

## TWO SENSES OF ‘ESSENCE’ AND A STRAW MAN

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**SUMMARY:** In this paper, I distinguish two senses of the word ‘essence’ both of which figure prominently in recent analytic metaphysics. To disambiguate, I adopt the terminology of ‘modal essence’ (for *how* a thing metaphysically *must be*) and ‘whatness essence’ (for *what* a thing *is*). With the help of this terminology, I address Kit Fine’s charge that modal metaphysics in the framework of Saul Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* proffers an incorrect conceptual analysis of whatness essence. I show that the charge is baseless, and thus that there is no justification for Fine’s verdict that the Kripkean conception of metaphysics should be given up.

**KEYWORDS:** accidental, essential, modality, necessity, whatness

**RESUMEN:** En este trabajo distingo dos sentidos de la palabra “esencia”, los cuales figuran prominentemente en la metafísica analítica reciente. Para desambiguar, adopto la terminología de “esencia modal” (para *cómo* una cosa *debe ser* metafísicamente) y “esencia qué-idad” (para *qué es* una cosa). Con la ayuda de esta terminología, me ocupo de la objeción de Kit Fine de que la metafísica modal en el marco de *El nombrar y la necesidad* de Saul Kripke ofrece un análisis conceptual incorrecto de la esencia qué-idad. Muestro que la objeción es infundada, y así, que no hay ninguna justificación para el veredicto de Fine de que la concepción kripkeana de la metafísica debe ser abandonada.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** accidental, esencial, modalidad, necesidad, qué-idad

### 0. Introduction

The noun ‘essence’ (like its adjectival relative ‘essential’ and its adverbial relative ‘essentially’) has many distinct uses in the philosophical literature. Two of these have figured prominently in analytic metaphysics of the last 70 years or so. There is the modal use, according to which the word ‘essence’ is a term for what I will call *modal essence*, which corresponds to how a thing metaphysically must be (if it exists).<sup>1</sup> This use was dominant among analytic metaphysicians

<sup>1</sup> If modal essentiality is explicated in the existence-conditioned way (that is, with the parenthetical ‘if it exists’), it is plausible that Socrates is modally essentially human whereas if it is explicated in the categorical way (that is, without the

during the second half of the 20th Century.<sup>2</sup> There is another use, according to which the word ‘essence’ is a term for what I will call *whatness essence*, which corresponds to what a thing is. This use, which is associated with a more traditional subject matter in the longer history of philosophy, started gaining on the modal use toward the tail end of the 20th Century. It is this use that is dominant among analytic metaphysicians today.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the terms ‘essence’, ‘essential’, and ‘essentially’, there are also the contrary terms ‘accident’, ‘accidental’, and ‘accidentally’. Ambiguity in the ‘essence’ family goes hand in hand with ambiguity in the ‘accident’ family, since no matter how one resolves the ambiguity, the terms are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive of the relevant class. The fact that ‘accidental’ is ambiguous can be made evident by mimicking (twice) a famous rhetorical question from Fine (1994)—minus the apparent use/mention confusion. (See note 12.) Can we not recognize a sense of ‘accidental’ in which it *is not* accidental to Socrates to be an element of {Socrates}? Of course we can, since it is no accident that Socrates is an element of {Socrates}. Socrates does not just happen to be that way. Can we not, in addition, recognize another sense of ‘accidental’ in which it *is* accidental to Socrates to be an element of {Socrates}? With some strain, we can, inasmuch as being an element of {Socrates} does not pertain to Socrates’s whatness. The fact that we can recognize both of these senses—modal and whatness, respectively—shows that ‘accidental’ (and likewise ‘essential’) is ambiguous.<sup>4</sup>

parenthetical), this is not so, since being human requires existing and it is possible for Socrates not to exist. Instead, what is plausibly essential to Socrates on the categorical explication is the property of *being human if existent*. Perhaps the two explications of modal essentiality arise from the fact that *being necessary* like *being relevant* is relational. Relevant *to what*? Necessary *for what*? If it is for existing, then that yields the existence-conditioned explication. If it is for being, then that yields the categorical explication. The distinction between existing and being need not be spooky: Saul Kripke, alas, does not exist, but he has being enough to render it intelligible to attribute to him properties like having written *Naming and Necessity*. (Cf. Plantinga 1974, p. 56. See also note 7.)

<sup>2</sup> This claim will be substantiated in subsection 1.1.

<sup>3</sup> This claim is substantiated by the fact that the vast majority of chapters in *The Routledge Handbook of Essence in Philosophy* (2024) (edited by Koslicki and Raven) concern whatness essentiality. My own contribution to that volume (“Origin Essentialism”) is an outlier in that it is concerned with modal essentiality.

<sup>4</sup> There is in ordinary English an ambiguity in ‘essential’ that is similar to (but not the same as) the ambiguity in philosophical English. On the one hand, ‘Practice is essential to being a skilled musician’ expresses that being a skilled musician *requires* practice. Otherwise put: it expresses that practice is *necessary* for being a

It is worth taking a moment to contrast the terminological choices of Almog (1991) and Fine (1994). Both analytic metaphysicians were writing at a time when 'essence' was widely used in its modal sense, though both were primarily interested in whatness essence. Almog (1991), recognizing "the dominance of the modal reading of 'essence' in current [as of 1991] discussions" (p. 230n2), chose to use the term 'whatness' for the phenomenon that interested him. Fine (1994), by contrast, simply used the term 'essence' for whatness essence—without explicitly indicating that he was using 'essence' in what was then a non-standard way.

Fine (1994) famously argued against the so-called modal account of essence, the view that a property *P* is "essential" (in the whatness sense) to an object *x* iff *P* is modally essential to *x* (that is, iff it is necessary that *x* has *P* (if *x* exists)). Fine (1994) characterizes this view as the "usual one" (p. 3). As a result, a generation of philosophers (as referenced in section 3) came to believe that Kripke and those who worked in the same vein held this view. This paper attempts to correct the historical record. Along the way, there are lessons concerning the use/mention distinction (that there is a difference between there being two notions of a single phenomenon and there being two senses of a single word) and the fallacy of equivocation (that it is wrong to attribute to a philosopher a view about one phenomenon for which a word is used solely on the basis of that philosopher's use of the word for a different phenomenon).

