

## Generic Essence, Objectual Essence, and Modality<sup>1</sup>

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When thinking about the notion of essence or of an essential feature, philosophers typically focus on what I will call the notion of *objectual* essence. The main aim of this paper is to argue that beside this familiar notion stands another one, the notion of *generic* essence, which contrary to appearance cannot be understood in terms of the familiar notion, and which also fails to be correctly characterized by certain other accounts which naturally come to mind as well. Some of my objections to these accounts are similar to some of Kit Fine's compelling objections to the standard modal account of (objectual) essence (Fine 1994). In the light of these objections, Fine advances the view that it is metaphysical necessity which has to be understood in terms of essence, rather than the other way around, and takes essence to be unanalyzable. When formulating his view, Fine had only objectual essence in mind (or had both concepts in mind, but assumed that the generic is a special case of the objectual), and for that reason, I will argue, his account fails. I will suggest that Fineans should modify their view, and take it that metaphysical necessity is to be understood in terms of the *two* notions of essence—a view I myself find appealing. Finally, I will end by suggesting a further move which reduces the objectual to the generic, making metaphysical necessity reducible to generic essence alone—a move with which I myself have some sympathy.

### 1. The Objectual and the Generic

The concept of essence is traditionally associated with questions of the form 'What is *a*?', where '*a*' is a singular term like 'Socrates' or 'the Moon'. The

traditional view is that there is a distinctively metaphysical construal of questions of that form, and that describing the essence or some essential features of a given object  $a$  is just giving an answer, be it complete or only partial, to the metaphysical question as to what  $a$  is. Thus when Aristotlian-minded philosophers claim that the essence of Socrates is to be a rational animal, they intend to provide an answer to a question of the type under consideration. And many readers of Kripke do the same when they claim that this or that table could not have originated from a different piece of wood than the one from which it actually had.

The concept of essence is also traditionally associated with questions of the form 'What is it to  $F$ ?', where ' $F$ ' is a predicate expression like 'be a human being', 'be wise', 'think', or 'be related as father to son'. The traditional view is that there is a distinctively metaphysical construal of these questions, and that a complete or partial answer to the metaphysical question as to what it is to  $F$  is a description of the essence or of some essential features of  $F$ -ing. Thus many Aristotlian-minded philosophers who hold that the essence of men consists in their being rational animals arguably intend their claim to provide an answer to a question of the type under consideration. And many readers of Kripke surely have a similar intention when they say that being water is being  $H_2O$ .

Let me sort the essentialist statements into the *objectual* and the *generic*. An objectual statement is one which states that a given object is by its very nature so and so, and a generic statement is one which states that to be thus and thus is essentially to be so and so. An objectual statement is simply an answer to an essentialist question of the first kind, and a generic statement an answer to one of the second kind.

The objectual/generic distinction parallels the subject/predicate distinction, and as it were embodies that distinction in the realm of essence. For the function of objectual statements is to describe the nature of what subjects designate, namely *things*; and generic essentialist statements aim at describing the essential features of what predicates express, namely *ways of being*.

Both concepts of essence, the objectual and the generic, occupy a central place in philosophy. The metaphysician, for instance, is chiefly concerned with the issue of determining the essence of things, as well as with the issue of determining the essence of certain features. He wants to know what Socrates is and what his life is; and he also wants to know what it is to be a substance and what it is to be an event or a process.

But essentialist concerns are arguably not only those of a metaphysician. For each particular domain of philosophy has its own generic essentialist questions, its own questions as to what it is to be so and so. Examples abound: What is it to exist? To be a number? A proposition? A person? What is it for a proposition to be true? For an inference to be valid? For someone to be rational? For something to have emotions? For an action to be good? For something to be a crime?

Given the importance of these two concepts of essence it is quite legitimate to wonder how they are to be understood. Yet in the contemporary literature on essence, focus has been on the objectual notion only, and the generic notion has been neglected. This negligence may have several sources. One might be the thought that the generic notion can be quite easily accounted for, e.g., in terms of the objectual notion or in purely modal terms. I am sure, for instance, that many would be happy with the view that generic essence is nothing but objectual essence of “general entities”, of properties for instance. In what follows I will argue that this latter view, as well as other *prima facie* plausible accounts of generic essence, have to be rejected.

