

## “Who Sees Not that All the Dispute is About a Word?”: Some Thoughts on Bennett’s “Proxy ‘Actualism’”

This note is a defense of Alvin Plantinga’s “actualist” modal ontology against the criticisms brought against it by Karen Bennett in her (2006) paper “Proxy ‘Actualism’”<sup>1</sup> (Familiarity with both Bennett’s paper and chapters IV-VIII of Plantinga’s (1974) *The Nature of Necessity* is assumed.)

What I will say in response to Bennett’s criticisms of Plantinga’s actualism is almost entirely a gloss on the following thesis: It is not essential to Plantinga’s philosophy of modality that the word ‘actual’ (or any word formed from ‘actual’—‘actually’, ‘actuality’ and so on) occur in its statement. I will defend this thesis in Part I. Having established that thesis (at least to my own satisfaction), I will, in Part II, consider its consequences for Bennett’s criticism of Plantinga’s actualism. My conclusion will be that these criticisms fail, owing to the fact that they depend on the historical accident that the customary *designation* for Plantinga’s position is “actualism”—that if this position had been given a name that did not contain ‘actual’ or any word formed from ‘actual’, the criticisms of the position that are presented in “Proxy ‘Actualism’” could not even be stated. Finally, in an Appendix, I will discuss a puzzling statement that Bennett has made about the properties Plantinga calls individual essences.

### I

I begin with a *précis* of Plantinga’s modal ontology. This *précis* will be, I concede, *terminologically tendentious* in that it will contain no occurrences of the word ‘actual’ (or of any word “based on” ‘actual’—‘actually’, ‘actuality’, etc.<sup>2</sup>). My position

<sup>1</sup> Bennett also criticizes a version of actualism defended by Bernard Linsky and Edward Zalta. The present paper is a reply only to her criticisms of Plantinga.

<sup>2</sup> In order to avoid using the adverb ‘actually’ in the *précis* of Plantinga’s views that follows, I will use the adverbial phrase ‘in fact’ to perform a certain important function often performed by that adverb. The function of ‘actually’ to which I allude is illustrated by the result of inserting the word into a famous sentence of Russell’s: ‘I thought your yacht was longer

is that this *précis*, tendentious though it may be, is an exact expression (in broad outline: much is left out) of the modal ontology presented in chapters IV-VIII of *The Nature of Necessity*. It is an exact statement of the core of Plantinga's modal ontology *in an alternative vocabulary*. It differs *only verbally* from Plantinga's own statement of his ontology in *The Nature of Necessity*. It presents the *same* ontology in (slightly) different words.

### *The Précis*

There are states of affairs.

States of affairs are abstract objects, like propositions. States of affairs and propositions are in fact closely connected. For each state of affairs there is a unique proposition that we may call its propositional analogue—and every proposition is the propositional analogue of one and only one state of affairs. For example, the propositional analogue of the state of affairs *Napoleon's having lost the Battle of Waterloo* is the proposition that Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo. Indeed, the connection between a state of affairs and its propositional analogue is so intimate that some—Chisholm (1970) among them—have identified them. (Everything said in the present paper is consistent with the thesis that a state of affairs is identical with its propositional analogue.)

A state of affairs *obtains* just in the case that its propositional analogue is true. (And, therefore, some states of affairs obtain and some don't—for, as I once heard Plantinga remark, "Some propositions are false. Roughly half of them.")

Say that a state of affairs that obtains is *obtentional* and one that does not obtain is *non-obtentional*.<sup>3</sup> Note that 'obtentional' applies *only* to states of affairs. Whatever may be the case with 'actual', there can no more be an obtentional human being or pig or neutron star than there can be a human being or pig or neutron star that has a cube root—or is true or false, in the sense in which propositions are true or false.

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than it actually is'. The best explanation of this function is probably that in such cases 'actually' is being used as a scope-indicator. For example, we might paraphrase 'I thought your yacht was longer than it actually is' in this way: 'Consider the length of your yacht; I thought your yacht had a length longer than *that* length'. (This use of the adverb 'actually' has a parallel adjectival use: 'I thought the length of your yacht was longer than its actual length'. The adjective can, however, be eliminated in favor of the adverb: 'its actual length' =<sub>df</sub> 'the length it actually has'.) So instead of saying, e.g., 'There could be things that do not actually exist,' I will say "There could be things that do not in fact exist" (that is: "Consider all the things that exist; there could be things other than *those* things").

