HOW TO RECONCILE ESSENCE WITH CONTINGENT EXISTENCE

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Abstract

To reconcile true claims of *de re* necessity with the supposedly contingent
existence of the concrete objects those claims are typically about, Kripkean
essentialists invoke weak necessity. The claim that *a* is necessarily *F* is held to
be equivalent to the claim that necessarily, if *a* exists then *a* is *F*. This strategy
faces a barrage of serious objections a proper subset of which shows that the
strategy fails to achieve its intended purpose. Relief can be provided via
recourse to a markedly non-Kripkean version of essentialism.[1]

I.   *Essence, Modality and Contingent Existence*

On a modal account of essence, an object is essentially *F* if and only if it is *F*
necessarily but non-trivially.[2] What is it, though, to be 'non-trivially' necessary? As
Fine (1994, p. 5) notes, for any logically or mathematically necessary truth, we can
produce a predicable expression from it such that any individual is necessarily such
that the necessary truth holds. For example, Cicero is necessarily such that $2 + 2 = 4$.
This tells us nothing about the nature of Cicero. It is a necessary condition on a

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[1] I am grateful to Daniel Hill and to some graduate students at Liverpool for discussion, to the Faculty
of Arts, University of Liverpool for granting me leave to work on this material and to the Department
of Logic and Moral Philosophy, University of Santiago de Compostela for hosting me during the leave.

[2] The non-triviality condition is added so as to extend charity to the modal account of essence. An
account of essence that waived it would still be modal, but it would be less plausible.

predicable expression's being non-trivially expressive of essence (modally construed) that the predicable expression is not true of any arbitrary subject whatever that we care to select. Included, for example, among the predicable expressions meeting this constraint is 'is necessarily human'.

Non-modal accounts of essence, such as that defended by Fine (1994), deny the sufficiency of (non-trivial) necessity to essentiality, but accept that if a property is essential then it is necessary. Essentialists of whatever hue generally hold, with Kripke, that concrete beings exist contingently. Such essentialists, then, are interested in accounting for the necessity of a concrete existent *a*'s being necessarily *F* in such a way as to leave uncompromised the contingency of *a*'s existence. The standard way to do this is, with Kripke, to invoke 'weak necessity'. Though Kripke's work deals with weak necessity only very briefly, it is vital to maintaining the edifice of his essentialism and it is invoked partly in order to reconcile what initially appear to be contrary commitments. I argue here, however, that the walls come tumbling down: weak necessity cannot do the job. Even if this nay-saying should turn out to be overblown, it still seems that Kripkean essentialists have work to do in answering the concerns that motivate a strongly sceptical view of the appeal to weak necessity.

Consider the following modal claim:

(1)   Necessarily, Cicero is human.

In order to be true, doesn't (1) require the necessary existence of Cicero? If so, this is a problem given the Kripkean's commitment that concrete objects like Cicero exist contingently. The Kripkean replies that, if true, (1) does not require the necessary existence of Cicero, since its logical form is not of a modalised atomic sentence but of a modalised conditional:

(1*)   Necessarily, if Cicero exists, then Cicero is human.

(1*) is the 'weak necessity' reading of (1). Wiggins (e.g., 1976, pp. 301, 303) rejects the appeal to weak necessity, since there are (or at least, there are ordinarily taken to be) non-hypothetically necessary truths of subject-predicate form, such as *2 is even*, and the appeal to weak necessity cannot, then, be explicable of the *logical forms* of all claims of the surface form 'Necessarily, *a* is *F*'.