## 2. The Formulation of Essentialist Statements

First, some preliminary points about the formulation of essentialist claims, of both the objectual type and the generic type, are in order.

Objectual statements can have various grammatical forms.<sup>2</sup> Most commonly, they have a subject-predicate form where the subject is a singular term and the predicate is the result of applying the predicate modifier ‘essentially’ to another predicate, yielding sentences of the form:

*a* essentially *Fs*.

Objectual statements can also have a form which is similar to the form of standard propositional attitude reports like ‘Sam believes that number 7 is prime’ or ‘John thinks that Mary is angry’, which result from applying the binary operator ‘it is true in virtue of what \_\_\_ is that ...’ to a singular term and a sentence, yielding sentences of the form:

It is true in virtue of what *a* is that *p*.

Both the predicational and the sentential mode of formulation have many variants beyond the ones presented above. Thus, for instance, we have the predicational forms ‘*a* by its very nature *Fs*’ and ‘it is part of *a*’s nature that it *Fs*’, and the sentential forms ‘it is true in virtue of the nature of *a* that *p*’ and ‘*a* is by its very nature such that *p*’.

Generic statements, like the objectual ones, can take several forms. There are, for instance, the following quasi-predicational forms:

An *F* essentially *Gs*,

An *F*, as such, essentially *Gs*,

*Fs* essentially *G*, and

*Fs*, as such, essentially *G*,

where ‘ $F$ ’ is a general term such that ‘is an  $F$ ’ is a monadic predicate and ‘ $G$ ’ is a monadic predicate as well. There is indeed a construal of these forms according to which they are synonymous and all express that  $G$ -ing is something  $F$ s do by virtue of what it is to be an  $F$ . Examples are ‘a man is essentially an animal’, ‘samples of water essentially contain  $H_2O$  molecules’, ‘a round square, as such, is essentially square’ and ‘red things, as such, are essentially colored’.

These forms can be used only to formulate statements about *monadic* features. Statements about any kind of features, be they monadic or relational, can be made by applying the somewhat artificial operator ‘being \_\_\_ -related (in a given order) essentially involves being ... -related (in the same order)’ to pairs of predicate expressions of the same arity. The resulting statements then have the cumbersome quasi-predicational form:

Being  $F$ -related (in a given order) essentially involves being  $G$ -related (in the same order).

An example is ‘being related as father to son (in a given order) essentially involves being related as genitor to progeniture (in the same order)’.

Besides the quasi-predicational forms stand sentential forms. For instance, generic statements can be obtained by applying the binary operator ‘it is true in virtue of what it is to \_\_\_ that ...’ to a predicate (in infinitive form) and a sentence, yielding sentences of the form:

It is true in virtue of what it is to  $F$  that  $p$ .

Examples are: ‘it is true in virtue of what it is to be a man that men are animals’, ‘it is true in virtue of what it is to be a set that the union of any two sets is itself a set’, and ‘it is true in virtue of what it is to be related as part to whole that any part of a part of something is a part of that thing’.

All essentialist statements we met so far are *individual*. Beside them stand *collective* essentialist statements. An objectual statement is collective if it is a statement to the effect that some fact holds by virtue of what *several* objects taken together are, like, e.g., ‘in virtue of what number 3 and number 4 are, it is true that  $3 < 4$ ’. Generic statements can also be collective, to wit ‘in virtue of what it is to be a man and of what it is to be a number, it is true that nothing can be both a man and a number’. And of course we can build “hybrid” collective statements with both an objectual and a generic character.

I take for granted that in the sphere of essentialist statements, whatever can be formulated can be expressed in sentential form—be it individual or collective. For instance, I shall take it that one can render ‘ $a$  is essentially  $F$ ’ by ‘it is true in virtue of what  $a$  is that  $a$  is  $F$ ’, and ‘an  $F$  essentially  $G$ s’ by ‘it is true in virtue of what it is to be an  $F$  that  $F$ s  $G$ ’. I will consider the

sentential mode of expression as providing the canonical way of formulating essentialist claims, but I shall nevertheless feel free to use other modes of formulation for stylistic reasons.