<sup>3</sup> There really is such a word as 'obtention'; the OED defines it as 'the act of obtaining'. If a state of affairs is identical with its propositional analogue, obtentionality is just truth and non-obtentionality is just falsity.

- A state of affairs is *possible* just in the case that it is possible for it to obtain.
- A state of affairs is *impossible* just in the case that it is impossible for it to obtain.
- A state of affairs *x* *includes* a state of affairs *y* just in the case that it is impossible for *x* to obtain and *y* not to obtain.
- A state of affairs *x* *precludes* a state of affairs *y* just in the case that it is impossible for both *x* and *y* to obtain.
- A state of affairs is *maximal* just in the case that, for every state of affairs, it either includes or precludes that state of affairs.
- A *possible world* (or simply a *world*) is a state of affairs that is both possible and maximal.

We assume without argument that there *are* worlds—that there are states of affairs that are both possible and maximal. We further assume that at least one world obtains. Since it is impossible for two maximal states of affairs to obtain, *exactly* one world obtains;<sup>4</sup> we will call it the *obtentional* world.

- A thing *exists in* a world just in the case that it would exist<sup>5</sup> if that world obtained.
- A thing *has* a property *in* a world just in the case that it would have that property if that world obtained.

A thing that does not exist is a contradiction in terms. (And so it is and must be, given the “account” of existence presented in footnote 5: since ‘*x* exists’ is equivalent to ‘something is identical with *x*’, a thing that does not exist would be a thing such that nothing was identical with that thing, and it is an easily proved theorem of standard quantifier logic with identity that there is nothing with which nothing is identical. And it is easy to see why: everything is identical with itself.) It follows immediately that a thing that *could exist but does not exist*—a “modal alien”, so to call it—is a contradiction in terms.

<sup>4</sup> Well, that’s not strictly true—not if there can be necessarily equivalent but distinct propositions, and hence necessarily equivalent but distinct states of affairs (as it may be, *There being eight solar planets* and *The number of solar planets being the cube of the least prime*). I owe this nice point to Kenneth Boyce—and propose churlishly to ignore it and to speak as if there were only one obtentional world. The nice point could be accommodated by replacing phrases like ‘in the obtentional world’ with universal quantifications; ‘in all obtentional worlds’, for example.

<sup>5</sup> We understand ‘exist’ in the following way: ‘*x* exists’ is equivalent to ‘Something is (identical with) *x*’ (and, therefore, ‘*F*s exist’ is equivalent to ‘Something is an *F*’). We assume that it follows from this definition of ‘exists’ that the word be applied univocally to things in any logical category or of any sort: to states of affairs, propositions, properties, human beings, pigs, neutron stars...

Let us give the name *existentialism* to the thesis that “modal alien” is a self-contradictory concept<sup>6</sup>.

Existentialists do not, of course, deny that there could be things that do not in fact exist. As things stand, for example, there are no million-carat diamonds; there nevertheless *could be* or *could have been* million-carat diamonds. But that modal truth does not imply the falsity of existentialism, since it is (loosely speaking) equivalent to the statement that the properties “being a diamond” and “weighing 200 kilos” are mutually consistent, and that statement obviously does not imply that there are nonexistent things: it refers only to two existent things (two properties) and asserts that these two existent properties stand in a certain relation, to wit, mutual consistency. And statements “about possible existents” can *always* be paraphrased as statements about the relations that hold among existent properties. In some cases, however, such a paraphrase would have to appeal to some rather special properties. Imagine that someone issues this challenge to the existentialists:

It seems that if Socrates had not existed, it would nevertheless have been true that it was possible for him to have existed. If that’s indeed the case, then there is a world  $w$  in which (a) Socrates does not exist, and (b) Socrates could have existed. Granted: that there is such a world—such a possible state of affairs—does not follow from existentialism. But it does follow from the contingent existence of Socrates and the symmetry of the accessibility relation. (If a world  $w$  in which Socrates does not exist is accessible from the obtentional world, then, by symmetry, a world in which Socrates does exist—the obtentional world—is accessible from  $w$ . It follows that it’s true in  $w$  that Socrates could have existed.) And the symmetry of the accessibility relation is a pretty intuitive thesis—certainly not a thesis that the existentialist is going to want to rule out by definition. But how will speakers in  $w$  say that Socrates could have existed if in their world there’s no Socrates for them to predicate possible existence of?

