FINE'S "NECESSITY AND NON-EXISTENCE"   Ted Sider
                                          Modality seminar

1. The distinction

There is a familiar distinction between tensed and tenseless expressions. A sentence such as 'Socrates is a man' or 'Socrates is self-identical' is tenseless, it cannot properly be said to be true or false at a time, while a sentence such as 'Socrates does not exist' is tensed, it can properly be said to be true or false at a time. Similarly, a predicate such as 'is a man' or 'is self-identical' is tenseless, it cannot properly be said to be true or false of an object at a time, while a predicate such as 'exists' is tensed. There is a corresponding distinction between sempiternal and eternal truths, a sempiternal truth being a tensed sentence that is always true and an eternal truth being a tenseless sentence that is true *simpliciter*. (p. 322)

Tensed sentences are true at a time "because of how things are at that time" (p. 323). "'Socrates is drinking the hemlock' can *properly* be said to be true at a time" (p. 323)

Tenseless sentences are true at a time "regardless of how things are at the time". "'Socrates is self-identical' can only degenerately be said to be true at a time…there are no transient states of Socrates' being self-identical." (p. 323) There is "no genuine engagement with how things are at each time" (p. 323).

Just as one may distinguish between tensed and tenseless sentences according to whether they can properly be said to be true or false at a time, so one can draw a distinction between *worldly* and *unworldly* sentences according to whether they can properly be said to be true or false in a world. And just as one may draw a distinction between eternal and sempiternal truths according as to whether they are true regardless of the time or whatever the time, so one can draw a distinction between *transcendental* and *necessary* truths according as to whether they are true regardless of the circumstances or whatever the circumstances. (p. 324)

Worldly sentences can "properly be said to be true or false in a world" (p. 324); their truth depends "upon the circumstances or how things turn out" (p. 324)

Unworldly sentences are true "regardless of the circumstances or how things turn out" (p. 324).

> We might think of the possible circumstances as being what is subject to variation as we go from one possible world to another; and we might think of the transcendental facts as constituting the invariable framework within which the variation takes place. Alternatively, we might think of the possible circumstances as being under God's control; it is what he decides upon in deciding to create one possible world rather than another. (pp. 325–6)

2. Making sense of the distinction

B-theorists can make sense of the tenseless/tensed distinction by saying that tenseless predicates lack an argument place for times. What about A-theorists?

> But there is nothing to prevent the A-theorist from also making the distinction, though in his own way. For he may take the tenses, properly so-called, to be meaningfully applicable only to certain kinds of sentence. Thus what will distinguish 'Socrates is self-identical' from 'Socrates exists' is that one can properly say that Socrates once existed even though one cannot properly say that Socrates was once self-identical. [Footnote:] There has been a prejudice against thinking that the meaningful application of a sentential operator may be restricted to certain sentences, even when a similar restriction in the application of predicates has been allowed. But it is no more meaningful to say that I anticipate that the party was a success than it is to say that the number 3 is red. (pp. 322–3)

3. Grades of necessity

Extended necessity and world-relative truth transcendental truths are taken to be true at every possible world

Superextended necessity and world-relative-truth A recursive extension of unextended and extended necessity and world-relative-truth to all propositions

[it is:]

(i) an unextended possibility that Socrates does not exist and an unextended necessity that Socrates does or does not exist;

(ii) an extended possibility and also an extended necessity that Socrates is self-identical (though not an unextended possibility or necessity);

(iii) and a superextended possibility that Socrates does not exist and is self-identical and a superextended necessity that Socrates is self-identical if he does not exist (though not an extended possibility or necessity). (p. 327)

4. Application to the "familiar puzzle"

1. Necessarily, Socrates is a man (person, self-identical…) $\Box M$

2. Possibly, Socrates doesn't exist $\Diamond {\sim} E$

3. Therefore, possibly, Socrates is a man and doesn't exist $\Diamond(M {\wedge} {\sim} E)$

Q resolution Strong necessity and possibility: $\Box$, $\Diamond$. Weak necessity and possibility: ${\sim}\Diamond{\sim}$, ${\sim}\Box{\sim}$. The premises are both false if understood in terms of strong necessity and possibility: as $\Box M$ and $\Diamond{\sim}E$, respectively. They're true for weak necessity and possibility: ${\sim}\Diamond{\sim}M$ and ${\sim}\Box{\sim}{\sim}E$. These then imply a conclusion about weak possibility: ${\sim}\Box{\sim}(M{\wedge}{\sim}E)$. But we naturally read the conclusion of the argument as concerning strong possibility, $\Diamond(M{\wedge}{\sim}E)$, and that isn't true.

Standard resolution Unqualified necessity and possibility: $\Box$, $\Diamond$. Qualified necessity (for a given object): $\Box(E{\to}\dots)$, $\Diamond(E{\wedge}\dots)$ ("necessarily, if the object exists then…"; "possibly, the object exists and…"). The first premise is only true given the qualified sort of necessity ($\Box(E{\to}M)$); but we would need the unqualified necessity to validly deduce the conclusion.