So much for the grammar of essence. In the next two sections I present and reject some accounts of generic essence which may at first sight have some plausibility.

### 3. Three Accounts of Generic Essence

I wish to present and reject here three accounts of generic essence, i.e., three accounts of how generic statements are to be understood, which may appear *prima facie* plausible. For the sake of simplicity, I shall focus on the restriction of each account to generic statements about monadic features. Of course, showing that the restricted accounts fail will be enough to show that the corresponding full accounts have to be rejected. In order to fix ideas, we shall take the target statements to be those of the predicational form:

(g) An *F*, as such, essentially *G*s.

Focusing on statements in sentential form would make no difference.

Let me begin with the *modal* account. This is the adaptation to the generic case of a standard approach to objectual essence. On this latter approach, any statement of type ‘*a* essentially *F*s’ should be understood as ‘necessarily, if *a* exists, then *a* *F*s’ (here as well as in the sequel, necessity is metaphysical necessity). The modal account of generic essence is simply the view that (g) should be understood as:

(g<sub>1</sub>) Necessarily, every *F* *G*s.

I shall assume that (g) entails (g<sub>1</sub>). This I think is uncontroversial. The problem with the modal account is with the converse entailment.

In the important paper (Fine 1994), Fine argues against the standard modal account of objectual essence. Some of his objections can straightforwardly be adapted to argue against the modal account of generic statements. Here are two such objections.

First, it is a general truth of predicate modal logic that necessarily, every cat is either loved by Socrates or not. But we do not want to say, on that account, that a cat, as such, is essentially either loved by Socrates or not: being either loved by Socrates or not does not pertain to what it is to be a cat—or so one can maintain.

The second objection runs as follows. It is a general truth of modal set theory that necessarily, every object is a member of some set (its singleton-set, for instance)—or so we may suppose. So necessarily, every cat belongs to some set. But *pace* the friends of the modal account, it does not follow that

cats, as such, essentially belong to sets: it is not part of the essence of cats that they belong to sets—or at least, this surely can be maintained together with the above mentioned general principle about sets.

One cannot reply to the previous objections simply by rejecting some of the particular modal or essentialist claims involved therein. The first objection does not rely on the view that it is false that cats, as such, are essentially either loved by Socrates or not. The point is just that it can sensibly be maintained that the proposition in question is false and at the same time accepted that necessarily, every cat is either loved by Socrates or not. And similarly, the second objection does not rely on the general principle of modal set theory mentioned therein, nor on the view that it is false that cats, as such, essentially belong to sets. Fine rightly stresses that “[...] any reasonable account of essence should not be biased towards one metaphysical view rather than the other. It should not settle, as a matter of definition, any issue which we are inclined to regard as a matter of substance” (Fine 1994, p. 5). His claim concerns objectual essence, and I wish to make the same point about generic essence. It will be equally important to keep that point in mind throughout the rest of the paper.

In order to escape the previous two objections, one may wish to modify the proposed account by imposing the requirement that ‘*G*’ express a feature which is not universally shared in all possible worlds, i.e., by claiming that (g) should be understood as:

(g<sub>1</sub>\*) Necessarily, every *F* *G*s, and possibly, something does not *G*.

But this will not do. For suppose as before that necessarily, everything belongs to its singleton-set. Then as a matter of necessity, every cat belongs to some set of cats. Since it is possible that there be things which do not belong to sets of cats, by the proposed account cats, as such, belong to sets of cats. Yet I maintain that this can be denied, even under the assumption that the proposed principle of modal set theory holds.