One way for existentialists to meet this challenge would be by appeal to a special property, a property that exists in all possible worlds and can be instantiated by and only by Socrates. (We Platonists say that every property exists in all possible worlds—including, of course, those in which it’s uninstantiated—and a follower of Plantinga must be a Platonist.) And there is at least one such property. (Depending on how one individuates properties, one may affirm the existence

<sup>6</sup> This is not what *Plantinga* means by ‘existentialism’—he in fact uses ‘existentialism’ as a name for a certain thesis he rejects—, much less what Sartre meant by it. Call the thesis Plantinga in fact called ‘existentialism’ (and which we shall not discuss) something else; ‘dependentism’, perhaps. Let ‘serious existentialism’ be the thesis that nothing is true of a thing  $x$  in worlds in which  $x$  does not exist—not even that it does not exist. (It is a matter of debate whether serious existentialism follows from existentialism.)

of one such property or of infinitely many such properties.) There is at least this property: the property of being Socrates—Socrateity for short<sup>7</sup>. (If Plato and Crito see a figure coming through the mist on a foggy morning in Athens, and Crito says, "Who's that?" and Plato replies, "That's Socrates," Plato ascribes Socrateity to the figure coming through the mist. Or so it seems reasonable to suppose.)

This property, Socrateity, is an *individual essence* (or simply an essence). "Individual essence" may be defined as follows. We begin with two preliminary definitions:

*The primary individual essence of a thing  $x$  (or simply the primary essence of  $x$ ) is the property of being identical with  $x$* <sup>8</sup>.

A property is an *individual essence of a thing  $x$*  if and only if it is necessarily coextensive with the primary essence of  $x$ .

And we define 'individual essence' in terms of 'individual essence of':

A property is an individual essence (simpliciter, full stop, period) if and only if it is possibly an individual essence of something.<sup>9</sup>

If the inhabitants of a world in which Socrates does not exist want to say that Socrates could have existed, they cannot, as we have said, do it by saying of him that he could have existed, since he's not "there" to have that (or anything else)

<sup>7</sup> Socrateity is indeed a property that could be instantiated by and only by Socrates, but it has the property "could be instantiated by and only by Socrates" only in worlds in which Socrates exists. In a world in which Socrates does not exist, Socrateity and "could be instantiated by and only by Socrates" are related as follows: the former does not have the latter, but it *could* have it—and *only* those properties with which it is necessarily coextensive could have it.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase 'the property of being identical with  $x$ ' is an open term, like 'the mother of  $x$ '. It is, however, an *intensional* open term (unlike 'the mother of  $x$ '). Phrases of the form 'the property of being identical with...' are thus intensional contexts. If, therefore, we wish to apply universal or existential instantiation to a sentence containing, e.g. the open term 'the property of being identical with  $z$ ', any singular term that replaces the variable  $z$  must be a proper name. Thus, for example, ' $\exists y y =$  the property of being identical with Socrates' comes from ' $\forall x \exists y y =$  the property of being identical with  $x$ ' by UI, but ' $\exists y y =$  the property of being identical with the inventor of bifocals' does not come from ' $\forall x \exists y y =$  the property of being identical with  $x$ ' by UI. And, of course, ' $\exists y y =$  the property of being identical with the husband of Xanthippe' does not follow from ' $\exists y y =$  the property of being identical with Socrates' and 'Socrates = the husband of Xanthippe' by either Leibniz's Law (the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals) or Euclid's Law (the principle of the substitutivity of identicals).

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga (1974, 72–77) gives several equivalent definitions of 'individual essence'. The definition in the text is not one of Plantinga's definitions, but it is equivalent to each of them—and is much simpler than any of them.

said of him. But Socrateity *is* there to have things said of it, and they can say of it that it could have been instantiated.<sup>10</sup>

That is one way for existentialists to meet the challenge imagined above: by affirming the existence of individual essences. But there are other ways. The challenge can be met by affirming the existence of appropriate abstract objects of other sorts than properties. It can, for example, be met by an appeal to propositions like the proposition that Socrates exists (a proposition that exists and is true in exactly those worlds in which Socrates exists, and exists and is false in all other worlds<sup>11</sup>) or the proposition that Socrates could exist (a proposition that exists and is true in all worlds). If there are such propositions as the proposition that Socrates exists and the proposition that Socrates could exist, then the inhabitants of a world in which Socrates does not exist can say of the former that it is possibly true or say of the latter that it is true—or can simply *assert* the latter<sup>12</sup>. (Again, there will be problems about how people could possibly have “referential access” or “cognitive access” to such propositions in worlds in which their subject-terms do not exist—but those problems are no worse than the problem the possibilists face in the matter of referential access to particular nonexistent individuals.)

