Conceivability, Property Individuation, and Strong Necessities

1. The Conceivability Argument

ecently avid halmers has defended the claim let's call it that conceivability is a reliable guide to possibility rmed with he has gone on to argue that physicalism is false is argument let's call it the onceivability rgument has the following structure

- $P \sim Q$ is conceivable
- f $P \sim Q$ is conceivable then $P \sim Q$ is possible
- f $P \sim Q$ is possible then physicalism is false
- hysicalismisfalse

P is a statement that reports all the relevant physical facts that according to physicalists

entail

HD There are no necessary connections between distinct properties that are not *a priori* related

et me explain statement is conceivable according to halmers if it cannot be ruled out on *a priori* grounds after ideal rational reflection $P \sim Q$ therefore is conceivable since the concepts needed to think of P and Q are *a priori* distinct f the conceivability of $P \sim Q$ is to guarantee the possibility of $P \sim Q$ it seems the relevant concepts say the concepts allied with the terms ' ibers' and 'pain' must individuate distinct properties or consider a scenario in which the relevant concepts instead of individuating distinct properties individuated one and the same property ny further speculation on the possibility of $P \sim Q$ would be moot

There is then an intermediary step from conceivability to possibility and it is the individuation of properties t is only after securing this first step that any modal speculations of whether this or that property can come apart from this or that *other* property can be entertained halmers of course believes that any two distinct properties so long as there are no *a priori* relations between them must be contingently related iven these observations suggest the following reformulation of the onceivability rgument

 $P \sim Q$ is conceivable

f $P \sim Q$ is conceivable then the concept associated with P and the concept

ormulated in this way the constituent principles of are drawn out in and depends on the truth of and depends on the truth of This two stage formulation has the virtue of

between these properties fter all in the actual world there are plenty of plants that are not red and there are plenty of non plants that are We don't have to speculate about modal issues to figure this out ut following a medieval example consider the property of being a featherless biped and the property of being a rational animal These properties are always co extensive in the actual world evertheless no one is persuaded that they are *necessarily* co extensive There are worlds where these properties can come apart say a world with featherless bipeds that are not rational or a world with feathered bipeds that are inally consider the property of being trilateral and the property of being triangular These properties are distinct but they are necessarily co extensive That is they cannot exist apart from each other in any possible world This may at first glance seem to be a counterexample to since there are no possible worlds where trilaterality is instantiated without triangularity and vice versa ut there is of course an obvious difference between the first two pairs of properties and the final pair While there are no a priori connections between the properties of the first two pairs there is an a priori connection between the properties of the final pair n instantiation of the property of being trilateral logically guarantees an instantiation of the property of being triangular and vice versa it seems is a plausible principle

urthermore one need only consider the 'standard' formulation of physicalism in order to see that both physicalists and anti physicalists are committed to The 'standard' formulation of physicalism goes something like this II the facts including all the phenomenal facts are necessitated by the physical facts That is once all the physical facts are fixed *all* the facts are fixed ut consider the position let's call it necessitarian dualism that posits a necessary connection between physical properties of human brains and non physical properties of conscious experiences ecessitarian dualism is consistent with the standard formulation of physicalism and should therefore be considered a variant of physicalism hope it is clear however that this would be a mistake pparently the standard formulation must be supplemented with or something like it in order to rule out this possibility for without there is no way to ensure that positions consistent with the standard formulation can remain genuine versions of physicalism

iven these considerations the debate surrounding the onceivability rgument essentially boils down to an assessment of esides cannot even get off the ground if the *a priori* conceptual distinction between physical and phenomenal concepts is not mirrored by an ontological distinction among properties f physical and phenomenal concepts refer to one and the same property then modal considerations concerning this property existing without itself become superfluous since one and the same property can never come apart from itself f am right about this the debates surrounding as it e ith the

cm

veryone agrees that is a posteriori ut because

is true and the terms 'water' and

' ' are rigid designators is necessarily yields T and applying it to Twin arth yields T as well n fact applying the secondary intension to *all* possible worlds yields T ccordingly we can give the following definitions

statement S is primarily possible if and only if its primary intension maps at least one possible world to T

statement S is primarily necessary if and only if its primary intension maps all possible worlds to T

statement S is secondarily necessary if and only if its secondary intension maps all possible worlds to ${\mathbb T}$

t seems therefore that ripkean necessities like cannot undermine a modified

version of – conceivability is a reliable guide to *primary* possibility Though

ripkean necessities are secondarily necessary they are not primarily necessary

What then constitutes a counterexample to ccording to halmers the only way to

undermine is to isolate a strong necessity

statement *S* is strongly necessary if and only if it is *a posteriori* and primarily necessary

oming up with an uncontroversial instance of a strong necessity is no trivial task ut even if physicalists could come up with a convincing instance halmers argues that the very notion of a strong necessity is objectionable mong other things he claims that the existence of a strong necessity introduces a "modality of metaphysical possibility that is distinct from and more constrained than logical possibility" halmers p This is because he believes that conceivability is equivalent to logical possibility and further believes that logical possibility should be identified with metaphysical possibility. The existence of a strong necessity however would drive a wedge between logical and metaphysical modalities e writes

n this view there are worlds that are entirely conceivable even according to the strongest strictures on conceivability but which are not possible at all This is a

gap between conceivability and possibility much stronger than any gap found elsewhere halmers p

The existence of strong necessities forces us to adopt a modal framework with at least three classes of possible worlds nomologically possible worlds metaphysically possible worlds and logically possible worlds in this framework the set of nomologically possible worlds will be a proper subset of the metaphysically possible worlds and the set of metaphysically possible worlds will be a worlds will be a proper subset of the logically possible worlds.

halmers argues that this puts constraints on the space of logically possible worlds that are 'brute and inexplicable' uch a modality he claims 'cannot be supported by analogy' and it leads to an '*ad hoc* proliferation of modalities' To press this point he challenges advocates of strong necessities to explain why od cannot create certain logically possible worlds where *P* ~*Q* turn out to be true f we presume that it is in od's powers to do anything that is logically possible it is difficult to see why we should accept metaphysical possibilities that are not equivalent to logical possibilities. The advocate of strong necessities it seems is forced to admit one of two things i *P* ~*Q* is logically possible but od could not bring it about or ii od could bring *P* ~*Q* about but that *P* ~*Q* would still be metaphysically impossible oth

properties Yes there are two distinct concepts but these concepts refer to one and the same property Though this could only be determined *a posteriori* the fact that there is only one property despite the presence of two distinct concepts makes the question of whether or not there are necessary connections between two distinct properties irrelevant. We cannot ask whether this or that property is necessarily connected to this or that *other* property since there is only one property at play o while it is clear that a rejection of is a rejection of it is far from clear that rejecting commits one to separate logical and metaphysical modalities fter all it is neither logically possible nor metaphysically possible for one and the same property to fail to be identical to itself hysicalists would be well advised in embracing the first option and avoiding the second option

y treating as a monolithic principle halmers' analysis of strong necessities is not sensitive enough to capture the fact that physicalist responses at least the more sophisticated ones actually agree with halmers in an important respect nti physicalists and physicalists alike are equally uncomfortable with countenancing *hidden* necessary connections between distinct properties or what one might ask would ground the connection between distinct properties across all possible worlds Without a logical relationship of some sort the connection would indeed be brute inexplicable and *ad hoc* oth halmers and his physicalist opponents it seems are committed to When halmers goes on to criticize physicalists for rejecting he is in essence assuming that a rejection of *just is* a rejection of This however is an assumption that does not have to be made

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