Here is another problem for the view that (g) should be understood as (g<sub>1</sub>\*). Presumably, the following general principle holds: if an *F*, as such, is essentially both *G* and *H*, then an *F*, as such, is essentially *G*. Now suppose that ‘an *F*, as such, is essentially *G*’ is true for some given predicate expressions ‘*F*’ and ‘*G*’. By the proposed account, this means that (i) necessarily, every *F* *G*s, and (ii) possibly, something does not *G*. Now let ‘*H*’ express a feature which is universally shared in all possible worlds. By modal reasoning, from (i) it follows that (iii) necessarily, every *F* both *G*s and *H*s, and from (ii) it follows that (iv) possibly, something does not both *G* and *H*. So by this account, ‘an *F*, as such, is essentially both *G* and *H*’ is true. By the previous general principle, it follows that ‘an *F*, as such, is essentially *H*’ is true. But on the proposed account, this implies that ‘*H*’ expresses a feature which is *not* universally shared in all possible worlds. Contradiction.

Another account of generic essence one may find *prima facie* plausible is framed in terms of necessity and objectual essence. It has it that (g) should be understood as:

(g<sub>2</sub>) Necessarily, every *F* essentially *G*s.

This account arguably escapes the difficulties encountered by the modal account. One may perfectly agree that as a matter of necessity, every cat is either loved by Socrates or not, and belongs to some sets, and still deny that my cat Nessie is by its very nature loved by Socrates or not, or a member of some set. Actually, denying that Nessie has these features is denying the implausible—or so it seems to me.

Yet this account must also be rejected, for it is not permissive enough: (g) does not entail (g<sub>2</sub>). Plausibly, bachelors, as such, are essentially unmarried. But many actual men are bachelors and fail to be essentially unmarried.<sup>3</sup>

At this point, one may be tempted to invoke “qua objects”. The suggestion is to understand (g) as:

(g<sub>3</sub>) Necessarily, for every *x* such that *x* is an *F*, *x*-qua-*F* essentially *G*s.

Of course, the viability of the account rests in the first place on which conception of qua-objects is countenanced.<sup>4</sup> But at first sight the proposal is quite promising, insofar as it seems to escape all the previous difficulties under any sensible conception of qua-objects. Even though we agree that necessarily, cats are either loved by Socrates or not, and belong to sets, we may still maintain that Nessie-qua-cat is neither essentially loved by Socrates or not, nor essentially a member of some set. The difficulty met by the second account also seems to disappear. For suppose that bachelors, as such, are essentially unmarried. By the qua-account, it does not follow that all bachelors are essentially unmarried, but only that every qua-bachelor object is essentially unmarried. And this appears to be unproblematic.

Anyway, the new account has to be rejected along with the other ones. Let us leave aside the fact that the account is committed to a rather exotic ontology that many would find unacceptable. One problem has to do with impossible features—and it actually affects the previous accounts as well, more precisely the view that (g<sub>1</sub>) or (g<sub>2</sub>) entails (g). There can be no round squares. So by the qua-account, round squares, as such, are essentially however you like. But it may sensibly be maintained that a round square, as such, is essentially round but not essentially human. Another problem is that qua-objects have undesirable essential features. For instance, it is presumably the case that any qua-object is by its very nature a qua-object. By the qua-account, we should then say that, e.g., men, as such, are essentially qua-objects. But of course this is absurd. A third problem is that the account arguably turn things upside down. By the proposed account, the fact that bachelors, as

such, are essentially unmarried consists in, and so is explained by, the fact that necessarily, for every bachelor  $x$ ,  $x$ -qua-bachelor is essentially unmarried. But intuitively, explanation goes the other way around: it is because bachelorhood attaches to the feature of being unmarried by virtue of what it is to be a bachelor that necessarily, qua-bachelor objects, if there are such things, are essentially unmarried.

### Properties to the Rescue?

In the light of the previous considerations, and perhaps even independently, it may appear that a proper account of generic essence should be framed in terms of *properties*. The idea is that each generic statement is about the objectual nature of a property or of properties.

The idea behind the approach under consideration is quite natural. When we say that, say, men as such are essentially animals, we do not really talk about individual men, be they actual or merely possible. Rather, we talk about the having of a certain feature, that of being a man, and we attempt to state what having that feature essentially involves. The proposed approach to generic essence takes this fact seriously, and goes one step further: it reifies features, and construes generic essentialist statements as objectual essentialist statements about reified features, i.e., about properties.<sup>5</sup>

It is my view that this account has to be rejected. In order to show it, I shall, as before, confine my attention to the restriction of the account to generic statements of the form (g), i.e., to the view that (g) is to be understood as:

(g<sub>4</sub>) It is true in virtue of what the property of  $F$ -ing is that  $F$ s  $G$ .

