

## Timothy Williamson on the Contingently Concrete and Non-concrete<sup>1</sup>

Timothy Williamson's important book *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* is an extended defense of *necessitism*: the view that necessarily everything is such that necessarily something is identical to it.<sup>2</sup> Williamson argues at length that necessitism is superior to its denial, *contingentism*. For necessitists, the models for first order quantified modal logic feature a constant domain common to all worlds; not so for the contingentist. Williamson's main argument in favor of necessitism over contingentism is that in a variety of ways it offers a superior treatment of quantified modal languages. Specifically, among other things he claims that necessitism allows for a more realist account of the model theory for quantified first order logic and provides a simpler and more elegant treatment of higher order modal logic. Though I in no way mean to diminish the importance of Williamson's ingenious and detailed arguments for these conclusions, I think it is fair to say that most people won't be very surprised to learn that there are results of this general kind. Ever since Kripke [1963] formulated a variable domain semantics for quantified modal logic people have been pointing out how much more smoothly quantified modal logic goes with a constant domain semantics (and a universal accessibility relation).<sup>3</sup> I think it is also fair to say that those not already advocating necessitism and a constant domain model theory are unlikely to be moved by Williamson's arguments. Opponents of possibilism seemed to think that the price of a more unwieldy logic is worth paying to reject it; I suspect the same is likely to be true of the opponents of necessitism. The question I want to raise is why that is. Of course, there

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Eddy Keming Chen and Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In a familiar symbolism,  $\Box \forall x \Box \exists y (y=x)$ . The necessity and possibility at stake throughout the present paper are uniformly *metaphysical*. See Williamson [2013] p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of parts of the dialectic here, see Menzel [2015].

are likely psychological and sociological reasons and other things in that ballpark. But I am interested in why necessitism seems likely to be philosophically a non-starter for many philosophers despite Williamson's demonstration of its advantages *vis à vis* quantified and higher order modal logic. So I want to try to explain why certain features of necessitism are likely to repel many philosophers. In so doing, I am not so much arguing against Williamson as I am trying to get him to say a bit more about why he is not put off by these features that seem likely to drive away others.

Let's begin by spelling out necessitism a bit more. As indicated, it is the view that necessarily everything is such that necessarily it is identical to something. The quantifiers 'everything' and 'something' here have to be understood as completely unrestricted or absolutely universal, as Williamson emphasizes.<sup>4</sup> Though I won't discuss it here, Williamson also considers the temporal analogue of necessitism, which he calls *permanetism*: always everything is such that always something is identical to it.

As Williamson is well aware, necessitism by itself is a very sparse doctrine. It doesn't tell us, for example, whether there could have failed to be tigers. It only tells us that each thing that is a tiger is necessarily something. But it is natural to add additional assumptions to necessitism to yield a more robust view that makes pronouncements about particular cases. For example, Williamson suggests that the necessitist should just accept the seemingly obvious claim that certain *kinds* that are in fact instantiated might not have been. So there might have failed to be tigers. But for the necessitist that means that tigers are only contingently tigers. Had there been no tigers, the things that are tigers

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<sup>4</sup> P. 14. All page references without explicitly identified sources are to Williamson [2013].

would have existed, that is, been something, and not have been tigers.<sup>5</sup> But in such a scenario, necessitism requires the kind *tiger*, if there is such a thing, still to be something, albeit uninstantiated.<sup>6</sup> Another plausible assumption that Williamson is willing to add to necessitism concerns particular concrete things that we normally say could have failed to exist. Consider this watch on my wrist. Williamson is willing to say that there could have been no concrete thing that is this watch. But of course the watch is necessarily something according to necessitism. That must mean that this watch might not have been concrete. Had that been the case, it would not have been a watch (since presumably necessarily, all watches are concrete).<sup>7</sup> So normal concrete things that we would usually say might not have existed are in fact contingently concrete. Similarly, consider something that we would usually say might have existed but doesn't, say a coin of a sort that was never produced. According to Williamson, this "thing" (not *actually* a coin) is contingently non-concrete.<sup>8</sup> Had things gone differently it would have been a concrete coin. Instead, it is non-concrete and not a coin.

