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PROBLEMS FOR A COMPLETE NATURALISM

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I

American naturalism has had an on-again, off-again relationship with metaphysics. [1] Some naturalists have agreed with John Dewey who saw his approach as not only compatible with but also inseparable from "a detection and description of the generic traits of existence." [2] Others, however, see naturalism and metaphysics as inherently opposed. Such philosophers attempt to give a complete account of reality without ever appealing to metaphysical claims, a "complete naturalism" in which all claims about the world are as contingent as those of the sciences. The ways in which one might argue for such a position are various, but in my opinion none succeeds. The goal of this essay then is to consider the three basic strategies for a complete or anti-metaphysical naturalism, and to indicate the problems involved in each.

Much turns, of course, on one's definition of metaphysics. If one defines metaphysics as the *inquiry into necessary existential claims,* it seems that there are three possible strategies by which one might attempt to do without it. First, one might argue that there are no necessary statements at all. Second, one might distinguish between existential and nonexistential claims and predicate necessity only of the latter. Third, one might try not to argue against metaphysics, but rather permanently to avoid it by changing the subject whenever metaphysical questions are brought up.

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[1] For an excellent review of the evolution of American naturalism and a survey of the ".kaleidoscopic" reference of the term, see Anyur Karimsky, "American Naturalism from a Non-American Perspective," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 28:4 (Fall 1992), 645-65.

[2] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1929), 51. Several recent interpreters of Dewey have argued against the possibility of separating some part of Deweys philosophy from his metaphysics. See for example Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), chap. 3; Raymond D. Boisvert, *Dewey's Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988); and the Symposium on Deweys Metaphysics in the *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 28:2 (Spring 1992): 161-216.

The first strategy for a complete naturalism rejects all necessary claims. On this view, every claim is contingent, and any claim can be meaningfully denied. The most thoroughgoing and influential position of this sort is that of W. V. O. Quine. Quine argues in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"[3] that the idea of analytic statements (which for Quine includes logically necessary statements)[4] is ill-founded and ought to be abandoned. In the critical first sections of the essay, Quine argues that explanations of analyticity (in terms of cognitive synonymy, interchangeability *salva veritate,* semantical rules, and so on) appeal to notions that are no more clear than or that presuppose the notion of analyticity. But, as has been widely noted, that the notion of analyticity cannot be defined without appealing to terms that presuppose it does not invalidate the notion: it may simply be the case that analyticity is part of a family of concepts which imply each other.[5] Moreover, as Franklin Gamwell points out, those who argue for a metaphysical position do not deny

[3] W. V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *From a Logical Point of View,* 2nd ed, rev. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 20-46.

[4] Although Quine's explicit attack is on the notion of analytic statements, which he defines as statements "true by virtue of meanings and independently of facts" (21), he certainly means his criticisms to apply to necessary or a priori statements as well, that is, statements "true in all possible worlds," "statements Whose denials are self-contradictory" (20) or "a limiting kind of statement which is vacuously confirmed, ipso facto, come what may" (41). There is certainly a difference between the two, however –a difference which can be brought out by noting that analytic statements such as "a bachelor is an unmarried man" can be confirmed only in those possible worlds with humans in them, not "come what may." Hilary Putnam suggests di.at Quine confuses analytic tru1hs widi. the narrower field of a priori truths, because he uncritically inherits their positivist identification. See Putnam,"'Two Dogmas' Revisited," *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers,* Vol. 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 1983), 92.

[5] See, for example, Benson Mates, "Analytic Sentences," *Philosophical Review* 60:4 (October 1951), 528-30; H P. Grice and P. F. Strawson, "In Defense of a Dogma," *Philosophical Review 65:2* (April 1956), 148; or Hilary Putnam, "Two Dogmas' Revisited," 88. Grice and Strawson compare analyticity in this respect to this family of notions that includes "morally wrong," "blamewor1hy," "breach of moral rules," or the family that includes "fact," "denial," "statement," "true," and "false."

but insist that there are concepts presupposed by all others.[6] In this respect, Quine's discussion may serve to clarify the notion of analyticity rather then overthrow it. In the constructive last section of this essay, however, Quine argues that one can give a thoroughgoing account of knowledge without appealing to the idea of necessary truths. It is to this account and its credibility that I now tum.