Wiggins is not here insisting that claims of this surface form admit of only one sort of parsing in respect of their logical forms. Rather, his objection appeals to the special case of modal claims concerning the existence of an object. He begins by claiming that, presuming it to be a property, existence is an essential property since '[a]n essential property of *x* is any property of *x* such that either *x* does not exist, or *x* has this property'. He continues:

> If we do not distinguish the sentence-scope and the predicate-scope of 'necessarily', however, and if we assign only one structure to 'Necessarily exists [*a*]', then we reach counter-intuitive results. It is true that Kripke would encourage us to read this as saying only that *a* exists in all the worlds *a* exists in…But it is a bad effect of this ruling that it suits ill at least one standard reading of the English sentence (while not really providing for more than one reading), and that so many of the expressive resources of the modal language have been used up before provision is made for the difference between *Necessarily seven exists* and *Necessarily Cicero exists*. But, as normally understood in English, the first sentence is true…and the second is false…
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> (1976, p. 301)

In fact, as we'll soon see while in the process of cataloguing its problems, the weak necessity strategy is in trouble here *regardless* of whether existence is a property. The troubles arise within the context of the specific modal account of essence that weak necessity is designed to rescue. Kripke (1971, p. 86) comments that although essential properties are those

> properties, which aside from trivial ones like self-identity, are such that [an] object has to have them if it exists at all…[note 11:] an exception must be made for existence itself: on the definition given existence would be trivially essential. We should regard existence as essential to an object only if the object necessarily exists.

The trouble is, however, that on Kripke's account it is not easy to escape the result that what were supposed to be contingently existent objects *do* necessarily exist. This is what the following section seeks to demonstrate.[3]

II.   Some Initial Problems with Weak Necessity

The weak necessity account presumes equivalence between (1), (1*) and:

(1**) Cicero is necessarily human.

Its advocate endorses what we can call the 'Weak Necessity Schema':

a is necessarily *F* (necessarily *V*s) ↔ necessarily, if *a* exists then *a* is *F* (*V*s).

Let us catalogue some initial objections to the Weak Necessity Schema.

If 'exists' is a first-level predicable expression, then it provides a counter-example to the Weak Necessity Schema. It is false, or at least normally held to be false, that Cicero necessarily exists. Yet it is necessary that if Cicero exists then Cicero exists. So we have a counter-example to the claimed equivalence between *a* necessarily *V*s and necessarily, if *a* exists then *a* *V*s. It would be an *ad hoc* move to declare, merely in the face of this difficulty, that the weak necessity account is not to be applied to the case of 'exists' (cf. Fine 1994, p. 7).

If existence is a property, then it is a necessary one. As Wiggins formulates the notion of an essential property, '[a]n essential property of *x* is any property of *x* such that either *x* does not exist, or *x* has this property'. This is classically equivalent to 'an essential property of *x* is any property of *x* such that if *x* exists then *x* has this property'. As a definition of essence, however, this does not debar the trivial. What is

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[3] It is curious that Kripke's wording suggests that necessary existence is a necessary condition for essential existence while remaining neutral over whether it is also sufficient. I don't think, however, that anything in what follows hangs upon the question of whether it is sufficient. My argument requires only that singular existentials are truth-valued and not modally neutral. It does not require, for any object, that existence is counted as among its essential properties. I am assuming that *a*'s being necessarily *F* is necessary, but not sufficient, for *a*'s being essentially *F*. In respect of terminology, one could cut the cake slightly differently by recognising the distinction, implicit in Kripke, between the trivially essential and the properly essential.

does capture, however, is the *necessity* (rather than the more exigent essentiality) of a property to *x*'s existence. To exercise charity to the Kripkean, then, we must work with the following principle: a necessary property of *x* is any property of *x* such that if *x* exists then *x* has this property. (*x*'s essential properties, in turn, will be a subset of *x*'s necessary properties.) Nevertheless, if existence is a property and the weak necessity account is deployed then existence is a necessary property. Not only that, but it is a necessary property of supposedly contingent beings, since it is necessary that if Cicero exists then Cicero exists. All *de re* modal claims attributing necessary existence then emerge as tautologically true. We are then committed to a contradiction and can apply a *reductio*: we must either relinquish the claim that concrete objects like Cicero exist contingently or reject the appeal to weak necessity as explicative of *de re* necessity. (It is not the Kripkean essentialist's commitment to a modal account of essence, *per se*, that generates this unhappy situation. Rather, as I hope to show later in this article, it is the specific account of *de re* necessity the Kripkean endorses.)