It is important for Williamson to distinguish being non-concrete from being abstract. Something that might have been a coin but isn't is (contingently) non-concrete. But it is not thereby abstract. Similarly, had the pen I am holding not been concrete it would not have thereby been abstract. Williamson suggests that 'non-concrete', unlike

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<sup>5</sup> Williamson considers and rejects a version of necessitism on which tigers are necessarily tigers and which claims that in the counterfactual scenario that we are tempted to describe as one in which there are no tigers, there really are simply no *concrete* tigers. See p. 8 note 11. I think he is right to do so.

<sup>6</sup> I can't see that Williamson commits himself to the claim that in such a scenario the kind *tiger* would still be the kind *tiger* or even still be a kind.

<sup>7</sup> At any rate, Williamson seems to allow that necessarily all sticks are concrete (p. 10). Despite the importance of the notion of *concreteness* for Williamson, he says it is used throughout the book informally and eschews the task of making it more precise. See p. 6 note 6.

<sup>8</sup>p. 7

‘abstract’, is purely negative in meaning. It is used solely to deny that something is concrete and attributes no positive properties to a thing.

These remarks should make clear that necessitists will be committed to denying widely held essentialist claims. Many think that a property  $P$  is essential to an object  $o$  only if necessarily whenever  $o$  is something it has  $P$ . It is widely held that members of natural kinds are so essentially: tigers are essentially tigers, gold is essentially gold and so on. But since necessitists hold that a given tiger  $t$  might have been non-concrete and so not a tiger,  $t$  could have been something without being a tiger. However, Williamson notes that a necessitist could adopt the following essentialist principle: a tiger is necessarily a tiger if concrete. Further, he seems inclined to have his necessitist adopt the following view about the essentiality of origins.<sup>9</sup> Consider a human  $h$  who grew from sperm  $s$  and egg  $e$ . Then  $h$  necessarily comes from  $s$  and  $e$  if concrete. Similarly, any  $h^*$  that could have come from  $s^*$  and  $e^*$  but actually didn’t is such that it necessarily comes from  $s^*$  and  $e^*$  if concrete.

Now consider the pen in my hand that the necessitist will say might have not been concrete. In that circumstance, what would it be? Williamson answers that it would be something that might have been a pen. It would be a *possible pen*. But this does not mean that it would be a pen and be possible. Since pens are necessarily concrete, had the pen been non-concrete it would have failed to be a pen. But it still could have been a pen. So it would have been a non-concrete thing that is a possible pen (but not a pen). It seems as though such modal properties (*being a possible pen*) are generally the only “non-negative” properties Williamson’s necessitist will say that non-concrete things that

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<sup>9</sup> p. 337

might have been concrete possess.<sup>10</sup> Consider an actual possible coin (i.e. something that is non-concrete and so isn't a coin but might have been). Williamson says that it is possibly a coin, not metal, not heavy, not light and not concrete. It actually has no location.<sup>11</sup> Williamson is willing to say that it is self-identical, since everything is. He is also willing to say that it is identical to a particular thing, since again everything has this sort of property.<sup>12</sup> (With respect to identity, Williamson's necessitist adopts the classical view that identical things are so necessarily and distinct things are so necessarily.) But that seems to be all there is to say about our contingently non-concrete possible coin.

We have seen that necessitism is the bare doctrine that necessarily everything is such that necessarily it is identical to something. But we have added additional doctrine to this bare claim, including the claim that there might have been no tigers; the claim that particular concrete things like the pen in my hand might have failed to be concrete and so failed to be a pen; the claim that there are actually non-concrete things that might have been concrete; the claim that a particular human *h* that came from egg *e* and sperm *s* is such that necessarily it comes from *e* and *s* if concrete; and so on. Henceforth I'll call this whole package *necessitism*.