I hope to mend some of the considerable damage that Fine (1994)—presumably unintentionally—did to the reputations of Kripke and others, so that a generation of philosophers might turn their attention again to this work instead of dismissing it as the locus of a gargantuan philosophical mistake and accepting Fine's verdict that the Kripkean "conception of metaphysics should be given up" (Fine 1994, p. 3). I also suggest what I hope is a helpful way of understanding the real import of Fine's paper.

skilled musician. (It does not express that practicing is (part of) what being a skilled musician is.) The sentence 'Alfred ran into Bertie quite by accident' expresses that Alfred ran into Bertie and that there was nothing (relevant) that *necessitated* this. Otherwise put: it expresses that it *just so happened* that Alfred ran into Bertie. On the other hand, ordinary English speakers also use 'essence' for (something like) nature. Barcan Marcus (1971) gives some good examples. She writes that Protagoras might have said of Socrates, "He's essentially a philosopher, not a politician" and that a social worker might say of a client, "He's essentially a good boy; just fell in with bad company" (p. 190).

## 1. *Two Senses of 'Essence'*

### 1.1. Modal Essence

The modal use of 'essential' is largely due to the work of Quine. Quine (1953 [1976]) charged that an untoward consequence of combining quantification and propositional modality, as occurs in quantified modal logic, is "the metaphysical jungle of Aristotelian essentialism" (p. 176). Quine characterized "Aristotelian essentialism" as "the doctrine that some of the attributes of a thing (quite independently of the language in which the thing is referred to, if at all) may be essential to the thing, and others accidental" (Quine 1953 [1976], pp. 175–176). Quine immediately clarifies his usage of 'essential' and 'accidental' by stating the doctrine "more formally" with a construction that involves quantification into a necessity operator: "what Aristotelian essentialism says is that you can have open sentences—which I shall represent here as ' $Fx$ ' and ' $Gx$ '—such that ' $(\exists x)(\text{nec } Fx \cdot Gx \sim \text{nec } Gx)$ '" (p. 176, with my deletion of Quine's numbering of the symbolic sentence). In other words, as Quine used the phrase, 'Aristotelian essentialism' is the doctrine that (it is intelligible to say that) some individual has both a modally essential property (F) and a modally accidental property (G).

Quine's view is that necessity does not sensibly attach to the state of affairs of a thing's having a property, except (at best) relative to this or that specification of the thing. (Cf. Quine 1953 [1980], pp. 155–156 and Quine 1960, pp. 95–200.) For example, according to Quine, the number two, when described as the even prime, is (or can be considered) necessarily even, since it is a necessary fact that the even prime is even. But, on Quine's view, the number two, when described as the number of moons of Mars, is (or can be considered) only contingently even, since it is a contingent fact that the number of moons of Mars is even (since, Mars could have had only one moon). Following Quine, Linsky (1971), in an introduction to a collection of essays on reference and modality, defined 'Aristotelian essentialism' as the metaphysical view that "necessary and contingent properties *do* belong to objects irrespective of their modes of specification" (p. 3).

It was common knowledge among analytic philosophers that their rendition of 'essentialism' as a doctrine about quantification into necessity (in other words, *de re* necessity) had at most a loose connection to Aristotle's actual doctrines.

An Aristotelian essence is not merely any attribute *F* satisfying [Quine's formula]; such an essence is intimately bound up with Aristotle's *ti esti* ("what is it?") question, and not every attribute *F* which satisfies [Quine's formula] will be an answer to the *ti esti* question. (Cohen 1978, p. 388)

(Cf. White 1972 and Matthews 1990.) Even if misappropriated, Quine's use of 'essential' and 'accidental' as terms for *de re* necessity and contingency became mainstream.<sup>5</sup> Cohen, a specialist in ancient Greek philosophy, himself goes on in the article from which the quote was taken to use 'essentialism' in Quine's sense and to ask whether Aristotle was committed to essentialism (so understood).

It was against the background of Quine's use of 'essentialism' and Quine's criticism of the doctrine for which he used the word that Kripke delivered his landmark *Naming and Necessity* lectures at Princeton University in 1970. Edited transcripts of these lectures, *complete with clarificatory interpolations by Kripke*, were subsequently published as Kripke 1972 [1980]. It is evident from the edited transcripts that Kripke used the word 'essentialism' (and related words) in Quine's sense (that is, in the modal sense). Consider this passage from the first lecture.

It is even suggested in the literature, that though a notion of necessity may have some sort of intuition behind it (we do think some things could have been otherwise; other things we don't think could have been otherwise), this notion [of a distinction between necessary and contingent properties] is just a doctrine made up by some bad philosopher, who (I guess) didn't realize that there are several ways of referring to the same thing. I don't know if some philosophers have

<sup>5</sup> One may wonder why Quine bothered to use 'essential' and 'accidental', given that 'necessary' and 'contingent' were already available. Quine abhorred *de dicto* necessity, but all the more did he abhor *de re* necessity. His 1953 [1976] paper "Three Grades of Modal Involvement" discusses three ways of embracing the idea of necessity: as a semantical predicate of sentences, as a "statement" operator (that is, an operator that attaches to sentences), and finally, the "gravest degree", as an operator that attaches to open formulas, so as to yield "Aristotelian essentialism". The idea in the paper is very roughly that the first grade is bad, the second even worse, and the third wholly unconscionable. Given this, it is not particularly surprising that Quine would introduce a separate term for *de re* necessity—especially since he did not use the terms '*de dicto*' or '*de re*' at the time. It is true that he could have introduced the term 'necessary-ism' instead of 'essentialism'. But the former term (even aside from its awkwardness) would not do for Quine's purposes, since it might all too easily be taken to cover all three doctrines that he abhorred instead of merely the one that he vehemently abhorred.

not realized this; but at any rate it is very far from being true that this idea [that a property can meaningfully be held to be essential or accidental to an object independently of its description] is a notion which has no intuitive content, which means nothing to the ordinary man. Suppose that someone said, pointing to Nixon, ‘That’s the guy who might have lost’. Someone else says ‘Oh no, if you describe him as “Nixon”, then he might have lost; but, of course, describing him as the winner, then it is not true that he might have lost’. Now which one is being the philosopher, here, the unintuitive man? It seems to me obviously the second. The second man has a philosophical theory. (p. 41, interpolations in original)

The target of this passage is obviously Quine. And Kripke’s interpolations make clear that he is, like Quine, using ‘essential property’ and ‘accidental property’ as synonyms for the modal terms ‘necessary property’ and ‘contingent property’, respectively. Furthermore, Kripke says, “When we think of a property as essential to an object we usually mean that it is true of that object in any case where it would have existed” (1972 [1980], p. 48). He also says, “Some properties of an object may be essential to it, in that it could not have failed to have them” (1972 [1980], p. 53). Plausibly, Kripke is offering what should be understood as an explicit definition. All we need do is understand his ‘in that’ as meaning *in the sense that*. In any case, the quotation leaves no doubt about how Kripke used the word ‘essential’.