Here endeth the *précis*.

<sup>10</sup> They can, that is, if they can manage to refer to it. That might indeed be difficult or impossible, for it is hard to see how one could refer to Socrateity if Socrateity existed but was un-instantiated. But if that is a problem for existentialists, it is not a problem that they alone face: it is also a problem for possibilists—that is, for those who affirm the thesis that there are things that might exist (or might have existed) but do not in fact exist. More exactly, possibilists face a very similar problem, a problem that is “parallel to” or “analogous to” this problem, for possibilists will find it difficult to suppose that anyone is able refer to any *given* possible but nonexistent person. They will therefore find it difficult to suppose that any inhabitant of a world in which Socrates does not exist (but might have existed) is able to refer to Socrates.

<sup>11</sup> A serious existentialist must hold that propositions are necessarily existent.

<sup>12</sup> We should, by the way, note that the proposition that Socrates exists is the proposition that Socrates exists only in those worlds in which it’s true (i.e., in which Socrates exists). It of course *exists* in worlds in which it’s false (“of course” because it couldn’t be false in a world in which it didn’t exist—or so serious existentialists say) but in those worlds it doesn’t have the property “being the proposition that Socrates exists.” (Cf. our earlier point about Socrateity and “could be instantiated by and only by Socrates.”) In worlds in which the proposition that Socrates exists does not have the property “being the proposition that Socrates exists,” however, both the proposition and the property exist, and are related as follows: the former *could* have the latter, and it’s the *only* proposition that could have that property. (And *this* should make anyone’s head spin: in those worlds, that property—although it exists—*isn’t* the property of being the proposition that Socrates exists.)

## II

This was prologue. Now the play. The “‘actual’-free” *précis* of Plantinga’s theory was presented simply to provide a context for the following question:

How would one argue for the following thesis: A person who accepts all the above definitions and statements—the definitions and statements set out in the *précis*—is a mere proxy existentialist? (What, in point of fact, does the charge, “You’re a proxy existentialist” even *mean*?)

It seems to me that the following two propositions are self-evidently true:

There is no way to argue for that thesis.

The charge “You’re a proxy existentialist” is meaningless.

(These two propositions are, of course, closely connected: if a thesis is meaningless, there is no way to argue for it.) At any rate, I hope that they are self-evident, because I have no argument for either of them. If they are true, I contend, they constitute a strong argument for the following evaluation of Bennett’s (2006) criticisms of Plantinga in “Proxy ‘Actualism’”:

These criticisms depend essentially on a chapter of historical accidents—(*verbal* accidents):

- Early informal discussions of the semantics of quantified modal logic (and the objects that made up its universe of discourse) used the terms ‘non-actual object’ and ‘merely possible object’ to mean ‘object that exists only in non-actual worlds’.
- It was assumed in these discussions that an object that exists in some non-actual world  $w$  (and not in the actual world) and the world  $w$  itself were “non-actual” (or “merely possible”) in the same sense.
- At some point (*c.* 1980), the term ‘actualism’ began to be used as a name for the thesis that there are no non-actual/merely possible objects (Robert M. Adams was probably the first philosopher to use the word in that sense<sup>13</sup>). At about the

<sup>13</sup> Here is an illuminating historical note, kindly supplied by Professor Adams:

“I did say, »Actualism is the doctrine that there are no things that do not exist in the actual world« (Adams 1981, 7). As far as I know, I may have been the first person to define ‘actualism’ in that way. And whether I was or not, that was the first place in which I did so. As I think you know, I now regard it as a mistake (indeed, an aberration) that I did so. I had given a more careful definition previously: »Actualism, with respect to possible worlds, is the view that if there are any true statements in which there are said to be non-actual possible worlds, they must be reducible to statements in which the only things there are said to be are things which there are in the actual world and which are not identical with non-actual possibles.« On

same time, the term ‘possibilism’ came into use as a name for the thesis that there are non-actual/merely possible objects.