I begin with a couple questions about methodology before turning to features of necessitism that I'd like to hear more about. To his credit, Williamson early on asks

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<sup>10</sup> The qualification 'generally' here is due to the fact that in certain situations we may be able to truly predicate "positive" non-modal properties of contingently non-concrete things. To adapt an example from Williamson, suppose that in a knife factory handles and blades are attached to make knives. The handles and blades are uniform so any two could be joined to produce a knife. Suppose that handle *H* in fact gets attached to blade *B* to form knife *K* but that had the conveyer belt been briefly delayed, it would have been attached to blade *B\** to form knife *K\**. It may be that there is only one merely possible knife that would have been the result of joining *H* and *B\** in such a scenario. If so, the description 'the possible knife resulting from joining *H* and *B\** had the conveyer belt slightly slowed' uniquely identifies a contingently non-concrete thing. But then it has the ("positive") property of being uniquely identified by this description.

<sup>11</sup> p. 13

<sup>12</sup> p. 13

whether we even need to take necessitism seriously.<sup>13</sup> Isn't it just obvious, he asks, that certain things might have been nothing? Certainly, most people do take this as obvious. An answer he considers and rejects is that many things that have been taken to be obvious have turned out to be false. But, Williamson says, that reply could be made on behalf of any hypothesis at all. Williamson writes:

If all propositions are treated as serious options, enquiry is deadlocked. Any blogger can multiply hypotheses faster than serious enquirers can evaluate them; any attempt to eliminate a hypothesis by argument can be met by the demand to treat the negations of the argument's premises as serious options. For enquiry to progress, it must take only a limited range of options seriously.<sup>14</sup>

Note here that Williamson commits himself to the claim that at the outset of inquiry we need to limit which hypotheses we take seriously. Some won't make the pre-theoretical cut. After spending several pages clarifying what necessitism claims, Williamson writes:

On these clarifications of what necessitism and permanentism imply, and what they do not, neither is obviously false. Even if we know pre-theoretically that this coin could have not been something concrete, that does not enable us to know pre-theoretically that it could not have been something nonconcrete. Granted, we cannot know pre-theoretically that there can be contingently non-concrete things, but our inability to know pre-theoretically that there can be things of a kind does not imply an ability to know pretheoretically that there cannot be things of that kind. It is not common sense that all objects are common-sense objects. However strange the consequences of necessitism and permanentism, common sense has limited authority over such claims. We can properly evaluate them only by theoretical enquiry.<sup>15</sup>

Here Williamson appears to say that necessitism *does* make the pretheoretical cut and *is* a hypothesis we must take seriously *because it isn't obviously false*. Coupled with Williamson's commitment to limiting the hypotheses we take seriously at the outset of inquiry, it appears that Williamson is saying that we should limit ourselves at the outset

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<sup>13</sup> p. 5

<sup>14</sup> p. 5

<sup>15</sup> p. 9

of inquiry to the hypotheses that are not obviously false.

I have three questions or concerns about this. First, short of a hypothesis being contradictory or explicitly inconsistent, how do we tell when it is obviously false? I'm just not sure what the intended standard of obvious falsity is. Depending on the answer to this first question, a second worry is that this is setting the bar too low for what we can safely ignore at the outset of inquiry and so won't sufficiently limit the hypotheses we can so ignore. Third, it would be nice to be given examples of some substantive philosophical claims that fail to meet this standard and so *can be* safely ignored from the start of inquiry. That would, I think, help address the two previous questions.