A different kind of textual evidence can be found in the fact that Kripke (1972 [1980]) specifies the following three modal claims, which he endorses, as giving “examples of essential properties” (p. 115).

- Queen Elizabeth (the woman herself, regardless of how she is described) could not have been a child of the Trumans. (p. 112)
- Queen Elizabeth could not have originated from a “totally different sperm and egg” from those from which she actually originated. (p. 113)
- The particular table at which Kripke was pointing could not have been originally made from “a completely different block of wood”. (pp. 113–114)

It is worth noticing in each case which property Kripke is claiming to be a necessary property of its bearer. In the first case, it is

the property of not being a child of the Trumans. In the second case, it is the property of not originating from a totally different sperm and egg. In the last case, it is the property of not originating from a completely different block of wood. Kripke's claims are fairly modest. Consider the last one. It is decidedly not the strong claim that the table could not have been originally made from a *partially* different block of wood. (A partially, but not completely, different block of wood has matter in common with the original block of wood. It "overlaps" the original.) This is in keeping with the fact that the argument Kripke sketches in the famous footnote 56 will at best support only the modest claim (p. 114n56). (Cf. Salmon 1981, pp. 203–204.) It is also in keeping with the intuition that a table could have been originally made from slightly different matter. (Cf. Kripke 1972 [1980], pp. 50–51.) Kripke does not advocate the view that the table must have had the exact origin that it does. Similar remarks apply to the Queen.<sup>6</sup> This important and often overlooked point has implications for the present paper. It is clear that Kripke thought that the property of not being a child of the Trumans, a property that he says that she must have, is an "essential property" of the Queen. It is extremely implausible that Kripke thought that a reasonable answer to the question, "What is Queen Elizabeth?" was "Not a child of the Trumans". Interpreting Kripke's use of the phrase 'essential properties' in connection with his *de re* modal claims about origins as meaning whatness-essential properties rather than modally-essential properties would thus be extremely implausible. (It would also of course be extremely uncharitable. But insofar as the concern is with faithful interpretation—and that is my only concern here—it is plausibility, not charity, that matters.)

Several other philosophers, who worked in a Kripkean vein in the 1970s and 1980s, offered explicit definitions of 'essential' (or its relatives): for example, Plantinga (1974, p. 56), Stalnaker (1979, p. 343), Salmon (1981, p. 4, p. 82), and Forbes (1985, p. 97). A later writer, Mackie (2006), who was concerned with the same sense

<sup>6</sup> Let me be more careful. Kripke did in fact think, though to my knowledge he nowhere said it in print, that the Queen had to come from her actual parents and her actual gametes. But this thought is merely an artifact of humans originating from exactly two parents and exactly two gametes. Suppose instead that humans originated from say 100 gametes. I had occasion to ask Kripke about this at the "*Naming and Necessity* at 50" celebration in Hudson, NY in July 2022. He confirmed that if such were the case, he would not want to rule out that the Queen could have originated from 99 of the gametes from which she actually originated and another gamete that was not actually involved in her creation. Indeed, he thought that such a claim was plausible.

of ‘essential’ as were the philosophers just mentioned, also offered a definition, one that explicitly flags that there are multiple senses of ‘essential properties’: “The essential properties of an individual, *in the relevant sense*, are those that it could not have existed without” (pp. 1–2, my emphasis).

Along the lines of the definitions provided by these modal metaphysicians, I will say that an object  $x$  has a property  $P$  *modally essentially* (and that  $P$  is a *modally essential property of  $x$* , and that  $P$  is *modally essential to  $x$* ) iff it is metaphysically necessary that (if  $x$  exists)  $x$  has  $P$ .<sup>7</sup> I will say that an object  $x$  has a property  $P$  *modally accidentally* (and that  $P$  is a *modally accidental property of  $x$* , and that  $P$  is *modally accidental to  $x$* ) iff both  $x$  has  $P$  and  $x$  does not have  $P$  modally essentially (that is,  $x$  has  $P$  and it is metaphysically possible that  $x$  lacks  $P$  (and yet exists)). *Modal essentialism* is the doctrine that some properties are modally essential to some things. (Like Salmon (1981), I forego Quine’s suggestion that a modal essentialist must also hold that some properties are modally accidental to some things. Cf. Della Rocca 1996.) Where  $K$  is any class of properties, I say that an object  $x$  *has* (the property that is the conjunction of properties in)  $K$  iff  $x$  has each element of  $K$ . I say that  $x$  *has  $K$  modally essentially* iff  $x$  has every element of  $K$  modally essentially, and that  $x$  *has  $K$  modally accidentally* iff  $x$  has  $K$  but not modally essentially (that is,  $x$  has at least one element of  $K$  only modally accidentally). I call the class of  $x$ ’s modally essential properties *the modal essence of  $x$* . On this usage, every object  $x$  has exactly one modal essence, and  $x$  has that class of properties modally essentially.

<sup>7</sup> I use the phrase ‘metaphysically necessary’ rather than the unadorned ‘necessary’ simply to make clear that the sort of necessity that is relevant here is metaphysical—in contrast to epistemic, deontic, logical, mathematical, physical, etc.

The existence-conditioned version of the definition has at least two undesirable consequences. First, on this definition, a property  $P$  can be a “modally essential” property of  $x$ , and  $x$  can have  $P$  “modally essentially”, even if  $x$  lacks  $P$ . For example, had Cristo Redentor not been made, it would not have the property of being a statue, although on this definition it would nevertheless have that property “modally essentially” (assuming the standard view that any statue is, in any possible world in which it exists, a statue). Second, on this definition, existence is a “modally essential” property of every possible thing, whereas existence is in fact a modally essential property of some possible things, for example, the number two, but not of others, for example, Cristo Redentor. Plantinga (1974) avoids the first of these undesirable consequences thus: Socrates has  $P$  essentially if and only if Socrates has  $P$  and has it in every world in which he exists (p. 56). My preferred definition leaves out the parenthetical ‘if  $x$  exists’. But I leave the phrase—but only in parentheses—in an ecumenical spirit. (See also note 1.)