But before giving my objections, let me emphasize the virtues of the proposed account.

It is clear that the new account is quite promising as far as the previous difficulties are concerned. Let me run through each relevant point in turn.

(i) The problem with the modal account was, in a nutshell, that if it were correct, each of the following entailments would hold:

- Necessarily, every cat is either loved by Socrates or not  $\Rightarrow$  a cat, as such, is essentially either loved by Socrates or not;
- Necessarily, cats belong to sets  $\Rightarrow$  a cat, as such, essentially belongs to sets.

On the proposed account, arguably neither entailment holds. For instance, it is very implausible to say that it is true in virtue of what cat-hood is that cats belong to sets, even on the grounds that necessarily, cats belong to sets.

(ii) Against the second account of generic essence, I argued that (g) does not entail (g<sub>2</sub>). There is no problem here. For instance, the view that it is

true in virtue of what bachelorhood is that bachelors are unmarried does not exclude the view that there are bachelors who fail to be essentially so. (iii) I finally argued against the qua-account on three grounds. There was first the problem with impossible features. The problem does not affect the account under consideration. For granted that there can be no round square, it remains possible to claim that it is true in virtue of what the property of being a round square is that round squares are round, but not that round squares are human. And this claim actually has some plausibility. The second problem was linked to certain features of qua-objects, and we may leave it aside given that the present account does not invoke qua-objects. Finally, there was the problem of explanatory inadequacy. Suppose that men, as such, are essentially animals. By the present account, this fact consists in, and so is explained by, manhood being essentially such that men are animals. Here there does not seem to be any problem of switching *explanans* and *explanandum*. For once it is granted that there is such a thing as the property of being a man, it appears quite plausible to say that explanation goes the way the present account claims it does.

So far so good. Now for the objections. The proposed account faces some difficulties which I have sorted under the labels COMMITMENT TO PROPERTIES, AVAILABILITY and DEPENDENCY.

COMMITMENT TO PROPERTIES. One problem is that generic statements do not appear to carry by themselves any ontological commitment to properties. The combination of the view that men, as such, are animals and of the view that there are no properties does not seem to be self-undermining. Of course, *some* generic statements clearly *do* carry such ontological commitments. For instance, any statement of type ‘it is true in virtue of what it is to be identical to the property of being a cat that . . .’ carries a commitment to whatever is denoted by ‘the property of being a cat’. But, one is inclined to say, such statements involve a commitment to properties because of their peculiar contents, not in virtue of their being generic essentialist statements. So friends of the property account have to say that despite appearances, generic essentialist statements do carry commitments to properties. And this, I think, is a view that should be resisted as far as possible.

The previous objection is not lethal. One may after all learn to live with the view that generic statements carry an ontological commitment to properties, especially if accepting that view allows one to formulate an account of generic statements which is satisfactory in all other respects, i.e., an account whose sole defect is that it goes against first appearances about what ontological commitments such statements carry. But as we shall now see, the proposed account faces other difficulties.

AVAILABILITY. Another, more radical problem, is that some predicates cannot possibly express properties, while there are corresponding true generic

statements. Consider for instance the predicate ‘is a non-self-exemplifying property’. There cannot be such a thing as the property of being a non-self-exemplifying property. For if the property in question existed, it would be the case that it exemplifies itself iff it does not. Now arguably, a non-self-exemplifying property, as such, is essentially *many things*: non-self-exemplifying, a property, an abstract object, a non-self-exemplifying property, etc.

In response to this argument, one might think of the following move. Say that a generic statement of type (g) is *analytic* iff the corresponding sentence ‘every *F* *G*s’ is true in virtue of what the predicate expression ‘*F*’ means. All the generic statements mentioned above are presumably analytic. Now one may think that the property account is not threatened by the problem of “paradoxical properties” when restricted to generic statements which are not analytic, and one may then hope that it is possible to formulate a general account of generic statements combining the property account for non-analytic statements and some account of analytic statements.

