not say: ‘It is possible that Socrates should not have existed’. On the other hand, it is tautological – but not an argument –, that we *cannot* express that Socrates could not have existed if we construct our language in such a way that we can talk modally about an object only with regard to such possible worlds where it exists.

Williamson argues that necessitation *must* be valid for *all* logical theorems. However, it is no problem that this should not apply to ‘*A* → ν*A*’, since, right from the outset this principle is not unrestrictedly valid, but only if ‘*A*’ talks about a name which occurs referentially with regard to the actual world. Moreover, it is *evident* that it is this very restriction of the validity of ‘*A* → ν*A*’ as a principle which forbids to apply necessitation unrestrictedly to ‘*A* → ν*A*’ – i.e., it is not arbitrary that necessitation should not be unrestrictedly valid for ‘*A* → ν*A’*.

Of course, one can define such a language where the necessitation of ‘*A* → ν*A*’ is unrestrictedly valid. Such a language simply does not *work* to express that Socrates could not have existed, because such a language only permits us to speak about Socrates with respect to worlds where he exists. But that does not mean that there *are* no possible worlds where he does not exist. Similarly, possibilities which concern objects which do not exist in a certain world would not be linguistically accessible from that world in that language. That is how such a language would *work*. If one *likes* language to work in this way, one may adopt it as one pleases. But one *cannot* prove that snow is red by putting it in a closed chamber where one has installed red light only.

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