## 1.2. Whatness Essence

The resurgence of the whatness use of the word ‘essential’ is largely due to the work of Fine, especially his 1994 article “Essence and Modality”. According to Correia (2024),

the notion [...] that Fine has in mind [when he uses the word ‘essence’ in Fine 1994] is the traditional notion, the one that Aristotle pointed to using the expressions ‘τὸ τί ἔστω’ (*the what it is*) and ‘τὸ τί ᾗν εἶναι’ (*the what it was to be*) and for which philosophers subsequently used the Latin ‘essentia’ and other words with the same root in more recent languages. (p. 138n1)

Correia’s view that there is some single notion that Aristotle pointed to is, I believe, very widely held. (It is, in any case, evident from the quoted passage that Correia takes it to be.) For this reason, although I am not myself convinced that there is some single notion that Aristotle pointed to, I am willing for present purposes to assume that there is.<sup>8</sup> I am further willing to assume that at least some things have whatness essences. In particular, I am willing to allow that the kind bachelor, the concept of bachelorhood, and the property of being a bachelor all have whatness essences. What is (it to be) the kind bachelor? It is (to be) the kind (let’s say) unmarried man. What is (it to be) the concept bachelorhood? It is (to be) the concept unmarried-man-ness. What is (it to be) the property of being a bachelor? It is (to be) the property of being an unmarried man. I am even willing to allow that {Socrates} has a whatness essence. What is (it to be) {Socrates}? It is (to be) the set whose sole member is Socrates. Finally, I am willing to allow that the number two may have a whatness essence. What is (it to be) the number two? Perhaps it is (to be) the successor of the number one.

Fine (1994) treats ‘*x*’s essence’, ‘what *x* is’, ‘*x*’s nature’, ‘*x*’s identity’, and ‘*x*’s “real” (or objectual) definition’ as interchangeable. (Fine does not to my knowledge use the perhaps more common phrase ‘what it is to be *x*’.) Given the assumption of the previous paragraph, Fine’s usage evidently amounts to two things: first, the

<sup>8</sup> Intuitively, the answers to “what is” questions are different from answers to “what is it to be” questions. The former, when asked “cold” (in the absence of context), fairly easily lend themselves to answers that mention merely a broad classificatory kind, but this is not true of the latter. For example, it seems natural enough to me to answer the following questions in the following ways. What is a triangle? A closed plane figure. What is it to be a triangle? To be a closed plane figure with (only) straight sides and three interior angles.

stipulation that he will use ‘essence’ for whatness essence; and second, the tacit advancement of a particular theory—to wit, that for any object  $x$ , there is a special property of  $x$  (what Fine calls ‘ $x$ ’s essence’ and what I call ‘ $x$ ’s whatness essence’) that is simultaneously  $x$ ’s nature and  $x$ ’s identity and that in addition serves as a definition, not of  $x$ ’s name, but of  $x$  itself.

Setting aside for a moment the notion of  $x$ ’s identity, Fine’s theory may be reasonably appealing for some values of ‘ $x$ ’. For example, it may be tolerably clear that having Socrates as sole element is part or all of what {Socrates} is, of the nature of {Socrates}, and of the real definition of {Socrates}. As for the notion of  $x$ ’s identity, it is perhaps most naturally taken to be the property of *being (identical with)  $x$* . But intuitively, having Socrates as sole element is not part or all of the property of being (identical with) {Socrates}. Nonetheless, it is not unnatural to say that having Socrates as sole element is part of the (very) identity of {Socrates}. So, it is tolerably clear that for {Socrates}, all of these converge: what-it-is, nature, (very) identity, and real definition. (Similar things can be said about the other examples I gave in the first paragraph of this subsection.)

But it is far from obvious how to extrapolate from the case of {Socrates} to the case of Socrates himself. Indeed, in the case of Socrates, it is intuitively implausible that the referents (if such there be) of ‘what Socrates is’, ‘Socrates’s nature’, ‘Socrates’s (very) identity’, and ‘Socrates’s real definition’ converge. Assuming that Socrates has a what-it-is, perhaps it is being human. Perhaps it is being *this particular* human.<sup>9</sup> As for his nature, it is (at least in part) to be philosophical and a gadfly. As for his (very) identity, perhaps it is being (identical with) Socrates. Perhaps it is (at least in part) being philosophical and a gadfly.

<sup>9</sup> There are some difficult issues here. What counts as an appropriate answer to the question “What is Socrates?” depends on context. In some contexts, an appropriate answer is “a philosopher”. In others, “a soldier”. In still others, “an Athenian”. The same is true of the question “What is {Socrates}?” In some contexts, the answer “Fine’s favorite singleton” (instead of “a set having Socrates as sole element”) may be appropriate. But it is much easier to make sense of the question about {Socrates} if asked it “cold” (that is, apart from context) than it is to make sense of the question about Socrates. Another issue arises from the fact that whereas it is tolerably clear (but see note 8) that the “cold” questions “What is {Socrates}?” and “What is it to be {Socrates}?” may be answered in the same way (with only the slight changes demanded by grammar), it is not so clear that the “cold” questions “What is Socrates?” and “What is it to be Socrates?” are to be answered in the same way. Indeed, the latter question sounds so odd that I have no intuition about how to answer it.

The matter of real definition raises an even more significant issue. By contrast with what-it-is, nature, and identity, the notion of an objectual definition seems altogether inapplicable to Socrates, as I (2008, §2) have previously argued. Along a similar line, Leech (2018, p. 319n24) says, "Aristotle arguably only has in mind definitions of kinds, such as *human*, and not definitions of individuals, such as Socrates". She provides the following quotation from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, VII, 15 (as translated by W.D. Ross): "And so when one of the definition-mongers defines any individual, he must recognize that his definition may always be overthrown; for it is not possible to define such things".

Nathan Salmon offers another consideration. It is now widely accepted, largely on the basis of the work of Kripke (1972 [1980]), that a name like 'Socrates' does not have a "nominal" or verbal definition. It does not, for example, have the same semantic content as 'the most famous teacher of Plato'. In light of this, the idea that Socrates—the man himself—nevertheless has a real or objectual definition is extremely dubious. For if Socrates had a real definition, then that real definition would, or at least could, serve as the semantic content of the name 'Socrates'. It is more plausible that Socrates is a *real primitive*—something that lacks a definition but that is used to define other objects, for example {Socrates}—on the assumption that some objects do have real definitions.