But the view that the property account escapes the problem of paradoxical properties when restricted to non-analytic statements is arguably incorrect. Let us define the following predicates:

- An object is an *L* iff it is human if it exemplifies itself;
- An object is an *M* iff it has genetic make-up *X* if it exemplifies itself (‘*X*’ is supposed to be a description of the human genetic make-up).

Assuming that humans, as such, have genetic make-up *X*, it is plausible to conclude that an *L*, as such, is an *M*. Now on one hand, it is clear that this conclusion is not analytic. And on the other hand, there can be no such thing as the property of being an *L*.

The previous problems concern the view that (g) entails (g<sub>4</sub>). The following one concerns the view that, conversely, (g<sub>4</sub>) entails (g).

**DEPENDENCY.** Consider the following thesis:

(M) It is true in virtue of what the property of being a man is that every man exemplifies it.

It seems that the following general transitivity principle is correct:

(T) If *a* is essentially an *F*, and if an *F*, as such, essentially *G*s, then *a* essentially *G*s.

If we accept that (g<sub>4</sub>) entails (g), from (M) and (T) we get the conclusion that:

(C) If  $a$  is essentially a man, then  $a$  essentially exemplifies the property of being a man.

But consider Socrates. He is essentially a man—or so we may suppose. By (C), it is part of the nature of Socrates that he bears a certain relation, namely exemplification, to a given entity, to wit the property of being a man. It then follows that Socrates is *ontologically dependent* upon the property, that Socrates' identity depends upon the property's identity. But surely even under the assumption that both (M) and (T) are true, this may be denied: it is possible to maintain that Socrates is ontologically independent from the property of being a man, and more generally from any property whatsoever.<sup>6</sup>

In response to the problem of DEPENDENCY, it is perhaps tempting to modify the account as follows. Where  $\pi$  is a property, let us say that an expression is  $\pi$ -*clean* iff it contains no term designating  $\pi$ , and let us say that a generic statement 'an  $F$ , as such, essentially  $G$ s' is *clean* iff ' $G$ ' is  $\pi$ -clean, where  $\pi$  is the property of being an  $F$ . The modified account says (i) that all unclean instances of (g) are false, and (ii) that for a clean statement of type (g) to be true is for the corresponding statement of type (g<sub>4</sub>) to be true.

But this will not do. First, the account is too restrictive. One may well maintain that men, as such, exemplify the property of being a man. Such a view should not be ruled out by a general account of generic statements. On the other hand, the account is in another respect too permissive. For consider the thesis:

(M\*) It is true in virtue of what the property of being a rational animal is that every rational animal exemplifies rationality.

Now on the proposed account of generic statements, (M\*) and the transitivity principle (T) mentioned above together lead to the view that Socrates is ontologically dependent upon the property of being rational if he is essentially a rational animal. But once again, one may accept both (M\*) and (T), and at the same time think that Socrates is essentially a rational animal but not essentially related to any property whatsoever.

## 5. Generic Essence, Objectual Essence and Metaphysical Necessity

So my view is that the four accounts of generic essence presented above fail. It is hard for me to see which other account could be proposed, and throughout the rest of this paper I will leave the issue aside. I am tempted to regard the notion as unanalyzable, but nothing in what follows will hinge on whether or not it is.

As I previously stressed, in (Fine 1994) Fine rejects the standard, modal account of essence, claims that the notion should be taken as primitive, and

holds that instead of “viewing essence as a special case of metaphysical necessity, we should view metaphysical necessity as a special case of essence” (p. 9). The idea is that for a proposition to be metaphysically necessary is for it to be true in virtue of what a given object is, or in virtue of what some given objects are. (Notice the use of the concept of *collective* essence here.) The concept of essence Fine has in mind is that of objectual essence.

Fine takes metaphysical necessity to be true in virtue of the nature of some objects, and so he endorses the following equivalence: it is metaphysically necessary that  $p$  iff some objects are such that it is true in virtue of their natures that  $p$ . I take it that the right-to-left part of that equivalence holds: essential truths are necessary truths. What about the other direction?