Even if existence is not a property or 'exists' is not a first-level predicate, all singular existential claims are nevertheless necessary. A natural response to the previous problem –and a response omitted above– would be to charge the supposition that existence is a property of particulars with generating the contradiction. It is not weak necessity that is at fault, but this gratuitous ancillary supposition. Though an obvious move, this is not a workable one, for two reasons. First, as we'll see in a moment, the denial that existence is a property (an ontological claim) is insufficient for the denial that existence can properly be attributed to individuals (a logical claim). Second, in affirming, for example, that Cicero might not have existed, the Kripkean is already committed to the view that there are singular existential attributions.

Of course, the supposition that existence is a property of particulars is both controversial and philosophically unpopular. Suppose, though, that we deny that existence is a property of particulars. We might do so on nominalist grounds, claiming that since there are no properties at all existence can hardly be one. The nominalist, though, does not deny that we can make predications about individuals: nominalism of itself does not entail that we cannot attribute existence. Even if we admit properties and deny that existence is among them, this does not improve matters for the weak necessity strategy. To see this, consider the account of singular existential statements defended by Hintikka (1966) according to which '*a* exists' is formalised as: $\exists x(x = a)$.

Now $\exists x[x = a] \rightarrow \exists x[x = a]$ is just an instance of the 'law of identity' of propositional logic, $A \rightarrow A$, and is accordingly a tautology. So, by necessitation, $\Box(\exists x[x = a] \rightarrow \exists x[x = a])$. Nothing depends on this particular method of formalisation. To maintain neutrality over this issue, we can set up a Weak Necessity Schema for Existence, as follows. Let '$\boxtimes$' be a weak necessity operator, '$\Box$' a logical necessity operator, 'a' be any singular term, 'C' be a syntactic context into which a can be placed and let 'E' stand for whatever syntactic apparatus best combines with a singular term to form a singular existence claim. So, the Weak Necessity Schema for Existence is as follows:

$$\boxtimes Ca \leftrightarrow \Box(Ea \rightarrow Ca)$$

The view that existence is not a property does not entail that meaningful singular existential claims cannot be formulated. All we need in order to get an instance of the Weak Necessity Schema for Existence is that singular existential claims can meaningfully be formulated. That they can is already acknowledged by Kripke in his informal explication of weak necessity. So, even if existence is not a first-level property, it is still the case that the weak necessity account generates the result that what were supposed to be contingently existing entities exist necessarily. The strategy is in serious trouble. Whichever way we go with regard to the issue of whether existence is a first-level property, the same unwelcome result is generated by the weak necessity account: that what were supposed to have been counted as contingently existing beings end up, if the account is carried through, having to be ruled to be necessary beings.

On the back of the previous objection, we have the paradox that things that do not really exist nevertheless necessarily exist. The weak necessity schema applies regardless of whether the singular term in a singular existence statement genuinely refers. It is just as necessary that if Sherlock Holmes exists, then Sherlock Holmes exists as that if Cicero exists, then Cicero exists. If the weak necessity schema is to account for singular existential claims, then it has the unwelcome result that Holmes exists necessarily. This is inconsistent with Kripke's claim that fictional and mythical objects are necessarily non-existent.

On the WN account, every intentional but non-existent object necessarily has every property. Since, on the Kripkean account, fictional and mythical objects are necessarily non-existent, for any F and any merely intentional object a: necessarily, if

a exists then *Fa*. The embedded conditional is vacuously true. This applies equally when we fill out the consequent place with ~*Fa* or indeed with any attributive claim. If an object's existence would generate a contradiction, then we are justified in denying that that object could exist. Pegasus is both necessarily winged and necessarily non-winged. So Pegasus and Holmes fall into the same logical abyss occupied by the round square. Kripke's commitment to their necessary non-existence is no mere add-on to his essentialism, but rather a consequence of it – though whether this is a problem with his essentialism or an advantage of it is a moot point.