### 1.3. Senses of 'Essence' vs. Notions/Conceptions/Theories of Essence

It is important to recognize that the modal and whatness uses of 'essential' do not correspond to different notions or conceptions or theories of a particular phenomenon; rather, as we have seen, they correspond to two different phenomena. One of these phenomena, modal essence, is relatively well understood, since the phenomenon of metaphysical necessity is intuitively well understood (as Kripke showed against Quine). The other phenomenon, whatness essence, is relatively obscure (as brought out in subsection 1.2), though I here operate on the assumption (generous to the friends of whatness) that it is a genuine phenomenon and that at least some things have a whatness.

It is useful to bear in mind an analogy. The "fluvial" and financial uses of 'bank' do not correspond to different conceptions or notions or theories of a particular kind of thing; rather they correspond to two different kinds of thing. *When one person uses an ambiguous*

*word (like ‘bank’) for one thing (the land along the side of a lake or river) and another person uses it for another thing (a certain kind of financial institution), they do not thereby have two different accounts of some one thing.* One should not speak here of two competing conceptions or notions or theories of a single kind of thing called ‘bank’, but instead of two senses of a single word ‘bank’. For the same reason, one should not speak of two competing conceptions or notions or theories of a single thing called ‘essence’, but instead of two senses of a single word ‘essence’.

Let me be clear. I am not saying that modal essentiality and whatness essentiality are as unrelated as fluvial banks and financial banks. Nor am I now saying that they are not. I am not taking a stand on that question.<sup>10</sup> For all I have said, it may be the case (as Fine thinks) that any whatness essential property of a thing is modally essential to that thing. This would not undermine the important point that whatness essentiality and modal essentiality are distinct things. They would be distinct things that stand in a certain relation to one another: a thing’s whatness essential properties would be a subset of its modally essential properties. The important point—and the point of my mentioning the ambiguous word ‘bank’—is that ‘essential’ is, as we have seen, ambiguous. An ambiguity is perhaps especially unfortunate when the two things it is ambiguous between are related to one another in the way just mentioned. This is the situation with the word ‘man’. On one use, less common these days,

<sup>10</sup> An anonymous referee found this “baffling” and asks “How can I say whether the notions A and B are distinct if I am not taking a stand on whether A and B are related or not?” First, it should be observed that I do not say that I am not taking a stand on whether modal essence and whatness essence are *in any way* related; what I say is that I do not take a stand on whether they are *as unrelated as* fluvial banks and financial banks. Obviously, in saying that modal essence and whatness essence are distinct, I am committed to their standing in the relation of non-identity to one another. Second, it should not be baffling that one can take a firm stand on the issue of whether one phenomenon is distinct from another without taking a firm stand on the issue of whether the two are related (in salient ways). Perhaps an example will help. Two theorists who agree that knowledge and justification are distinct phenomena may differ in that one (who thinks that knowledge is justified true belief) thinks that they are (relevantly) related while another (who, like Sartwell (1991), thinks that knowledge is merely true belief) thinks that they are not. Someone who agrees with these theorists that knowledge and justification are distinct phenomena may be neutral on the issue that divides the two theorists. In a similar way, I am taking the stand that modal essence and whatness essence are distinct, without taking a stand on whether they are related (in salient ways). What I am doing is not significantly different from taking the stand that two people are distinct without taking a stand on whether they are married.

the term applies truly to Michelle Obama (because she is human). This is the sense of 'man' Mill uses in a *System of Logic* when he says, "The word *man*, for example, denotes Peter, Jane, John, and an indefinite number of other individuals" (Book I, Chapter 2, §5). On another use, the term applies truly to Barack Obama but not to Michelle Obama (because of their genders). The two uses of 'man' do not correspond to different conceptions or notions or theories of a particular kind of thing; rather they correspond to two different (albeit related) kinds.

## 2. *A Straw Man*

Fine (1994) criticizes what he calls "the modal account", which he takes to come in three versions, only two of which figure prominently in his discussion.<sup>11</sup> According to the simplest version, "an object [has] a property essentially just in case it is necessary that the object has the property" (p. 3). According to the other, "an object [has] a property essentially just in case it is necessary that the object has the property if it exists" (p. 4). It is obvious that Fine is using 'essentially' in its whatness sense, not in its modal sense—for if he were using 'essentially' in its modal sense, then "the modal account" would be a triviality instead of a substantive thesis subject to potential falsification. This understanding of Fine is confirmed by the fact that a rhetorical question that he uses to falsify "the modal account" foregoes the use of 'essence' altogether: "For can we not recognize a sense of nature, or of "what an object is", according to which it lies in the nature of the singleton to have Socrates as a member even though it does not lie in the nature of Socrates to belong to the singleton?" (p. 5).<sup>12</sup> What Fine criticizes is *the modal account*

<sup>11</sup> Fine suggests that the remaining one collapses into one of the other two (p. 4).

<sup>12</sup> Here, where we expect him to *mention* the word 'essence', Fine *uses* the word 'nature'. Presumably, the swapping of 'nature' for 'essence' is due to the fact that Fine thinks the words are synonymous. Fine's concern with "a sense of nature"—instead of a sense of 'nature'—appears to involve a use/mention error. His question is on a par with this one: "For can we not recognize a sense of bloke, according to which Barack Obama is a bloke but Michelle Obama is not?" This question does not make much sense with 'bloke' used rather than mentioned. If we insert quotation marks around 'bloke', the question makes sense, but is odd, since 'bloke' does not have multiple senses. Here is a better question: For can we not recognize a sense of 'man', according to which Barack Obama is a man but Michelle Obama is not? Answer: yes, 'man' in the sense of *bloke*. But this should not lead us to think that those who use 'man' for *human* subscribe to a human account of blokes—that is, the view that  $x$  is a bloke iff  $x$  is human. (I make this point more fully later in the main text.) It is thus plausible that Fine's dismissal of the Kripkean conception of

of *whatness essence*, or for short, *the modal account of whatness*, *MAW*.

MAW: A property *P* is part of (or an element of) the whatness essence of an object *x* iff it is metaphysically necessary that (if *x* exists) *x* has *P*.