We want generic truths to be metaphysically necessary. If it is true in virtue of what it is to  $F$  that  $p$ , then it is metaphysically necessary that  $p$ —and similarly for the collective case. Now take the proposition that whatever is made of water is made of  $H_2O$  molecules. On one view, the proposition is true in virtue of what it is to be made of water, and so it should be necessarily true. On Fine’s account, there should be a collection of objects in virtue of whose natures the proposition is true. But which objects?

One natural suggestion is: the property of being made of water. Another suggestion is: the property of being made of water and the property of being made of  $H_2O$  molecules. One might then be tempted to go on and maintain that for each generic truth, there are properties whose natures (perhaps together with the natures of other objects) ensure its truth. But as we saw when examining the account of generic essence in terms of properties, such a view cannot be sustained. And on the other hand, it is hard to see how, in Fine’s setting, one could do without invoking properties in such a way.

So we want both objectual essentialist truths and generic essentialist truths to be metaphysically necessary, and Fine’s account of metaphysical necessity is unable to satisfy the second *desideratum*. One way out which suggests itself is to reduce metaphysical necessity to objectual essence and generic essence, leaving the latter two notions as primitive. On that view, for a proposition to be metaphysically necessary is for it to be an essentialist truth, objectual or generic. Or perhaps a better proposal would be that for a proposition to be necessary is for it to be an essentialist truth, be it objectual, generic or “hybrid” (i.e., with both an objectual and a generic aspect). This latter view—call it *the GO-view* (‘G’ is for ‘generic’ and ‘O’ for ‘objectual’)—appears to me quite appealing, and anyway I suggest that Fineans should abandon Fine’s original reductive claim and go for the GO-view.

Some might wish to supplement the GO-view with a thesis which has the effect of simplifying the account of metaphysical necessity—a thesis I myself find appealing. The thesis is that to be true in virtue of what some given objects are is to be true in virtue of “what it is to be these objects”. Let me be more precise. To each singular term ‘ $a$ ’ we may associate the *haecceity*-predicate ‘is  $a$ ’—‘ $Ia$ ’, in symbols. Let us use:

- ‘ $\Box$ ’ for the necessity operator,
- ‘ $\Box_{a, b, \dots}$ ’ for the objectualist operator ‘it is true in virtue of what  $a$  is, what  $b$  is, ... that’ (collectively understood),
- ‘ $\Box_{F, G, \dots}$ ’ for the generic operator ‘it is true in virtue of what it is to  $F$ , what it is to  $G$ , ... that’ (collectively understood),
- ‘ $\Box_{a, b, \dots | F, G, \dots}$ ’ for the hybrid operator ‘it is true in virtue of what  $a$  is, what  $b$  is, ... and of what it is to  $F$ , what it is to  $G$ , ... that’ (collectively understood).

(Both the objectual operator and the generic operator are definable in terms of the hybrid operator, but the latter is not definable in terms of the other two.) The thesis is that:

- $\Box_{a, b, \dots} p$  iff  $\Box_{|a, |b, \dots} p$   
It is true in virtue of what  $a$  is, what  $b$  is, ... that  $p$  iff it is true in virtue of what it is to be  $a$ , what it is to be  $b$ , ... that  $p$ .

The GO-view can be formulated as follows:

- $\Box p$  iff  $(\exists x \exists y \dots \Box_{x, y, \dots} p)$  or  $(\exists \varphi \exists \psi \dots \Box_{\varphi, \psi, \dots} p)$  or  $(\exists x \exists y \dots \exists \varphi \exists \psi \dots \Box_{x, y, \dots | \varphi, \psi, \dots} p)$   
It is metaphysically necessary that  $p$  iff
  - there are some objects  $x, y, \dots$  such that it is true in virtue of what  $x$  is, what  $y$  is, ... that  $p$ , or
  - there are some features  $\varphi, \psi, \dots$  such that it is true in virtue of what it is to  $\varphi$ , what it is to  $\psi$ , ... that  $p$ , or
  - there are some objects  $x, y, \dots$  and there are some features  $\varphi, \psi, \dots$  such that it is true in virtue of what  $x$  is, what  $y$  is, ... and of what it is to  $\varphi$ , what it is to  $\psi$ , ... that  $p$ .