A second question about methodology concerns what we know pretheoretically about possibility and necessity and so can safely assume at the outset of modal inquiry. I would have thought that we pretheoretically know that certain things that aren't the case might yet have been and that certain things that are the case might not have been. That is, we know that things could have been different than they are in certain ways. For example, I know that I might not have written this paper had I had just a bit more on my plate when I was asked to do it. I know that my wife and I might have never met. I know that George W. Bush might have lost the 2000 U.S. Presidential election.<sup>16</sup> Of course, there are many things I don't know about what is possible or necessary. I don't know whether my Lost surfboard could have been made from slightly different batches of resin and fiberglass.<sup>17</sup> I don't know whether there might have been nothing rather than

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<sup>16</sup> Of course many think there is a sense in which Bush *did* lose that election, but I mean that I know that Gore might have been officially declared the winner.

<sup>17</sup> A surfboard is made by a person shaping a foam blank to the desired dimensions. The blank is then covered with fiberglass and resin. I am imagining my board's blank being shaped just as it was and then wondering whether, had slightly different batches of fiberglass and resin been used constructing the surfboard, it would have been the board I own.

something. But I think we do start out pretheoretically knowing that many particular things are possible and that some things, perhaps truths of logic and mathematics, couldn't be otherwise. Now I would have thought that one thing I know pretheoretically is that I might not have existed, by which I mean I might have been nothing. I can coherently describe how this might have been by describing a scenario in which my parents never met. I would have been tempted to say that I know pretheoretically that many things might have been nothing, like the iPhone next to me. But of course Williamson denies that I know these things, since he claims they are false. There is something in the neighborhood that he claims I *do* know pretheoretically. It was in the previous quotation, and I quote the relevant portion again:

Even if we know pre-theoretically that this coin could have not been something concrete, that does not enable us to know pre-theoretically that it could not have been something nonconcrete.<sup>18</sup>

So where I and many others thought that what we knew pretheoretically was that the coin may have failed to exist—may have been nothing—Williamson claims that what we *really* knew pretheoretically was that the coin could have failed to be concrete.

It looks like what is going on here is that people claim to know pretheoretically that certain things might not have existed, might not have been, might not have been anything. Then Williamson tells them that they don't know that and what they really know pretheoretically is that certain concrete things might have failed to be concrete. But how is it determined that this *really is* the thing they know pretheoretically rather than what they appear to be claiming to know? When I have asked nonphilosophers who think they pretheoretically know that they and other concrete things might not have existed whether what they are really knowing is that these things might have failed to be

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<sup>18</sup> P. 9

concrete, they reject that reformulation of their pretheoretical knowledge. So why should we say that Williamson is right about what is really known pretheoretically here?

More generally, under what conditions is it legitimate to reformulate what people claim to know pretheoretically in different terms that makes what is now claimed to be known pretheoretically not the same thing that was originally claimed to be known? It is important to Williamson's methodology to answer these questions, I think, because determining what we do and do not know pretheoretically plays an important role in determining which hypotheses we do and do not have to take seriously prior to inquiry. The worry is that if the move Williamson makes here is legitimate, we are threatened with the possibility that we can rule out *no* hypothesis by what we think we know pretheoretically. Suppose there is some hypothesis H that is ruled out by some proposition p that we seem to know pretheoretically. It seems like a sufficiently resourceful advocate of H could come up with some proposition p' consistent with H and claim that when we think we pretheoretically know p, it is really p' that we pretheoretically know. Given that knowing p and knowing p' are sufficiently similar to make the claim that we are confusing them not implausible, is this move always legitimate? If so, this seems to raise the worry that we won't be able to rule out enough hypotheses pretheoretically. If not, when is it legitimate and when isn't it?<sup>19</sup>

Let me now turn away from methodology and to certain features of necessitism that I think are bound to strike the uninitiated as hard to swallow. Consider a contingently non-concrete thing like a possible child of Marilyn Monroe and John F. Kennedy. Such a thing has the modal property of being a possible child of MM and JFK.

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<sup>19</sup> Thanks to Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini for helpful discussion of the points in the last two paragraphs.