Quine argues persuasively that any single belief depends upon many others. Even a simple descriptive statement such as "Right now, I am looking at a boat" depends on a nest of other beliefs which remain implicit, beliefs that range from mundane knowledge about sails and water to more abstract bits involving theories of time or logic. Thus, to borrow one of Quine's metaphors, all of one's beliefs form an interrelated web.

> The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience.[7]

As Quine's images also suggest, he believes that all statements are of a single kind. The only difference between one's beliefs about "casual matters" and those about "the profoundest laws" is their degree of proximity to their experiential conditions. Quine argues for this "monistic" [8] position on the grounds that, in a scientific theory, when predictions fail, the theory fails as a whole. To repair it, one may revise the errant predictions, or one may revise the definitions and laws that led to them. That is, although the laws and definitions are apparently necessarily true, true by virtue of the meanings of the terms that compose them, they too can be revised to account for

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[6] Franklin 1Gamwell, *The Divine Good: Modern Moral Theory and the Necessity of God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 96, fn. 4.

[7] Quine, "Two Dogmas," 42.

[8] Quine calls his position "methodological monism" in "Five Milestones of Empiricism," *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 71-72.

"recalcitrant experience. "[9] Quine then takes a more radical step. He argues that revisability extends throughout the theory, not only to its definitions but to the principles of logic and mathematics used in it as well. Insofar as logic and mathematics are applied in the natural sciences, they share its contingent status. "Revision of the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what difference is there in principle between such a shift and the shift whereby Kepler superseded Ptolemy, or Einstein Newton, or Darwin Aristotle?" [10]

There is of course a difference between the laws of physics, which are expressly created to account for experience, and logical principles. Quine accounts for this difference by saying that logical principles are so central to one's field of knowledge that to revise them would cause enormous violence to the rest of one's system. Under ordinary conditions, it will be preferable to revise any other belief, and the knower follows a "maxim of minimum mutilation." Despite this difference in the degree of willingness to revise, however, there is no qualitative difference, and even logical principles are ultimately confirmed or infirmed by experience. Consequently, the distinction between contingent and necessary statements breaks down.

> [I]t becomes folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system.... Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to

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[9] For an example of revising the law that momentum is proportional to velocity, see W. V. Quine, "Necessary Truth," *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays,* rev. and enl. ed (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[10] Quine, "Two Dogmas," 43. Some of Quine's commentators rightly complain that, other than this one sentence, "Two Dogmas" pays little attention to the revisablity of logic. This one sentence has, however, generated an enormous amount of literature. For a fuller treatment by Quine, 8"*Philosophy of Logic* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), chap. 6. Important discussions can be found in Hilary Putnam, "The Logic of Quantum Mechanics," *Mathematics, Matter, and Method: Philosophical Papers,* Vol. 1(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 174-97; Michael Dummett, "Is Logic Empirical?" *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth, 1978), 269-89; and David Bostock, "Logic and Empiricism," *Mind* 99:4 (October 1990): 571-82.

revision. [11]

Given that it is logically possible that any statement may be revised, there is no statement true in all possible worlds, no statement whose denial is self-contradictory. All claims, including those of metaphysics, are on a par with the claims of natural science. [12] Logical necessity, strictly speaking, is eliminated.