If, instead of the irrational terminological jumble<sup>14</sup> these accidents left us with, philosophers discussing quantified modal logic and the ontological problems it posed had resolutely applied ‘actual’ and ‘non-actual’ and ‘merely possible’ only to *abstract* objects (such as possible worlds) and, instead of, e.g., ‘non-actual pig’/‘merely possible pig’ had said ‘pig that does not exist but could have existed’ and had used ‘existentialism’ instead of ‘actualism’, and, instead of ‘possibilism’, some term like ‘anti-existentialism’ or ‘neo-*Meinongian* possibilism’<sup>15</sup>, then

(a) The *real* metaphysical and ontological problems posed by quantified modal logic (and the informal modal discourse of which quantified modal logic is a regimentation) would be exactly as they in fact are,

and

(b) The verbal confusions that have resulted from the above-listed historical accidents—and the *unreal* metaphysical and ontological problems that have resulted from the confusions—would never have existed.

#### *Appendix: The relation between concrete objects and their essences*

Bennett (2006, 287) says that she doesn’t see much difference between an object and its individual essence:

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this understanding, it is only »if the notion of possible worlds is to be regarded as primitive,« that »the actualist will not agree that there are nonactual possible worlds« (Adams 1974, 224). D. C. Williams, in his (1959) article »Mind as a Matter of Fact« had used the word ‘actualism’ before I did, in a related sense, but I think not exactly the same as my sense in either of those essays.”

<sup>14</sup> The question of the role played by David Lewis’s “genuine modal realism” (Lewis’s statements of genuine modal realism involve a wholly idiosyncratic use of ‘actual’) in creating this jumble raises some very complicated issues. I will not discuss Lewis’s view here.

<sup>15</sup> “Neo-*Meinongians*” (Terence Parsons, for example), unlike *Meinong* himself and other paleo-*Meinongians*, do not hold that, e.g. a nonexistent pig has no sort of being whatever: they think that there *are* nonexistent pigs. But neo-*Meinongians* affirm the being of not only nonexistent pigs but *impossible* pigs, pigs that are nonexistent precisely *because* they have inconsistent (or incomplete) sets of properties. By a neo-*Meinongian possibilist*, I mean someone who affirms the being of nonexistent things, but only of such nonexistents that have complete and consistent sets of properties.

Perhaps there is a lot of ontological difference between things like the Eiffel Tower and properties like *being made of metal*. Bu... there is not that much ontological difference between things like the Eiffel Tower and properties like *being the Eiffel Tower*.

I think that this statement has to be the result of a confusion of some sort. The Eiffel Tower is a concrete thing, a physical object, an artifact, an edifice, a structure. You can poke it with a stick. The property *being the Eiffel Tower* is an abstract object, and it is as immune to stick-poking as a proposition or a complex number or the middle of next week. And not only can physical objects be poked, but they can also fail to exist—whereas abstract objects exist in all possible worlds (or so we platonists say). Perhaps the confusion has something to do with the fact that ‘the property *being the Eiffel Tower*’, although it is the name of a property, an abstract object, is formed from a proper name of the concrete object that instantiates it. Let’s look at a case of an individual essence that isn’t of that sort—an essence that is not what I have called a *primary* essence.

I could, in principle, consider a non-primary essence of the Eiffel Tower, but to do that would place unwise demands on the patience of my readers, owing to the structural complexity of the Eiffel Tower. It will save us all a lot of time if I consider a non-primary essence of a much simpler artifact. Let us say: a table formed by placing a board on a stump<sup>16</sup>. Which properties of an artifact one supposes are essential to it—and, therefore, which of its properties one supposes are among its individual essences—will depend on one’s metaphysics of artifacts. (And one’s metaphysics of artifacts will presumably depend in its turn on one’s general metaphysics of composite material objects). My own metaphysics of artifacts is not going to be of much use in this case, since it can be summed up in the statement that there are none. I’ll therefore invent a metaphysics of artifacts that will imply the existence of both my simple table and the Eiffel Tower. I’ll “construct” a property that anyone who accepted my imaginary metaphysics of artifacts should concede was an essence (and a non-primary essence) of the table. I think that this property I shall construct will suffice for an illustrative example of a non-primary essence of an artifact, despite the fact that this property is an essence of the table only given a certain metaphysics of artifacts that few if any philosophers would accept.