Williamson raises and responds to the worry that possession of the modal property in question is not grounded in the possession of some non-modal properties<sup>20</sup> and the related worry that the modal fails to supervene on the non-modal.<sup>21</sup> I very much agree with Williamson's response to these worries. Taking the former worry, Williamson imagines a challenger saying that it is a proper explanation of why a lump of clay is malleable—possesses a modal property—to say that it has a certain microstructure—possesses a non-modal property. The challenger thinks the necessitist should give the same sort of explanation of a contingently non-concrete thing possessing the property of being a possible child. Williamson responds by saying that it is unclear whether having a certain microstructure *is* a non-modal property. That seems right. But I would add that even if having a certain microstructure *is* a modal property, explaining why a thing has the modal property of being malleable in terms of its possession of the modal property of having a certain microstructure seems like a good explanation. The reason is that having a certain microstructure seems more basic than being malleable. Hence explaining the possession of the latter in terms of the possession of the former seems appropriate. Further, it would seem odd to claim that there is no further explanation of why a thing is malleable. That isn't because it is a modal property; it's because that property just doesn't seem basic enough for its possession to have no further explanation (I'll leave open whether that is also so for the property of having a certain microstructure). So unlike Williamson's imagined challenger, I see no reason to think that the possession of modal properties need to be grounded in or explained by the possession of non-modal properties; nor do I see any reason that the modal must supervene on the non-modal.

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<sup>20</sup> pp. 13-14

<sup>21</sup> pp. 380-391

As indicated, I do, however, think that the possession of certain properties, modal or not, need to be explained by the possession of more basic properties. I don't have a theory of the conditions under which the possession of a property needs to be explained in terms of the possession of more basic properties, nor of exactly what the sense of 'basic' being employed here is. But I think we all have the sense that the possession of some properties needs explanation in terms of possession of more basic properties. Properties like *being alive*, *believing Paris is in France*, *referring to Barack Obama* are properties the possession of which need to be explained by the possession of more basic properties. It would be quite odd to claim that the possession of such properties has no further explanation in terms of the possession of more basic properties. Returning to the contingently non-concrete merely possible child of JFK and MM, it has the property of being a possible child. This looks to me to be a paradigmatic case of a property whose possession needs to be explained in terms of possession of more basic properties, whether modal or otherwise.

Of course, we don't always explain how/why something has the property of being a possible F when it is claimed to have that property. One reason for that is that sometimes it is just obvious that something is a possible F, as in the case of me being a possible non-meeter of my wife. But if I were asked to explain how/why I possess this property, I could give an explanation in terms of my possessing what I take to be more basic non-modal and modal properties. As an example, consider the following famous exchange between Terry and Charley Malloy in *On the Waterfront*, where we can construe Terry as explaining how/why he has the property of being a (merely) possible contender and why Charley is to blame for it:

Charley: Look, kid, I - how much you weigh, son? When you weighed one hundred and sixty-eight pounds you were beautiful. You coulda been another Billy Conn, and that skunk we got you for a manager, he brought you along too fast.

Terry: It wasn't him, Charley, it was you. Remember that night in the Garden you came down to my dressing room and you said, "Kid, this ain't your night. We're going for the price on Wilson." You remember that? "This ain't your night"! My night! I coulda taken Wilson apart! So what happens? He gets the title shot outdoors on the ballpark and what do I get? A one-way ticket to Palooka-ville! You was my brother, Charley, you shoulda looked out for me a little bit. You shoulda taken care of me just a little bit so I wouldn't have to take them dives for the short-end money.

Charley: Oh I had some bets down for you. You saw some money.

Terry: You don't understand. I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am, let's face it. It was you, Charley.