Quine's view has been criticized on the grounds that one cannot do away with logically necessary principles, because the very process of revision requires them. To judge, for example, that one's predictions have failed, one must be able to recognize the contradiction between one's prediction (p) and the recalcitrant experience (not-p).[13] And to assess which statements the revision of which will accommodate the recalcitrant experiences, and which revision will produce the least changes to one's system, one must employ the principle of modus ponens. The very practice of inquiry thus requires logical principles which operate on a level above that of the claims being revised. Some critics have pointed out that Quine's own discussion of revision appeals to such logical principles, for example, when Quine writes that the "re-evaluation of some statements *entails* re-evaluation of others" and "having re-evaluated one statement we *must* re-evaluate some others, *because of their logical connections."*[14] As James F. Harris writes:

> Clearly, there must be some rules on the meta-linguistic level for revising particular statements on the basis of other statements. Otherwise, the process of re-evaluation,

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[11] Quine, "Two Dogmas," 43.

[12] Quine, "Two Dogmas," 20, 45.

[13] As Quine admits, "When a set of beliefs have accumulated to the point of contradiction . . . we can be sure that we are going to have to drop one of the beliefs in that subset, whatever else we do." W. V. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *Web of Belief* (New York: Random House, 1970), 10.

[14] Quine, "Two Dogmas," 42; quoted in James F. Harris, *Against Relativism: A Philosophical Defense of Mthod* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1992), 34; emphasis added by Harris. These same quotes bother David Rynin in "The Dogma of Logical Pragmatism," *Mind* 55:259 (July 1956), 386. My treatment of Quine owes a great deal to Harris and I do not mean to suggest that he (or Rynin) stops with this one criticism.

the whole process of the assessment of the field, becomes a random process, and surely this cannot be what Quine intends since then there would be no way for a person to conduct the assessment with the pragmatic intention of causing minimal disruption to the network. [15]

Quine can, however, respond to this criticism. In arguing that all members of the field of knowledge are revisable, Quine does not *reject* logical principles but merely treats them as "further elements of the field."[16] In order to revise one's beliefs, such principles as non-contradiction and modus ponens may indeed be necessary, but this does not rule out the possibility that on another occasion the principles themselves might be amended. Quine permits the idea of necessity relative to context, what might be called "provisional" or "contextual" necessity, in distinction from absolute necessity. In order to revise any belief, there is always a background of assumptions that are not questioned-and not questionable-for the purposes of that revision. "Relativity to the context or circumstances of the moment-this is for me the keynote."[17] In fact, logical principles may be so useful that one never chooses to revise them, but Quine's point is that this does not justify treating them as different in kind: "Once we abstract from the passing concerns of the moment, I can recognize only gradations of obviousness, gradations of consensus, gradations of platitude, rather than any intelligible demarcation between the necessary and the contingent."[18]

The more trenchant question for Quine's position is not how any claim could be revised without appealing to logically necessary principles, but specifically how those principles themselves could be revised without at the same time appealing to them. As Quine admits in the quotes above, revision requires at least the principles of non-contradiction and modus ponens. In order to revise one's beliefs, then, one presumably reasons in this way: this recalcitrant experience contradicts some part of my system; and if I revise this,

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[15] Harris, *Against Relativism,* 37.

[16] Quine, "Two Dogmas," 42.

[17] Quine, "Reply to Bohnert," in Lewis Edwin Hahn and Paul Arthur Schilpp, eds., *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Press, 1986), 93.

[18] Quine, "Reply to Bohnert," 94.

then I must revise that. This train of reasoning eventually leads one toward the center of one's system of beliefs, where one concludes that, if statement p is true, then the statement of modus ponens must be revised. But how can one argue that, if p, then q, where q is the denial of "if p, then q"? If the reasoning is true, it is false. The same holds for the principle of non-contradiction: it seems impossible to reason, either p or not-p, where not-p is the denial of "either p or not-p." And even if one could employ a principle while revising it, creating, for example, a revised version of the principle of modus ponens, then the original principle would still be active. It would not really be revised but would be held, so to speak, above the revision, immune. A change of logic is a change of subject. Hence some of the elements of the field have the peculiar character that they must be held valid for any reasoning to take place, including reasoning about their own character. They are, in a word, necessary. Call this, the unrevisablity of (at least some) logical principles, the first problem for this strategy.