Accepting the previous thesis, one gets the simplified formulation of the GO-view:

- $\Box p$  iff  $\exists \varphi \exists \psi \dots \Box_{\varphi, \psi, \dots} p$

It is metaphysically necessary that  $p$  iff there are some features  $\varphi, \psi, \dots$  such that it is true in virtue of what it is to  $\varphi$ , what it is to  $\psi$ , ... that  $p$ .

On the resulting view, objectual essence reduces to generic essence, and metaphysical necessity in turn reduces to generic essence.

Let me finish by briefly addressing a worry one may have about the GO-view, whether in its original form or in its simplified version. Both formulations of the view involve quantification into predicate position. The worry is simply that because of this fact, the GO-view is ontologically committed to properties (or other general entities), and forces one to accept the account of generic essence in terms of properties which I previously rejected, or at least meets a version of the problem of AVAILABILITY.

I do not think there is any problem here. First, even assuming that the GO-view is indeed committed to properties, I believe that the view does not force one to endorse the property account of the generic, and I am not sure that the view is threatened by some AVAILABILITY problem. Second, and more importantly, I do not believe that the GO-view is committed to properties or any other general objects. For a friend of the GO-view may take it, as I do, that quantification into predicate position, unlike quantification into nominal position, is not ontologically committing. See (Prior 1971, ch. II) and (Rayo and Yablo 2001).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at Arche's Modality Workshop (St. Andrews, UK, December 2003), Geneva's Workshop on Abstract Objects (Geneva, Switzerland, June 2004) and the 27th International Wittgenstein Symposium (Kirchberg, Austria, August 2004). For their questions, objections and suggestions, I wish to thank David Chalmers, Kit Fine, Jussi Haukioja, Alexander Kellenberger, Philipp Keller, Wolfgang Künne, Kevin Mulligan, Josh Parsons, Jonathan Simon, Barry Smith, Crispin Wright, and other participants I may have forgotten to mention. This work was carried out under the IRIS project on formal Concepts (Lausanne-Geneva, dir. Kevin Mulligan) and the project Ontological Dependence (HUM2004–05609-C02-01 (DGI), Barcelona, dir. Manuel García Carpiñero).

<sup>2</sup> See (Fine 1995a) for a discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Another account framed in terms of necessity and objectual essence has been suggested to me: (g) should be understood as 'necessarily, everything is essentially such that if it is an *F*, it *Gs*'. But I fail to see what could be said in its favor.

<sup>4</sup> See (Fine 1982) for one such conception. Following (Lewis 2003) on qua-talk, (g<sub>3</sub>) can be given the counterpart-theoretic translation 'given any possible object *x* such that *x* is an *F*, all counterparts of *x* which are *Fs G*', which is equivalent to 'every possible object which is an *F Gs*' (counterparthood is reflexive), which in Lewis' framework is equivalent to (g<sub>1</sub>).

<sup>5</sup> Some may wish to invoke kinds instead, or both kinds and properties. I focus on the property approach, but what I will say can be straightforwardly modified to deal with the other variants.

<sup>6</sup> I understand ontological dependence as follows: *x* ontologically depends upon *y* iff *x* is by its very nature related to *y*, i.e., iff there is a relation *R* such that it is part of the nature of *x* that *Rxy*. Let us say that an object *x* necessitates a given object *y* iff *x* cannot exist unless *y* does. Accepting (M) and (T) and denying the dependency of Socrates upon properties is compatible with an Aristotelian view of properties according to which necessarily, a property exists iff it has exemplifiers. On such a view, objects necessitate their essential properties, e.g., Socrates necessitates the property of being a man. The view would be incoherent if ontological dependence was equivalent to necessitation, more precisely if necessitation entailed ontological dependence. But there is no such entailment, or at any rate, this can sensibly be maintained. See (Fine 1995b).

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