Fine (1994) proceeds on the assumption that philosophers who used ‘essential’ to cover all modally essential properties were thereby proposing an analysis or elucidation of what Fine calls ‘the concept of essence’ (or ‘the concept of nature’, etc.). Fine sees MAW as a consequence of the allegedly proposed philosophical analysis or elucidation of the concept of whatness essence. He says,

It is my aim in this paper to show that the contemporary assimilation of essence to modality is fundamentally misguided and that, as a consequence, the corresponding conception of metaphysics should be given up. [...] My point [...] is that the notion of essence which is of central importance to the metaphysics of identity is not to be understood in modal terms or even to be regarded as extensionally equivalent to a modal notion. (p. 3)

I concur with Nathan Salmon (in conversation) that Fine is asserting at least the following: (i) in contrast to modal essence, whatness essence is of central importance to metaphysics, at least to “the metaphysics of identity”; (ii) the notion of whatness essence is not to be understood in modal terms; (iii) in their fundamentally misguided investigations, contemporary modal metaphysicians have held MAW, thereby erroneously assimilating whatness essence to modal essence; and (iv) consequently, their general conception of metaphysics must be rejected. In this paper, I will primarily address (ii) and (iii), saving discussion of (i) and (iv) mostly for other work.

I will be brief concerning (ii). That MAW is untrue is hardly open to doubt. As we saw in subsection 1.1, Cohen (1978) had already said as much when he made the point that not every property that is essential in Quine’s sense provides an answer to Aristotle’s *ti esti* question. Fine’s central counterexample is Socrates’s property of being an element of {Socrates}—a modally essential property that

metaphysics is predicated (at least in part) on a gargantuan philosophical mistake—confusing use and mention. It is an easy mistake to make, and even the best of us are prone to it. For example, the Gray’s Elegy passage of Russell’s 1905 masterpiece “On Denoting” is rife with use/mention errors.

forms no part of Socrates's whatness essence (assuming he has one).<sup>13</sup> Other counterexamples include Socrates's property of being such that there are infinitely many primes and his property of being such that the Eiffel Tower is not a number.<sup>14</sup> For present purposes there is no need for me to take a stand on the larger issue of (ii), the issue of whether the notion of whatness essence is to be understood (at least partly) in modal terms.

I move on now to (iii). Fine says of MAW that

it is only in the last twenty years or so [leading up to 1994] that the modal approach to essentialist metaphysics has really come into its own. For with the advent of quantified modal logic, philosophers have been in a better position to formulate essentialist claims. [...] there would appear to be nothing special about the modal character of essentialist claims beyond their being *de re*. It therefore appears reasonable to treat the metaphysics of identity as merely part of a broader study of modality *de re*. The subject becomes, in effect, a part of applied modal logic. (p. 3)

With these words, Fine intimates that modal metaphysicians of the 1970s and 1980s held MAW. Fine does not so much as mention any particular philosopher of that period by name, let alone cite any particular work.<sup>15</sup> In the absence of citation it is most natural to take

<sup>13</sup> In setting out his counterexamples to "the modal account" Fine slides from 'It is necessary that (if *a* exists) *Fa*' to '*F* is essential to *a*' (which follows if 'essential' is used in its modal sense, but not if used in its whatness sense) to '*F* is part of the nature of *a*' (which at best follows from the previous sentence only on its whatness reading).

<sup>14</sup> These are precisely the sorts of examples that were given to students to distinguish the use of 'essential' in analytic philosophy from other uses when (in the early to mid 1980s) I was an undergraduate at the University of Washington. (At the University of Washington, I was fortunate to have as teachers Bob Coburn and Marc Cohen, as well as others, whose able instruction is less relevant to present concerns.) These sorts of examples were also used for the same purpose when (in the early to mid 1990s) I was a graduate student at Princeton. (At Princeton, I was fortunate to have Saul Kripke serve as one of my examiners for two oral exams on the topic of "essentialism". The topic was *de re* modality, not (answers to) Aristotle's *ti esti* question.)

<sup>15</sup> The only philosopher Fine cites by name as having allegedly advocated MAW is G.E. Moore. The attribution is dubious given that Moore was an indefatigable warrior for common sense. The only work from the 1970s or 1980s that Fine includes among his references is Wiggins 1976. Fine writes that Wiggins "argues against what I have called the modal account of essentialist claims" (p. 14*n*2). However, Fine also writes of Wiggins that "he would be perfectly prepared to concede, given a suitable understanding of necessity, that [a *de re* modal statement and an essentialist

Fine's principal target to be Kripke, especially in his remarks on *de re* necessity (in Kripke 1971 and Kripke 1972 [1980]). Presumably also targeted are philosophers who did associated subsequent work on modal essentialism: Plantinga (1974), McGinn (1976), Forbes (1985), the authors of the works in the collection edited by French, Uehling, and Wettstein (1986), and more. Perhaps even Fine (1977 [2005]) himself is among his targets. My conjectures here are not surprising. (See section 3.) And Fine (2024) confirms the suspicion that he was casting a very wide net: "Quine, *like all others who worked within the framework of quantified modal logic*, adopted a modal view of [whatness] essence" (manuscript, p. 8, my emphasis).<sup>16</sup>

Evidently, Fine's net is meant to capture even Cartwright (1968).

Essentialism, as I shall understand it, is the doctrine that among the attributes of a thing some are essential, others merely accidental. Its essential attributes are those it has necessarily, those it could not have lacked. Its accidental attributes are those it has only contingently, those it might not have had. Some attributes are essential to everything whatever—the attribute of being self-identical, for example, or perhaps the attribute of having some attribute or other. (Cartwright 1968, p. 615)

These are the opening lines of Cartwright's once-famous "Some Remarks on Essentialism". Cartwright, with his characteristic clarity, is obviously setting out his terminology. It would be implausible—and uncharitable—in the extreme to attribute to Cartwright the view that a reasonable answer to Aristotle's *ti esti* question (for anything) is being self-identical or having an attribute. So too it is implausible—and uncharitable—in the extreme to suggest that such a view was widely held in the 1970s and 1980s.

Fine does appear to acknowledge that it would be reasonable to use 'essential' as a term for modal essentiality. He says, "It is not my view that the modal account fails to capture anything which might

attribution] were extensionally, and perhaps even analytically, equivalent" (p. 14n2). Arguably, Fine is claiming in this note that Wiggins (who is not mentioned in the main text) is inconsistent, both denying and affirming MAW.

<sup>16</sup> Fine's manuscript (presented at the July 2021 workshop for the contributors to *The Routledge Handbook of Essence in Philosophy* (2024) that is mentioned in note 17) contained the word 'view' where the printed version contains the word 'conception' (p. 433). Fine may be confusing the (true) claim that Quine and company adopted a modal use of 'essence' and the (false) claim that they adopted a modal view of what Fine means by 'essence'. (Quine abhorred modality. See note 5. He would not have held a modal view of anything.)



reasonably be called a concept of essence" (p. 3). Yet he evidently has no basis for attributing MAW (and more specifically, the obviously objectionable claim that modal essentiality is sufficient for whatness essentiality) to modal metaphysicians in the Quine-influenced era of 1970–1994 unless he construes their remarks using 'essential' (and its relatives) as somehow concerned with whatness. His position thus appears to be that although it would have been reasonable for the modal metaphysicians of the 1970s and 1980s to use 'essential' as a term for modal essentiality, they instead used it for whatness essentiality—withstanding all appearances to the contrary. More specifically (as discussed in subsection 1.1), withstanding Quine's explicit definition, Quine's enormous influence on their discussions, and the explicit definitions that they themselves—at least some of them—gave.