III.   Weak Necessity and the Bifurcation of Modalised Singular Existentials
Before examining two further problems for the weak necessity account, let us consider the role and import of the issue of *bifurcating* claims of the surface form 'Necessarily *Fa*' within Wiggins's critique of Kripke. In this context, bifurcation means assigning one logical form to some such claims and a distinct logical form to other such claims. When a strongly rigid designator occurs in the subject place, the claim is read as a modalised atomic sentence; whereas, when it is a weakly rigid designator, the claim is read as a modalised conditional.

Let ρ be any singular term and $\phi(\rho)$ be any expression in which ρ occurs. In order to remain neutral over the logical form of singular existentials, we can now paraphrase the conditional at the start of the above quotation from Wiggins, as follows:

> If we do not distinguish the sentence-scope and the predicate-scope of 'necessarily' and we assign only one structure to 'Necessarily $\phi(\rho)$', then we reach counter-intuitive results.

In this conditional the second conjunct of the antecedent doesn't apply to Wiggins's Kripkean opponents: they assign *distinct* readings to claims of the form 'Necessarily $\phi(\rho)$' according to whether or not ρ is a strongly rigid designator or a weakly rigid designator. The real clout of Wiggins's argument, however, is that the Kripkean strategy leaves us with no means of reading *Necessarily Cicero exists* on which it comes out *false*. *Necessarily, if Cicero exists then Cicero exists* –the weak

necessity reading– is an entirely innocuous necessitated instance of the 'law of identity' of propositional logic. On the Kripkean analysis what was, on a natural reading, plainly false turns out to be a logical truth (cf. Fine 1994, p. 6). Therein is a counter-intuitive result generated by the *way in which* the Kripkean bifurcates claims of the form 'Necessarily $\phi(\rho)$'. Likewise, there are counter-intuitive results to be reaped from any strategy which seeks to provide a unitary account of such claims since this would result, without weak necessity, in any essentialist claim requiring the necessary existence of its object or, with weak necessity, in attributions of necessary existence being trivially true of everything.

The Kripkean must either hold to bifurcation or offer a unitary account. However, as the next section argues, each option generates at least two unwelcome results not already mentioned so far.

IV.   *Further Objections to the Weak Necessity Account*
The actual WN account means that we sometimes need to know whether a name is a weakly or a strongly rigid designator before we can tell the logical form of a modal claim in which that name is used. The actual WN account does bifurcate 'Necessarily $\phi(\rho)$', treating the necessity as strong when ρ is a strongly rigid designator and weak when ρ is a weakly rigid designator. So, on the actual account, logical form is determined not merely by a term's syntactic category but, in the case of a denoting term, by substantive semantics facts about that term. Logical form, then, is no longer just a matter of syntax.

A unitary WN account is inapt in the arithmetical case. A way of avoiding the previous result is not to bifurcate but instead to extend the weak necessity reading to all claims of the surface form 'Necessarily $\phi(\rho)$'. Now Wiggins's example of *2 is even* causes a problem. If we read it as 'Necessarily if 2 exists, then 2 is even' then this is in one way too weak and in another too strong. Suppose we deny the existence of numbers. Then we are forced to admit both that 2 is necessarily even and that 2 is necessarily odd, since in each case we have a vacuously true instance of the modalised conditional. Given that these claims are not co-tenable, we have another example of the Holmes/Pegasus problem. We have thus left no room in logical space for an anti-realist view of number which admits that there can nonetheless be true statements of *de re* necessity about numbers. Suppose we hold that numbers exist. As