It is natural to see Terry as explaining how/why he "coulda been a contender" by implicitly appealing to non-modal properties he actually had and noting that he has other possible (and so modal) properties (possibly being taken care of better economically by Charley and possibly not having to take dives). Had he had these possible properties as well as the actual ones he had, he maintains he would have contended for the title.<sup>22</sup> This explains how Terry is a possible contender. Similarly, when David Lewis [1986] says "...had I not been such a commonsensical chap, I might be defending not only a plurality of possible worlds, but also a plurality of impossible worlds..."<sup>23</sup> it is tempting to see him as explaining how/why he has the property of possibly defending a plurality of impossible worlds. He is implicitly claiming that had he possessed many of the non-modal properties he actually possessed, given that he also possesses the (modal) property

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<sup>22</sup> Presumably the possession of the modal properties of possibly being taken care of by Charley and possibly not having to take dives could also be explained in terms of more basic properties.

<sup>23</sup> p. 1

of possibly being less commonsensical, he thereby possesses the property of possibly defending a plurality of impossible worlds.

However, no such explanations will be forthcoming from Williamson's necessitist as to how/why some contingently non-concrete thing is a possible coin. Being forced to have the possession of modal properties like being a possible coin, being a possible child, and so on by contingently non-concrete entities have no further explanation in terms of possession of more basic properties seems to me a high cost. I wonder whether Williamson sees it as such.

At one point, contrary to the tone of most of what he says about the matter,<sup>24</sup> Williamson does suggest a kind of an explanation a necessitist might give of why one contingently non-concrete thing *o* is a possible star and another contingently non-concrete thing *o\** is not.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps such an explanation can be an explanation of why *o* has the property of being a possible star *simpliciter*. Williamson writes:

Some necessitists may bluntly insist that they are under no obligation to explain why *o* is a possible star and *o\** is not, rather than vice versa, in more basic terms. But suppose, alternatively, that what it is to be a star can be explained: it is to be an  $\mathfrak{S}$ . Therefore it is necessary that something is a star if and only if it is an  $\mathfrak{S}$ , and necessitists can use that strict equivalence for their explanatory purposes. Thus they can explain why *o* is a possible star and *o\** is not, rather than vice versa, by starting from the explanans that *o* is a possible  $\mathfrak{S}$  and *o\** is not. Any explanation of a difference between *o* and *o\** must somewhere assume another difference between *o* and *o\**. Sooner or later the regress of explanations comes to an end. Why cannot that end come with the difference between being a possible  $\mathfrak{S}$  and not being one?<sup>26</sup>

So Williamson suggests explaining why *o* is a possible star—why it has that modal property—by saying that it is a possible  $\mathfrak{S}$ , where to be a star *is* to be an  $\mathfrak{S}$ , so that

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<sup>24</sup> p. 13, 389.

<sup>25</sup> See footnote 30 below.

<sup>26</sup> p. 389

necessarily something is a star iff it is an  $\mathcal{S}$ . I have two worries about the proposed explanation here where it is understood as an explanation of why  $o$  has the property of being a possible star *simpliciter*. First, Williamson for present purposes advocates a coarse grained conception of properties on which necessarily coextensive properties are identical.<sup>27</sup> But then being a star and being an  $\mathcal{S}$  are the same property. That means being a possible star and being a possible  $\mathcal{S}$  are the same property.<sup>28</sup> Call that property *PS*. Then in saying that  $o$  is a possible star because  $o$  is a possible  $\mathcal{S}$  I am simply attributing *PS* to  $o$  in both the explanans and the explanandum. But that doesn't seem like a legitimate explanation of why  $o$  has is a possible star. This seems sufficiently strange that perhaps I just missed something here.

My second concern about the proposed explanation is that instances of it don't seem properly explanatory. To be a chunk of gold is to be a piece of a solid composed of the element whose atomic number is 79. Necessarily something is a chunk of gold just in case it is a piece of a solid composed of the element whose atomic number is 79. But now suppose I want to explain why contingently non-concrete  $o$  is a possible chunk of gold. To say it is so because it is a possible piece of a solid composed of the element whose atomic number is 79 doesn't seem to explain why  $o$  is a possible chunk of gold at all. It does tell me something about gold. But it doesn't tell me anything more about why  $o$  is a possible chunk of gold.