A second and related inconsistency arises whenever one produces a statement that summarizes what it is that a complete naturalism stands for. That is, any statement like "no statement is immune from revision" also seems to be logically necessary. It appears to be precisely a second-order rule about the character of all possible statements, and therefore beyond the reach of experience, however recalcitrant. This is surely not how Quine intends it, however, for if it were necessary it would be equivalent to the statement "it is logically necessary that no claims are logically necessary," a clear example of self-referential incoherence. [19] Instead, it seems that Quine must treat this statement as an inductive generalization, one that may come to be revised in the long term. But it remains a peculiar claim, for, unlike other examples of falsifiable analytic claims such as "all swans are white" or "all lemons are fruit," Quine's claim concerns all claims and therefore includes itself. This self-referentiality is what generates all the inconsistencies, *whether or not the claim actually gets revised.* On the one hand, if the statement that "no

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[19] Maurice Mandelbaum bas called this 1he "self-excepting fallacy," that is, the fallacy of stating a generalization that purports to bold of all cases but which, inconsistently, is not applied to one's own.. See Mandelbaum, "Some Instances of the Self-Excepting Fallacy," *Psychologische Beitrage* 6 (1962): 383-86, and "Subjective, Objective, and Conceptual Relativisms," in Michael Krausz and Jack W. Meiland, eds., *Relativism: Cognitive and Moral* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982), 36.

statement is immune from revision" *is* eventually revised, then it will be the case that "at least one statement is immune from revision," and Quine's program will have been disproved. On the other hand, if the claim is not or not yet revised, one cannot accept Quine's program "in the meantime," as a sort of working hypothesis, because of its self-referential character. Consider the following. It is a condition of revising Quine's claim that one find a true claim that is logically necessary. But if one discovers such a claim, then Quine's claim is not only false, it is necessarily false. It has been false all along and could never have been true. Precisely because it is a claim about all claims it puts itself in the position of being either logically necessary or logically impossible, which is to say that it is itself a putatively necessary claim. But since it is a necessary claim that denies the possibility of necessary claims, it is self-referentially inconsistent.

To argue that all claims are contingent, then, is self-refuting. Perhaps, however, Quine does not intend to argue for an anti-metaphysical position but simply to make the observation that apparently necessary claims have been revised in the past and so a sense of history (and of humility) leads one not to claim any absoluteness or finality for what appears necessary now. Hilary Putnam interprets Quine in this manner, calling Quine's argument "an induction from the history of science" and chiding those who argue that Quine's position is self-refuting for taking a "cheap shot."[20] According to Putnam, Quine makes an observation of historic importance for philosophy: that the distinction between contingent and necessary statements is better understood as a distinction between those statements that can be revised in light of experience alone and those whose revision waits on the emergence of a rival theory.

While this distinction is certainly legitimate, its use in an argument against the possibility of necessary statements trades on an ambiguity in the term "revisable." To say that a claim is "revisable" may refer either to its epistemic character (that the claim is made fallibly, and the one who asserts it may be wrong) or to its logical character (that the claim is contingent, and that about which it is asserted may be otherwise). Neither interpretation of

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2[20] For what Putnam calls Quine's historical argument, see "Two Dogmas' Revisited," 90-92; for the reference to the *a priori* cheap shot, see "There Is at Least One *A Priori* Truth," *Realism and Reason,* 98.