standard, this involves committing to their necessary existence. But then, the WN account provides too weak a reading of 'Necessarily, 2 is even'. When we utter that sentence, we really do commit to the necessary existence of 2. So a unitary WN account will be too weak in the arithmetical case. A knee-jerk response here would be to invoke pragmatics. When we utter 'Necessarily, 2 is even', what we say implicates, but does not entail, the necessary existence of 2. However, when combined with some standard logic, this step is doubly erroneous. If it is indeed true that it is necessary that 2 exists, then, since a necessary truth is entailed by any statement whatever, everything we utter entails this. So our utterance cannot implicate but not entail the claim about 2's necessary existence. Also, 'Necessarily if 2 exists, then 2 is even' is true because its consequent is a necessary truth. This requires, however, that '2 is even' is a non-hypothetically necessary truth: otherwise we have an infinite regress in respect of formalising the quoted sentence's logical form. Since '2 is even' has to be non-hypothetically necessary, it has to be accounted for via strong necessity, not weak necessity. If (instead of bifurcating) we unify on the weak necessity side, then we are left without the means to explain, without pain of regress, why true weak necessity claims employing strongly rigid designators, like '2', are true.

Any WN account involves the syntactic anomaly that an atomic statement is turned into a compound one merely by addition of a necessity operator. Whether we bifurcate or not, the WN account entails that (at least in the case of claims employing weakly rigid designators) placing what was, outside of a modal context, an atomic statement within the scope of 'Necessarily' transforms the statement now being operated upon by the modal term into a compound statement. 'Cicero is human' is atomic, but inside a necessity operator it is transformed into a (covert) conditional with 'Cicero exists' as its antecedent. So we have a syntactic analogue of the widely opposed Fregean doctrine that an intensional context switches the reference of a name from its usual referent to its sense. It is surely more implausible to suggest that a modal context transforms the logical syntax of the sentence upon which it operates. (I make this as a rhetorical point, with no suggestion that the Fregean doctrine and Kripke's exhaust the options.) Such syntactic transformation is a very odd thing to have to endorse.

V. *The Appeal to Weak Necessity Reduces to Absurdity*

Having mounted an array of objections to the weak necessity strategy, I here marshal one short and central argument –the *reductio* mentioned above– which, if sound, cleanly and simply dispenses with it. This argument is independent of the ontological issue of whether existence is a property and, unlike some of the previous material, independent of any forays into the troublesome waters of the fictional, the mythical and the impossible. So far as controversies over 'exists' and existence are concerned, it requires only that singular existentials are literally meaningful. This is a claim that the Kripkean essentialist already accepts, since modalised existentials are taken to be literally meaningful by the Kripkean. Here is the *reductio*.[4]

{1}	1.	Some objects exist contingently.	Premise
{2}	2.	Cicero exists contingently.	Assumption
--	3.	For all x: if x exists contingently then x does not necessarily exist.	Theorem
--	4.	If Cicero exists contingently, then ~(Cicero necessarily exists).	3 UE
{5}	5.	For all x: x is necessarily F/necessarily Vs $\leftrightarrow$ necessarily (x exists $\rightarrow$ x is F/Vs).	Assumption
---	6.	For all x: necessarily, (x exists $\rightarrow$ x exists).	Theorem
{5}	7.	Cicero necessarily exists $\leftrightarrow$ necessarily (Cicero exists $\rightarrow$ Cicero exists).	5 UE
--	8.	Necessarily (Cicero exists $\rightarrow$ Cicero exists).	6 UE
{5}	9.	Cicero necessarily exists.	7,8
{2}	10.	~(Cicero necessarily exists).	2,4 MPP
{2,5}	11.	Cicero necessarily exists & ~(Cicero necessarily exists).	9,10 &I
{2}	12.	~(For all x: x is necessarily F/necessarily Vs $\leftrightarrow$ necessarily (x exists $\rightarrow$ x is F/Vs)).	5,11 RAA
{1}	13.	~(For all x: x is necessarily F/necessarily Vs $\leftrightarrow$ necessarily (x exists $\rightarrow$ x is F/Vs)).	1,2,12 EE

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[4] This argument is partly inspired by an argument of Wiggins (1976, pp. 302-3), though there are differences of both form and content.