<sup>16</sup> “Let us picture to ourselves a very simple table, improvised from a stump and a board. Now one might have constructed a very similar table by using the same stump and a different board, or by using the same board and a different stump. But the only way of constructing precisely *that* table is to use that particular stump and that particular board. It would seem, therefore, that that particular table is *necessarily* made up of that particular stump and that particular board” (Chisholm 1973, 583).

Our imaginary metaphysics of artifacts consists in the logical consequences of two assumptions.

Assume, first, that *Contact* is the correct answer to the Special Composition Question<sup>17</sup>:

*Contact*

Necessarily: for all  $y$  the  $x$ s compose  $y$  if and only if no two of the  $x$ s overlap spatially and any two of the  $x$ s are in ancestral contact.

(Where ‘ $x$  and  $y$  are in ancestral contact’ expresses the ancestral of the relation expressed by ‘ $x$  and  $y$  are in contact’.)

Assume, secondly, that the following thesis about the modal status of the relation between an artifact and certain of its parts is true:

Strong Artifactual Composition

Necessarily: If an artifact  $x$  is a fusion of certain non-overlapping artifact-parts the  $y$ s, and if the  $y$ s are arranged in manner  $M$ , then, (i) in every world in which  $x$  exists,  $x$  is a fusion of the  $y$ s arranged in manner  $M$  and (ii) anything in any world that is a fusion of the  $y$ s arranged in manner  $M$  is  $x$ .

I explain the terms of art that occur in this statement of Strong Artifactual Composition as follows:

(a) An *artifact-part* of an artifact is any part of that artifact that was intentionally manipulated in the course of the construction of the artifact by its maker(s). The statement of Strong Artifactual Composition presupposes that for every “artifact” there are non-overlapping artifact-parts, the  $y$ s, such that that artifact is a fusion of the  $y$ s—that is: the  $y$ s are all parts of that artifact and every part of the artifact overlaps some of the  $y$ s. (It follows from this assumption that neither a statue cast from molten bronze nor a statue made by chipping away at a block of marble is an “artifact”. Let’s assume that in the present discussion ‘artifact’ is a term of art, and that it applies only to things that were put together by a procedure that involved their “assembly” out of smaller, pre-existent objects. Our table is an artifact in this sense, and I see no objection to supposing that the Eiffel Tower is as well.)

<sup>17</sup> See van Inwagen (1990) §§2 and 3. The  $y$ s compose  $x$  (at  $t$ ) just in the case  $x$  is a fusion or mereological sum of the  $y$ s (at  $t$ ) and no two of the  $y$ s overlap (mereologically). ‘ $y$  is composed of the  $x$ s’ is a stylistic variant on ‘the  $x$ s compose  $y$ ’.

(b) To specify the *manner* in which the members of a certain collection of non-overlapping artifact-parts are arranged is to specify which of them are in contact with one another, and at what points and regions on their surfaces.)

Now let a *Chisholm Table* be a table that has been formed by placing a board on a stump. (*Contact* implies that placing a board on a stump will bring a fusion of the board and the stump into existence.) Suppose we have a Chisholm Table before us. Let 'Mensa' be a proper name of the table, 'Tabula' a proper name of the board, and 'Truncus' a proper name of the stump. Let 'A' be a proper name of the part of the surface of Tabula that is in contact with Truncus, and let 'B' be a proper name of the part of the surface of Truncus that is in contact with Tabula.

Mensa has the following property (truncotabularity):

Being a thing  $x$  such that Tabula is a part of  $x$  and Truncus is a part of  $x$  and every part of  $x$  overlaps either Tabula or Truncus and A is the part of the surface of Tabula that is in contact with Truncus and B is the part of the surface of Truncus that is in contact with Tabula.