the historical argument will do the work Quine needs. In the first case, to recognize that a claim is fallible has no bearing on its logical character. For this reason, even a complete fallibilism does not refute the possibility of necessary claims: one can fallibly hold that something is true some of the time or one can fallibly hold that it is true come what may.[21] As Aron Edidin says, *"A priori* justification must be independent of empirical evidence, but it seems perverse to require that it also be independent of non-empirical evidence, for example, that of deduction, logical intuition, or thought experiment."[22] In the second case, if Quine means to show that all claims are logically contingent, then his historical evidence does not address the point. That a claim about matter in Newton's system or about space in pre-Lobachevskiian geometry turns out with the emergence of a superior theory to be necessary only given the axioms of an obsolete system does not prove that logically necessary claims are impossible, but only that these particular claims were incorrectly classified. They were not absolutely necessary, but only conditionally necessary. With the emergence of the alternative theory, their correct status is recognized. (Moreover, they do not become contingent claims but remain necessary claims, of a conditional sort.) In short, if one wants to argue that there are no absolutely necessary claims, claims that hold true under any set of axioms, it is not appropriate to point out that there have been some claims that did not make the grade. Historical observations and inductive arguments are simply not appropriate to conclusions about every possible claim. Unless the statement that no claims are logically necessary is argued as itself logically necessary, no amount of empirical evidence can prove it, but to argue for it as a necessary claim is self-contradictory. Hence the second problem generated by this strategy is to state one's position without incurring this self-referential inconsistency.

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[21] For a textbook treatment of this point, see Raymond Bradley and Norman Swartz, *Possible Worlds: An Introduction to Philosophy and its Logic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 155-56.

[22] Aron Edidin, *"A Priori* Knowledge for Fallibilists," *Philosophical Studies* 46:2 (September 1984), 189.

The first strategy for an anti-metaphysical position stumbles on its need to prove that logic and its own basic principles are contingent. The second strategy avoids these problems by distinguishing between the logical necessity of propositions and the ontological necessity of things. In this way it seeks to affirm the possibility of some logically necessary statements while still denying the possibility of any logically necessary *existential* statements. The existence of anything is on this account logically contingent.

John Hick has developed a position of this type which defends the intelligibility of both logical and ontological necessity. [23] By logical necessity, Hick means the predication of the property of necessity of a proposition, for example, "It is logically necessary that p," or, simply, "Necessarily, p." Logical necessity designates for Hick a linguistic or conceptual affair: "To say that a given proposition is logically true, or logically necessary, or analytic, is generally intended to signify that it is true by virtue of the meanings of the terms which compose it."[24] Hence by logical necessity Hick means to permit both formal logical truths (such as "for any statement, either p or not-p"), and analytic statements (such as "blue is a color"). By ontological necessity, on the other hand, Hick means the predication of the property of necessary existence of an entity. To say that something has necessary existence is to say that its existence depends on no conditions or factors other than itself. An ontologically necessary being would therefore be eternal, incorruptible, and

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[23] Hick works out this distinction in three repetitive articles: "God as Necessary Being," *Journal of Philosophy* 57:22-3 (Oct 27 - Nov 10, 1960), 725-34; "Necessary Being," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14:4 (1961): 353-69; and "A Critique of the 'Second Argument,'" in John Hick and Arthur C. McGill, eds., *The Many-Faced Argument: Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1967), 341-56. Another position of this type (excluded from this essay for reasons of space) also distinguishes between logical and ontological necessity but argues that the latter is senseless, that the only mode of necessity there can be is logical necessity. For this argument, see Quine, "Reference and Modality," *From a Logical Point of View,* 139-59. For a powerful critique of Quine's position from the perspective of neoclassical metaphysics, see George L. Goodwin, *The Ontological Argument of Charles Hartshorne* (Missoula, MN: Scholars Press, 1978), chap. *N,* and "'De Re' Modality and the Ontological Argument," in Marco M. Olivetti, ed, *L'Argomento Ontologico* (Pava: CELAM, 1990); for an equally powerful critique from the perspective of possible world semantics, see Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature a/ Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 222-51.

[24] Hick, "A Critique of the 'Second Argument,'" 341.