The assumption at line 5 is the Weak Necessity Schema. The claim that some objects exist contingently and the Weak Necessity Schema jointly generate a contradiction. Assuming our logic to be correct, we must either reject the commitment to contingent existence or reject the Weak Necessity Schema. Let us consider the responses the Kripkean might make to the argument. We have already seen that the claim that existence is not a property and the claim that 'exists' isn't a first-level predicable expression are not claims which can usefully be invoked against this argument. However, it seems that the obvious point of attack is to hone in on the formulation of the Weak Necessity Schema as it appears in line 5. Strictly, the Weak Necessity Schema should quantify not only over individuals but also over whatever is predicable of them at the level of surface syntax. However, 'exists' is excluded by the Kripkean. So, the Kripkean may protest, line 5 is a misrepresentation of the Weak Necessity Schema: 'exists' was never intended to be one of the expressions apt for plugging into the predicate place. The proper response, I have suggested, is to ask what justification there is for such exclusion, other than that the lack of it causes problems for the Kripkean account.

Most essentialists take it as a datum that at least some concrete objects exist contingently. On the weak necessity account of claims of the form '*a* is necessarily *F*/necessarily *V*s', any singular attribution of necessary existence is not only true but tautologically so. So, for any concrete object we care to select, the contingency of its existence is sacrificed. We have now generated the contradiction that some concrete objects exist contingently and that no concrete objects exist contingently. So, we have a *reductio*. From a dialectical point of view, we are not strictly forced to take it as a *reductio* of the weak necessity account: we could revise our opinion that some concrete objects exist contingently. However, from a strategic point of view, the whole point of invoking weak necessity was to reconcile the supposedly contingent existence of concrete objects with the truth of *de re* necessities about those objects. We see, then, that this strategy fails. Granted, Kripke told us long ago that existence is to serve as an exception to the Weak Necessity Schema. Nevertheless, we are left with nothing, in his account or elsewhere, to indicate that this is not an *ad hoc* manoeuvre. The problem of reconciling the Weak Necessity Schema with contingent existence therefore remains a genuine and serious difficulty for Kripkean essentialism.

VI.   Saving Contingency

Even if a broadly modal account of essence is maintained there is a way out of all this trouble. It involves relinquishing the standard account of the syntax of *de re* modality: an account with which Kripkean essentialists, among others, work. According to this account,

> a sentence expresses 'necessity *de re*' [if and only if] it is adequately…formalizable by a sentence in which either there is a name within the scope of some modal operator or a modal operator within the scope of a quantifier….a sentence expresses 'necessity *de dicto*' just on condition that it expresses necessity but does not express necessity *de re*.
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> Sainsbury (1991, pp. 239-40)[5]

Essentialists, however, have never unanimously agreed with the standard account. An alternative view, on which at least some *de re* modality is not adequately captured by sentential modal operators at all, has been defended by Wiggins (1976) and McGinn (2000).[6,7]

While Wiggins (1976; 1980) has formalised *de re* modality via lambda abstraction and a modal operator upon predicates, the anti-sentential view can initially be explicated, with Wiggins (1980) and McGinn (2000), by appeal to natural language. On the account of Wiggins (1976; 1980), modal terms in *de re* constructions are construed as qualifying predicates, while McGinn (2000) urges that

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[5] Though I have found no explicit endorsement of the standard account in Kripke's own (1971) and (1980), much of what he writes presupposes it. For example, he remarks (1971, p. 71) that the intelligibility of modality *de re* requires the intelligibility of quantifying into modal contexts. In the literature on modality and essentialism, 'quantifying into modal contexts' is understood to involve the construction of a formula in which there is a modal operator within the scope of a quantifier. Thus, it involves the second feature Sainsbury identifies as sufficient for being modality that is syntactically *de re*.

[6] I will not here investigate in any detail the different commitments with respect to modality *de re* in the works of Wiggins and McGinn. For current purposes, it is what their views share (namely rejection of the standard account of the syntax of modality *de re*, on very similar grounds) that is most relevant.