4.1 Identifying the sense in which premise 1 is true

Both responses fail correctly to identify the sense of 'necessity' in which we are willing to accept the first premiss that it is necessary that Socrates is a man. For both take the relevant sense of 'necessity' (be it weak or qualified) to be one in which we are also willing to accept that necessarily Socrates exists. (p. 331)

4.2 Essence and necessity

> It is of the nature of Socrates to be a man; this is what Socrates *is*. From this it appears to follow, for some suitable notion of necessity, that it is necessary that Socrates is a man. (p. 332)

Does essence imply qualified or unqualified necessity?:

$$\frac{a \text{ essentially } F\text{s}}{\Box(Ea \rightarrow Fa)} \qquad \frac{a \text{ essentially } F\text{s}}{\Box Fa}$$

> …suppose that someone believes in God and takes it be of the nature of God to exist (the reasons he might have for believing in God's existence are not here in question). Then surely he is entitled to infer that it is an (unqualified) necessity that God exists. But all that we are entitled to infer under the weak reading of the connection is that it is [an] (unqualified) necessity that God exists if he exists! This suggests that any plausible account of the connection between essence and necessity should make it strong. (p. 332)

4.3 Identifying the sense in which premise 2 is true

> The Priorian response does not correctly identify the sense of 'possibility' in which we are willing to accept the second premiss that it is possible that Socrates does not exist. For it takes this to be a sense in which we are also willing to accept that it is possible that Socrates exists and does not exist. (p. 332)

4.4 The sense in which the conclusion should be rejected

> …let us fix on the sense in which it is taken [by the standard response] not to be possible that Socrates is a man and does not exist (this is presumably the unqualified sense though it makes no difference to the objection if we take it to be the qualified sense). If it is not possible in this sense that Socrates is a man and does not exist then it is also not possible in the same sense that Socrates is a non-existent man. But our attitude towards these two possibilities is quite different, despite their having logically equivalent contents. For we are somewhat disinclined to accept the one, the possibility that Socrates is a man and does not exist, and yet strongly inclined to accept the other, the possibility that Socrates is a non-existent man, for this seems to amount to no more than the possibility that Socrates

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does not exist and his being correctly classifiable as a man. (It is important to understand this latter possibility in the right way. Imagine someone listing the kinds of things that might not exist. Thus he might say that it is possible that Fido is a non-existent dog and possible that Socrates is a non-existent man). If this is right, then we have a sweeping objection to any normal reading of the modality, since any such reading will fail to distinguish between possibilities with logically equivalent contents. (p. 333)

…for reasons hard to articulate, the [second] extension is much more of a 'stretch' than the [first]. The first simply involves the admission of a straightforward and independent way of being true at a world, while the second requires the recognition of an anomalous amalgam of the other two ways of being true at a world. (p. 336)

4.5 Fine's own resolution

We've already seen bits of it, but anyway.

- The natural reading of premise 1 is as concerning extended necessity

- The natural reading of premise 2 is as concerning unextended possibility

- If you stick to extended modal notions, the conclusion simply doesn't make any sense (neither extended nor unextended necessity apply to hybrid claims with both worldly and unworldly parts)

- If you insist on evaluating the conclusion, you may move to the superextended modalities. Then the conclusion is true. But that's ok:

    But any puzzlement we might have had in accepting the conclusion should disappear. For if I am right, the felt incompatibility between the nonexistence of Socrates and his being a man arises from our implicitly assuming that his being a man is a worldly matter. There is then a genuine difficulty in seeing how he could both be a man and not exist. But, on a correct view, his being a man is an unworldly matter. It is something that holds 'off-stage', regardless of how things turn out; and so, in particular, it is something that holds regardless of whether or not he exists. Thus it is not that he is possibly a man despite his not existing. His existence or non-existence is simply irrelevant to his possible status as a man; and all that the possibility of his being a man and not existing comes down to is the genuine possibility of his not existing and the unworldly, or circumstance-indifferent, fact that he is a man. (pp. 338–9)

5. The propositions and nonexistence puzzle

(i) necessarily, if Socrates does not exist then the proposition that Socrates does not exist is true

(ii) necessarily, if the proposition that Socrates does not exist is true then the proposition that Socrates does not exist exists

(iii) necessarily, if the proposition that Socrates does not exist exists then Socrates exists

(iv) Therefore, necessarily, Socrates exists

> We may remove the air of puzzlement by noting that the claim that the proposition that S is true has a hybrid status. It is a matter of the proposition expressing that S, which is an unworldly matter, and it is also a matter of S, which is a worldly matter (as long as S is a worldly matter). We therefore see how it might be possible for the proposition that Socrates does not exist to be true even though the proposition does not exist. For this possibility simply turns on the proposition that Socrates does not exist expressing that Socrates does not exist, which is an unworldly matter holding regardless of the circumstances, and on the possibility that Socrates does not exist. (p. 340)

6. Fine and Williamson

Fine might say:

> Properties can have their possession conditions even though they don't exist, because the possession conditions of a property are not a worldly manner. Thus it could be that even if my anti-haecceity didn't exist, it could be necessarily true that it is instantiated by all and only things that aren't me.

But this doesn't make it ok to accept Haecceities:

Haecceities $\forall y \Box \exists X \Box \forall x (Xx \leftrightarrow x{=}y)$

The problem is that Haecceities implies that my haecceity *exists* necessarily.

7. A question about quantification