To repeat, then, it seems that Williamson's necessitist has no explanation of how/why contingently concrete entities have properties like being possible coins, being

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<sup>27</sup> p. 264, 266, 291

<sup>28</sup> Suppose being a star is necessarily coextensive with being an  $\mathcal{S}$  but being a possible star is not necessarily coextensive with being a possible  $\mathcal{S}$ . Then some  $o$  at some  $w$  has the former but not the latter (or vice versa). But then at some  $w'$ ,  $o$  has the property of being a star and lacks the property of being an  $\mathcal{S}$ . Contradiction.

possible children and so on. For some, this consequence will be very disconcerting.

There is a related worry about the *natures* of contingently non-concrete entities. Above we saw that contingently non-concrete things generally have no “positive” properties. They are self-identical, identical to particular things, not heavy, not metal and so on, but they generally have no “positive properties”. Consider again the contingently non-concrete thing *o* that is a possible child of JFK and MM.<sup>29</sup> What sort of *nature* does *o* have? Well, it might have been a child, might had blond hair, might have gone to law school and so on.<sup>30</sup> *o* possesses lots and lots of modal properties. But this means that *o*’s nature is pretty much exhausted by what it might have been.<sup>31</sup> Williamson considers the worry that things like *o* have irreducibly modal aspects to their natures: modal aspects of them that are not grounded in non-modal aspects. That is not the concern I have. Rather, it is that things like *o* have *exclusively* modal natures. There is nothing absurd about this, but it does show how peculiar the contingently non-concrete is. I think for a lot of philosophers, the more peculiar an entity is seen to be, the harder it is to believe in it without overwhelmingly good reason.

I have a final concern about the essentialist principles Williamson’s necessitist adopts. We saw above that necessitists have to give up essentialist principles like tigers are necessarily tigers. At most, they can hold that tigers are necessarily tigers if concrete. I also mentioned that Williamson seemed to adopt a modified version of the principle of

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<sup>29</sup> I talk here as though there is a unique such thing which of course there isn’t since many distinct things with different essential origins if concrete are possible children of JFK and MM. Take an arbitrary one of these.

<sup>30</sup> For the most part, Williamson considers a version of necessitism on which e.g. a contingently non-concrete thing *o* might have been a human and a contingently non-concrete thing *o\** might have been a mountain, but *o* could not have been a mountain and *o\** could not have been a human. But he does consider a version on which both *o* and *o\** could have been human or mountainous (p. 389). I have in mind here the former version of necessitism.

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps I should say *substantial* nature or some such thing. For arguably, it is part of *o*’s nature not to possess any positive properties.

the essentiality of origins: if person  $h$  results from the combination of egg  $e$  and sperm  $s$  then  $h$  necessarily results from  $e$  and  $s$  if concrete. However, I fail to see why these principles should seem compelling to the necessitist. He claims that I could have failed to be concrete and so failed to be human and just about everything else I am. Given that I could have been *that* different from the way I am, why should I think that I couldn't have been a concrete dolphin? After all, I think what drives the intuitive appeal of essentialist principles is the thought that there are ways I am such that had I not been that way I wouldn't be me. But once I talk myself into thinking that I could have been non-concrete—a way so different from the way I am that it is hard to imagine being more different—I have a hard time convincing myself that I couldn't have been a different kind of concrete thing. If I could have been non-concrete, why couldn't I have been a concrete non-human? Similarly, if I could have been non-concrete and so lacked any of the properties I in fact have, why couldn't I have come from a different egg and sperm? Essentialist principles just seem hard to motivate once you take necessitism on board. I would add that here we may find one source of what I predicted would be a strong resistance to necessitism. If essentialist thinking runs deep with many philosophers, as I think it has since Kripke [1980], and if even Williamson's modified essentialist principles do not sit well with necessitism, as I think they do not, this may well partly explain the resistance of many philosophers to necessitism.

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