Indestructible.[25] Such a being would exist "without beginning or end, and without origin, cause, or ground of any kind whatsoever. "[26]

According to Hick, one can admit the intelligibility of both logical and ontological necessity and, as long as one keeps them apart, neither will imply a logically necessary existential proposition. That is, Hick denies that either logically necessary statements or statements about ontological necessity lead to metaphysics. Why not? In the first case, a logically necessary statement can never describe what exists because the word "exists" is not properly a descriptive term. Hick contends that it has been made clear by Kant, and later reinforced by Russell's theory of descriptions, that it is mistaken to think of "existence" as a quality or attribute. "Existence is not a predicate comparable with, say, 'red' or 'four-footed' as qualities which a given entity might have or lack. To affirm that x exists is not to say that x has, among its several properties, that of existence; it is to perform the quite different operation of asserting that the concept of x is instantiated." [27] In short, since existence is not a property, it cannot be a logically necessary property. Consequently, one cannot sensibly say that "it is logically necessary that p" when p is an existential claim. To say that something exists is simply shorthand for saying that there is something that answers the description of x. There cannot be a logically necessary entity, for logical necessity has no purchase on matters of fact and existence.

Likewise, statements about ontological necessity, even if they are true, are not metaphysical. Ontological necessity is intelligible, Hick grants, because one can make sense of the idea that an entity exists under all conditions-"always and everywhere." In fact, one might simply define a concept as the concept of an eternal, indestructible, and incorruptible entity. Ontological necessity can be a property, just as ontological contingency is. But Hick argues that ontologically necessary existence does not imply logically necessary existence. If it did, such an entity would exist in every logically possible world, including the actual world. But Hick argues that

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[25] Hick, "God as Necessary Being," 732.

[26] Ibid., 733.

[27] Hick,*An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 75; for a fuller treatment of Kant's critical contribution to Hick's position, see Hick, "Ontological Argument for the Existence of God," in Paul Edwards, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy 5* (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press, 1967), 539-40.

even if there exists an ontologically necessary being, it might not have existed; it is logically possible that it not exist. There is therefore a gap between ontology and logic. As Hick puts it, even if one defines a concept as that of "an ontologically necessary entity," the question "whether *that* concept is instantiated still cannot be determined by the concept itself but only by the facts of the universe." [28] From the fact that a being exists necessarily, it does not follow that it necessarily exists. It only follows that if such a being exists, it will exist eternally, independently, without a cause, and so forth. Thus Hick not only distinguishes but also separates an entity's logical status from its real status. Neither implies the other, and so, no matter how something exists, it is always logically possible that it did not.[29]

This separation of logic and ontology permits Hick to avoid both of the problems into which Quine's strategy fell. First, one need not claim that logical principles are contingent, for logically necessary claims are permitted. Second, one also avoids the self-referential problem into which Quine's first position fell, for one can state and defend one's position as a logically necessary, non-existential claim. That is, one can state and defend one's position by interpreting the statement that it is logically contingent that anything exists as a statement not about entities but about statements, for example, as "Any statement of the form 'x exists' is logically contingent." Because this statement is not existential, it can be defended as logically necessary without incurring self-referential inconsistency.

Now, the alternative to Hick's position would be one in which logic and ontology do imply each other. On such an account, those states of affairs that are ontologically contingent correspond to logical possibilities; those that are ontologically necessary correspond to logical necessities. It does not make sense on such an account to say that an ontological possibility will necessarily be, nor that a state of affairs that is ontologically necessary might not be.

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[28] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion, 75.* For Hick, the relevant facts may not be apparent while one is still in the universe. See Hick, "Theology and Verification," *Theology Today* 17:1(April 1960): 12-31.

[29] The separation of logic and ontology has appealed to some radical empiricists as well. See Jerome A Stone, *The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence: A Naturalist Philosophy of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 170-78, and perhaps also Nancy Frankenberry, *Religion and Radical Empiricism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 22-23.

Such is the position of Charles Hartshorne, who argues that logic and the meanings of terms grow out of an involvement with the real world and that therefore, although logic and ontology can be distinguished, these are not separable.[30] Hartshorne's position has been argued for by Larry Goodwin, upon whose clarity I cannot improve.