Strong Artifactual Composition implies that truncotabularity is an individual essence of Mensa. (We could in principle write out the name of an analogous essence of the Eiffel Tower. It would be rather long, of course.) Now consider a world ("Nomensa") in which Tabula and Truncus both exist (and have the intrinsic properties they have in fact) and Mensa does not exist.<sup>18</sup> Inhabitants of Nomensa have the semantical resources to assert that it is possible for Mensa to exist, and they have these resources despite the fact that in Nomensa Mensa is not "there" to have possible existence ascribed to it—for they are able to refer to truncotabularity (they can refer to it by using the offset expression above) and to predicate possible instantiation of that property<sup>19</sup>. That is to say, they can assert the possible existence of Mensa by saying that truncotabularity (which is necessarily coextensive with the property that we in the obtentional world call Mensahood or Mensaity or the property of being identical with Mensa) was possibly instantiated—that is, was possibly a property that something had.

<sup>18</sup> Some of these worlds are very "close" to the obtentional world; consider, for example, a world in which—although they are never in contact (or are never in contact in the exactly the way in which they are in contact in the obtentional world)—Tabula and Truncus are near each other and it would be an easy matter for someone to place Tabula on Truncus in exactly the manner in which Tabula is placed on Truncus in the obtentional world.

<sup>19</sup> In that respect, truncotabularity is unlike Socrateity or any of Socrates' other essences, which, it would seem, human beings are unable to refer to in worlds in which Socrates does not exist.

One way to assert the possible existence of *Mensa* in *Nomensa*, therefore, is to assert of a certain individual essence (an essence that in worlds in which *Mensa* exists is an individual essence of *Mensa*) that it is possibly instantiated.<sup>20</sup> Thomas Jäger's (1982) "actualist" semantics for quantified modal logic exploits this fact.<sup>21</sup> In an obvious sense, "Jäger semantics" does utilize uninstantiated essences as replacements or proxies for "non-actual" objects. And "non-actual" objects certainly require replacements, owing to the fact that 'non-actual object' is either meaningless or means '(possibly existent but) nonexistent object'—and there are no (and could not possibly be any) nonexistent objects. There is therefore an obvious sense in which the property *being identical with the Eiffel Tower* "does duty for" the Eiffel Tower in Jäger semantics: the modal ontology that the semantics presupposes does not affirm that, although the Eiffel Tower *is* (that is, has being) in all possible worlds, it is existent in some of them and nonexistent in all the others; it affirms, rather, that, although the property *being identical with the Eiffel Tower* is (and exists) in all possible worlds, it is instantiated in some of them and uninstantiated in all the others.

But why would someone, upon reflecting on a semantics in which uninstantiated essences do duty for nonexistent objects, react to it by saying, "There is not that much ontological difference between things like the Eiffel Tower and properties like *being the Eiffel Tower*?" If that statement were true, there would not be that much ontological difference between *Mensa* and the property *being Mensa* ("Mensaity" for short). That is, there would not be that much ontological difference between *Mensa* and the primary essence that is necessarily co-instantiated with truncotabularity. And can't one refute *that* thesis simply by pointing out that while hardly any possible worlds contain *Mensa*, *Mensaity* is present in all of them?—and that, therefore, in a world in which *Mensa* is not present to have possible existence or possible location in Alabama predicated of it, *Mensaity* *is* present to have possible instantiation or possible co-instantiation with "being located in Alabama" predicated of it? (Of course, that's not the only important ontological difference between *Mensa* and *Mensaity*. After all, *Mensa* is a concrete physical thing, and *Mensaity* is an abstract object. And one can set

<sup>20</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that there are other ways to assert the possible existence of *Mensa* in *Nomensa* than by ascribing possible instantiation to an essence (or possible truth to a proposition like 'A truncotabular thing exists'). For example, an inhabitant of *Nomensa* might assert the possible existence of *Mensa* simply by saying "It is possible to place *Tabula* on *Truncus* in such a way that *A* is the part of the surface of *Tabula* that is in contact with *Truncus* and *B* is the part of the surface of *Truncus* that is in contact with *Tabula*." If *Contact* and *Strong Artifactual Composition* are both true, that sentence expresses a proposition that is necessarily equivalent to the proposition that the sentence '*Mensa* possibly exists' expresses in the obtentional world.

<sup>21</sup> See also Plantinga (1974, 123–132).

things down on concrete physical things and one can't set things down on abstract objects: If you want to have a picnic, and the closest thing to a picnic table available to you is Mensaity, you're out of luck.)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to Robert M. Adams, Karen Bennett, and Amy Seymour for helpful comments and discussion.