It is plausible that modal essentiality is a *necessary condition* on whatness essentiality, at least for natural kinds. Without equivocating on 'essential', Kripke evidently endorses this point. For example, in his discussion of heat, he says that because "what the phenomenon [of heat] *is*" is molecular motion, heat is in all possible worlds molecular motion (Kripke 1972 [1980], p. 133). But this is not to endorse the sufficiency, but only the necessity, of modal essentiality for whatness essentiality, at least in the case of natural kinds. (I find nothing in *Naming and Necessity* to suggest that Kripke holds such a view when it comes to individuals.) This is not to endorse MAW.<sup>17</sup>

I do not presume to know what accounts for Fine's misinterpretation of the modal essentialism literature of the 1970s and 1980s. One possibility is that he himself used 'essence' (primarily) for *whatness essence*. If so, then it would be natural enough for him to presume that the usage of his contemporaries was like his own. It would also make sense of the fact mentioned in section 0, that he does not explicitly indicate in "Essence and Modality" that he uses 'essence' in a way that was, at the time, non-standard. In addition, it would also suggest that he himself once held MAW, thus making his pre-

<sup>17</sup> Subsequent to hearing my presentation at the July 2021 workshop for the contributors to *The Routledge Handbook of Essence in Philosophy* (2024) (edited by Koslicki and Raven)—a presentation that began with a brief version of the main point of this paper—Fine (2022) published responsive remarks. (He does not mention me by name.) I would welcome the chance to respond point by point to Fine, but this is not the place for that. I would be remiss however were I to fail to mention that the paragraph to which the present note is attached arises in part in response to some of what Fine (2022) says.

sumption that the view was widespread more natural than it would otherwise be.

Whatever the case with that possibility, it is worth highlighting a consideration relevant to Fine's misinterpretation. Consider the following ambiguous sentence.

*S*: A property *P* is essential to *x* iff it is metaphysically necessary that *x* has *P*.

Because this sentence is lexically ambiguous, one must exercise due caution to avoid falling into serious error. The philosopher who uses 'essential' to mean *modally essential* takes *S* to be analytic and to express a triviality: that a property is modally essential to *x* if and only if it is modally essential to *x*. That philosopher consequently readily assents to *S*. Another philosopher, who uses 'essential' to mean *whatness essential*, thereby understands *S* to express MAW. Understanding it thus, the second philosopher, we may imagine, fervently dissents from *S*. It would be an egregious error to attribute a substantive disagreement between the two philosophers on the basis of their differing usage and their resulting verbal dispositions toward *S*. The first philosopher may well naysay MAW every bit as wholeheartedly as the second. Certainly, in uttering *S* to express a logical truth about modally essential properties the first philosopher is not thereby proffering a conceptual analysis of whatness essence. That philosopher is not talking about whatness essence at all.

Consideration of another ambiguous sentence is helpful.

*S'*: *x* is a bank iff *x* is the land along the side of a lake or river.

*S'* is ambiguous. If one reads 'bank' in its fluvial sense, *S'* is straightforwardly analytic. If one reads 'bank' in its financial sense, it expresses the altogether silly fluvial account of financial banks.

Consideration of another ambiguous sentence is similarly helpful (and perhaps less apt to cause confusion to those who think that a thing's whatness essential properties are a subset of its modally essential properties).

*S''*: *x* is a man iff *x* is human.

*S''* is ambiguous. If one reads 'man' as a term for humans, *S''* is straightforwardly analytic. If one reads 'man' as a term for masculine-gendered adult humans, it expresses the altogether silly human account of masculine-gendered adult humans. (Counterexamples to the

sufficiency of the proposed criterion are easy to come by: my child is human but she is neither masculine-gendered nor adult, and hence not a masculine-gendered adult human.)

Just as one who uses 'bank' in its fluvial sense does not thereby endorse a ridiculous account of financial banks, and just as one who uses 'man' as a term for humans does not thereby endorse a ridiculous account of masculine-gendered adult humans, one who uses 'essential' in its modal sense does not thereby endorse MAW.

MAW is a straw man—an easily refuted view that, contrary to Fine (1994), was not widely held by modal metaphysicians of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>18</sup>

It has been suggested to me that a more charitable reading of Fine has him making merely a weaker disjunctive claim: the modal metaphysicians of the 1970s and 1980s either endorsed MAW or (without making that mistake nevertheless) benightedly misspent their energies on the relatively unimportant (to "the metaphysics of identity") phenomenon of modal essentiality instead of spending their time on the important phenomenon of whatness essentiality. While there can be no doubt that Fine thinks that a philosopher who focuses on modal essentiality instead of whatness essentiality focuses on the less important of the two phenomena, the point of the suggested disjunctive interpretation of Fine is to free him from a commitment to the claim that anyone ever held MAW. That would free him from the charge of having set up a straw man.

Independently of whether such an interpretation is charitable, it is implausible to attribute to Fine (1994) a position that is compatible with the claim that no one held MAW. (Just as I was after faithful interpretation of Kripke, I am after faithful interpretation of Fine.) Fine says that his "overall position is the reverse of the usual one" (p. 3). His overall position in "Essence and Modality" is that modality is to be analyzed in terms of whatness rather than the other way around. And Fine's counterexamples to MAW are the centerpiece of his attack on the allegedly usual view that whatness is to be analyzed in terms of modality. The counterexamples can occupy this role only if MAW was widely held. Thus, it is clear that Fine was committing himself to the view that MAW was widely held.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In personal communication in the summer of 2021, each of Forbes, Kripke, Plantinga, and Salmon confirmed that he never held the modal account of whatness essence.

<sup>19</sup> Although it is clear that Fine (1994) was so committed, when in July 2021 (after my presentation at the workshop for the contributors to *The Routledge Handbook*

Fine's claim that his view reverses the standard one echoes a claim that Kripke (1972 [1980]) made about one of his own views in *Naming and Necessity*.