[7] I say 'at least some' rather than 'all' here, because the opponent of the sentential account claims that there are *de re* modalities that are not also *de dicto* modalities and that sentential modal operators cannot do the work for those *de re* modalities.

they modify the copula. After McGinn (2000, pp. 76-7), the different approaches to parsing *de re* modal claims can be illustrated thus:

View	Parsing
Standard	*Necessarily*, Socrates is human
Predicate modifier	Socrates is *necessarily-human*.
Copula modifier	Socrates *is-necessarily* human.

In explaining his view of the logical form of *de re* modality, Wiggins (1980, p. 107) points to the natural language 'verbal forms "*x* can be ϕ", "*x* could be ϕ" and "it is possible for *x* to be ϕ"'. He adds that such *de re* modal forms fall outside Quine's three grades of modal involvement and have logical forms akin to 'the *de re* predicates of ability, obligation, capacity or disposition'.[8] On this view, there are true statements of *de re* necessity which are not equivalent to any (weakly or absolutely) necessary truths. The necessity operant in such *de re* modal statements is taken to be objective but non-alethic: it does not specify the mode in which a statement has its truth-value. A case can be provided for this alternative account of the syntax of *de re* modality just by appeal to the syntactic diversity of modal idioms in natural language, with the claim that that diversity is not captured by the wholly sentential modal operators of standard modal logic. Without investigating that case further here, we can, with Wiggins (1976), point to another argument for the alternative view: namely, that it enables us to escape some difficulties into which the Kripkean account, with its appeal to weak necessity, would lead us were we to adopt it. On the Kripkean account, there is no non-sentential reading of the modality in 'Cicero exists necessarily'. On the alternative view, on the other hand, in 'Cicero exists necessarily' the modality is internal. The alternative view, unlike the Kripkean account, requires that 'Cicero exists' be true in order for 'Cicero exists necessarily' to be true. Most importantly for our purposes, the alternative view entails that the Weak Necessity

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[8] The accounts of Wiggins and McGinn both entail that *de re* modality falls outside the 'Three Grades of Modal Involvement' distinguished by Quine (1966). The standard account, on the other hand, entails that *de re* modality is contained within Quine's second and third grades.

Schema is false.[9] So, the alternative view does not fall prey to the anti-Kripkean *reductio*. On the alternative view, contingency and essentiality are not in conflict, since if (1**) is a true statement of *de re* necessity (rather than being, or being equivalent to, a necessary truth) then it is consistent with Cicero's being a contingent existent.

VII.   Conclusion

Weak necessity, it has been argued, is the Achilles heel of Kripkean essentialism as a coherent philosophy. The notion was invoked to enable simultaneous subscription to the contingent existence of concrete objects and to the standard modal account of essence. It does not pass muster and could not do so. Weak necessity saves us from none of the bad results it was invoked to try to prevent and it generates unwelcome results of its own. If we wish to uphold the conviction that concrete objects exist contingently whilst still subscribing to the idea that they have some of their properties necessarily then we must abandon the appeal to weak necessity: it does not open up a genuine path for the reconciliation of these two convictions.

Rejecting the Weak Necessity Schema and the standard account of the syntax of modality *de re* does provide such a path. This move perhaps comes at the cost of giving up other supposed theoretical benefits attached to the standard account, such as its easy harmony with standard modal logic and possible worlds semantics. Invoking weak necessity in an effort to keep these benefits would be ill-advised, since this could not compensate for the weak necessity account's failure to reconcile the convictions it was originally invoked to try to reconcile. The Kripkean must relinquish the weak necessity account or one of the convictions.

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[9] Fine (1994, p. 4) takes modal accounts of essence to be 'conditional' as opposed to 'categorical'. The modal account of essence that appeals to weak necessity is an example of a 'conditional' account. As we have seen, however, a modal account of essence which takes the syntax of *de re* modality to be non-sentential falls upon the 'categorical' side of the divide.

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