> To say that a concept is logically possible ... is simply to say that the *meanings* involved in the concept do not contradict each other. But meanings have *reference.* ... In other words, the non-contradictory *meanings* involved in genuinely logical possibilities must themselves refer at least to possibilities. What sort of possibilities? Obviously, at some point, to *real* possibilities; for if the meanings involved in logical possibility A refer to logical possibility B, [and so on]...we have an infinite regress. *At some point the meanings involved in a logical possibility must refer to a real possibility.* In short, compatibility with actuality... is not only the definition of real...potentiality, it is also the criterion for logical conceivability, because a consistent thought cannot refer only to its own consistency.[31]

One can call this position one of modal coincidence, Hick's one of modal separation.

One clear point of conflict between these two theories of modality is whether an ontologically necessary being would also be logically necessary. If logical and ontological modalities imply each other, as Hartshorne has it, the statement that an ontologically necessary being exists would have to be logically necessary. Hick is clearly opposed to this: "These two concepts are

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[30] See especially, Charles Hartshorne, "Real Possibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 60 (October 1963): 593-605.

[31] Goodwin, *The Ontological Argument of Charles Hartshorne,* 41-42. In a similar vein, David Haight has charged that logic separated from reality is "empty" and "rootless." Regarding the logically necessary statement that "Whatever is blue is colored," he asks, "Is it not the case that logical necessity is grounded in ontological necessity by virtue of the fact that, e.g., blue is *in fact* ... a color?" David Haight, "Is Existence an Essential Predicate?" *Idealistic Studies* 7:2 (May 1977), 194.

quite distinct; logical necessity is not a case of ontological necessity, nor vice versa. "[32] On Hick's position, it is logically possible that an ontologically necessary being does not exist, and so, even if such a being exists, this fact is logically contingent. How can one decide between these two positions? Hick appeals to conceivability. "Post-Humean empiricism can assign no meaning to the idea of [logically] necessary existence, since nothing can be conceived to exist that cannot also be conceived not to exist."[33] That is, it seems that one can always conceive the nonexistence of an ontologically necessary being, because as a matter of fact one can conceive the non-existence of anything in general. This then is a second (and nontheistic) point of conflict between these two theories: one asserts and the other denies that it makes sense to say that anything might not exist.

Both the claim about conceiving the nonexistence of an ontologically necessary being and the claim about conceiving nonexistence in general, however, lead to difficulties, if not paradoxes. [34] Consider the first, that one can conceive the nonexistence of a being that can exist under any conditions. What would such a conception be like? Any conceivable experience is by definition one with which such a being is compatible! And even if one claims to be able to conceive this non-existence, it seems that it would be impossible to explain it. The problem is this: if someone asks Hick why a logically necessary statement is true, he can respond, "because it could not be otherwise." But by treating the existence of an ontologically necessary being as logically contingent, Hick closes the door on this kind of explanation; it *could* be otherwise. But because the existence of this being is ontologically necessary, Hick also rules out the possibility of a causal, naturalistic explanation. If such a being exists, it exists of its own power, necessarily, independently, indestructibly. But what then could keep it from existing? It is contingent *upon* nothing, yet it still is contingent. Hick correctly says that the existence of an ontologically necessary being is on his account a brute fact, sheer datum, but this is not an explanation; it is the lack of an explanation.

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[32] Hick, "A Critique of the 'Second Argument,'" 348.

[33] Hick, "God as Necessary Being," 727.

[34] For an excellent treatment of the possibilities of conceiving nonexistence, see Robert Merrihew Adams, "Has It Been Proved That All Real Existence is Contingent?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8:3 (July 1971): 284-91.