The modern logical tradition, as represented by Frege and Russell, disputed Mill on the issue of singular names, but endorsed him on that of general names. [...] More recent theorists have followed Frege and Russell [...]. The present view, directly reversing Frege and Russell, (more or less) *endorses* Mill's view of *singular* terms, but *disputes* his view of *general* terms. (pp. 134–135)

By means of this and other reversals of standard views, Kripke set analytic philosophy on its ear. This feat was conspicuously attributed to Kripke in the blurb (a quote from the *London Review of Books*) that appears on the back cover of the Harvard (purple cover) and Blackwell (orange cover) editions of *Naming and Necessity*. Fine aims at nothing less in “Essence and Modality”.

Fine's narrative of a reversal—or ‘inversion’ to adopt the terminology of Wildman (2013)—is a false one. But it captured the imaginations of a generation of analytic metaphysicians. (More on this in section 3.) In reality, “Essence and Modality” does not reverse a trend in analytic philosophy to analyze whatness essence in terms of modal essence. What it does do is add to the literature on the analysis of modality. According some, modality is a *sui generis* phenomenon, not to be analyzed in other terms.

I do not think of ‘possible worlds’ as providing a *reductive* analysis in any philosophically significant sense. [...] In the actual development of our thought, judgments involving directly expressed modal locutions (‘it might have been the case that’) certainly come earlier. [...] In practice, no one who cannot understand the idea of possibility is likely to understand that of a ‘possible world’ either. [...] The main and the original motivation for the ‘possible world analysis’—and the way it clarified modal logic—was that it enabled modal logic to be treated by the same set theoretic techniques of model theory that proved so successful when applied to extensional logic. It is also useful in making certain concepts clear. (Kripke 1972 [1980], p. 19n18)

of *Essence in Philosophy* (2024) mentioned in note 17), I asked Fine, “Can you name anyone working within the framework of QML [quantified modal logic] in the 1970s–1980s who you think held the modal account of whatness?”, he replied, “I’m not sure anyone did, but the evidence is not clear” (personal correspondence of July 10, 2021).

According to another influential view, modality is to be analyzed in terms of a plurality of parallel universes (Lewis 1986). Fine (1994) adds to this literature another view: modality (what could or could not be the case) is to be analyzed in terms of a great metaphysical dictionary. By contributing in this way, Fine shows, even without saying, that the phenomenon of modality is of great importance to philosophy. (In pointing this out, I am not saying that Fine would disagree.)

### 3. *Does This Need Saying?*

When I have presented versions of the first two sections of this paper, some among my audience have found the point completely obvious, some have found it utterly surprising. (Others have had other reactions.) This reflects the fact that my project is largely one in the history of (recent) philosophy. As time marches on, the audience for the important works of philosophy, like Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity*, grows less familiar with the context in which that work was written.

Fine’s suggestion (that MAW was widely held in the twenty or so years preceding 1994) got traction with younger philosophers. They describe MAW, without citation, as “widespread” (Correia 2007, p. 63), “once the dominant account” (Wildman 2013, p. 760), “once-dominant” (Skiles 2015, p. 100), and “traditional” (Leech 2018, p. 311). Both Wildman (2021, p. S1456n2) and Zylstra (2019, p. 339) cite exactly two still-living (at the time of their writing) philosophers of the period as advocating MAW: Kripke (1972 [1980]) and Plantinga (1974).

Cowling (2013) lists Barcan Marcus (1967), Forbes (1985), Mackie (2006), Parsons (1969), Plantinga (1974), Salmon (1981), and Stalnaker (1979) as adherents of the modal view (p. 262n1). Curiously, Cowling (2013) does not list Kripke. All of the philosophers Cowling mentions clearly offer explicit definitions of ‘essential’ (or its relatives) in the cited works. But, as mentioned in subsection 1.1, whether one sees Kripke (1972 [1980], p. 53) as offering an explicit definition (rather than merely trusting his audience to be familiar with the philosophical context in which he was working) depends a little on the interpretation of his use of the phrase ‘in that’ in “Some properties of an object may be essential to it, in that it could not have failed to have them”. If this difference is what accounts for Cowling’s omission of Kripke, it is highly ironic. The very fact

of their offering explicit definitions should have prevented the cited philosophers from being misunderstood as holding MAW.

Cowling (2013) also says, “Fine argues that the modal view is extensionally inadequate and delivers a view unsuitable for systematic metaphysics. Fine’s case against the modal view has received a warm welcome and, surprisingly, defenders of the modal view have been slow to directly address his arguments” (p. 248). It is hardly surprising that none of the modal metaphysicians mentioned by Cowling directly addressed Fine’s criticisms of MAW. Fine (1994) did not mention them by name, after all, and they did not hold MAW. This combination of facts renders it very difficult for the philosophers Cowling names to have responded to Fine. A response would be an indication that they understood that they were being attacked, and that in itself would have lent credibility to Fine’s erroneous claim that they held MAW. (In addition, one can hardly publish a paper in which one says merely that one never held MAW. But see note 18.) In fact, it is only because Fine (2024) finally made clear that he thinks “Quine, like all others who worked within the framework of quantified modal logic, adopted a modal view of [whatness] essence” (manuscript, p. 8) that I am in a position to defend Kripke and company without thereby lending credibility to Fine’s baseless charge against them (see note 16). And defense is extremely important, given how insightful much of this work—and Kripke’s in particular—is. It would be understandable if philosophers discounted the work of a modal metaphysician who held MAW. Philosophers would be very wrong to discount the work of Kripke.

Freed from the distraction of Fine’s reversal narrative, it also becomes easier to see Fine’s work in its proper light. It is primarily a contribution to the literature on reductive analyses of metaphysical modality. As such, Fine’s chief rival is Lewis (1986). Whereas Lewis takes as fundamental his postulated parallel universes, Fine takes as fundamental his postulated great metaphysical dictionary.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> I dedicate this essay to the memory of my friend and teacher, Saul Kripke. It is my hope to honor his memory by removing some of the tarnish to his reputation that has resulted from the impression in the philosophical air that he advocated what Fine (1994) calls “the modal account of essence”. I thank Saul for talking with me in the last year of his life about the issues of this paper. I thank him too for many other philosophical conversations over the course of nearly 35 years. I am also grateful to Nathan Salmon for philosophical conversations spanning about a quarter of a century. As it turns out, long before Nathan and I met (at conference in 1999 in Haifa, Israel in honor of Saul), we were, unbeknownst to each other, already of one mind on the issues of this paper. I thank also Phil Atkins, Marc Cohen, Fabrice

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