As Hartshorne has said, such a being considered under Hick's modal separation is an absolutely irrational fact, indistinguishable from a reductio of itself.[35]

Turn now to the claim that one can conceive the nonexistence of any entity, that the denial of existence is logically possible in every case. Hick denies that it is logically necessary that something exists. But to deny the logical necessity of such a statement commits one to the claim that *it is logically possible that nothing exists,* and this is a peculiar claim. It is not simply the claim that there are relative lacks or absences or privations but rather an appeal to the intelligibility of the idea of absolute nothingness. If Hick is correct, it must be conceivable that absolutely nothing exists. What would it mean to say this? As with the above case, no conceivable experience could verify this claim, and any conceivable experience falsifies it. Moreover, confronted as one is with a world full of things, this claim is one whose meaningfulness makes no practical difference for human action, and cannot conceivably make such a difference. Hence this second strategy for a complete naturalism requires that one grant the meaningfulness of a statement with neither empirical nor pragmatic value.[36]

I have argued above that Hick connects words in a logical order without relation to any conceivable states of affairs. This is a consequence (if not the very definition) of the separation of logic and ontology. One can now see the cost of defending one's naturalism in this way. The claim that all things exist contingently implies or is equivalent to the claim that it is logically possible that nothing exist. Yet surely it is a condition of a meaningful claim that one can conceive of some criteria by which the claim might be validated,

[35] Hartshorne, "Is the Denial of Existence Ever Contradictory?" *Journal of Philosophy* 58:4 (February 17, 1966), 89. For further arguments that ontological necessity implies logical necessity, see Alan G. Nasser, "Factual and Logical Necessity and the Ontological Argument," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 113 (September 1971): 385-402, and John D. White, "God and Necessity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10:3 (1979): 177-87.

[36] As Hartshorne has jibed, the possibility of nothing is no more a possibility than having nothing to eat is a kind of meal. Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1970), 245; see also "Non-restrictive Existential Statements," 159-72. For a classical analysis of the idea of nothing, one in accord with an empirical and pragmatic understanding of meaning, see Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* translated by Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modem Library, 1944), 296-324.

and this claim about pure nothingness fails.

III.

Given the question "Does the world include any necessary features?" the first two strategies try to argue that it does not. One can call these two strategies attempts to *deny* metaphysics. I have argued that both strategies generate contradictions. Another response to the metaphysical question is possible if one can simply turn away from the question, leaving it unanswered as useless, uninteresting, or pernicious. One can call this a *refusal* of metaphysics. Richard Rorty's is the most influential attempt to develop a strategy that does not argue against but simply abandons metaphysics.

Rorty agrees with Quine that there are no absolutely necessary claims: "a necessary truth is just a statement such that nobody has given us any interesting alternatives which would lead us to question it."[37] Rorty's position differs from Quine's, and from Hick's, however, in that he does not try to argue that there are or could be no necessary claims. Rorty considers the history of arguments over whether there are or are not necessary claims a stalemate. "I do not know what would count as a noncircular metaphysical or epistemological or semantical argument for seeing them in *either* way."[38] Rorty's goal is to suggest that the very idea of necessary truths is not a useful one and is better laid aside. Although this strategy is sometimes considered irrationalist or not really philosophical, it is best seen, in my opinion, as a legitimate attempt to reject not only his opponents' claims, but also their presuppositions.

According to Rorty, the belief that one needs necessary truths follows from the presupposition that true ideas or true sentences are those that successfully "represent" or "picture" reality. Given this presupposition, it makes sense to ask whether one's propositions really do correspond to what there is and it makes sense to search for proof that they do. Proof would be

[37] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 175. Rorty labels himself a naturalist, defining naturalism "as the view that *anything* might have been otherwise." Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), *55,* emphasis in original.

[38] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism," *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 174, emphasis added.

a proposition that *must* be true, that cannot be denied, a necessary truth.

But the idea that one can compare one's propositions to nonpropositional reality is a strange one, Rorty argues, and no one has yet been able to show how it could be done. The problem is this. In order to show that a proposition is true, one needs to identify the nonpropositional "stuff" which makes it true. But as soon as one describes this stuff-whether as "experience," or "sensory stimuli," or what have you-it is no longer nonpropositional stuff. Any appeal to "the world" is circular because all descriptions are embedded in the language of some particular set of circumstances. "[N]othing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and ... there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some other test than coherence."[39] One can now appreciate why Rorty believes that the history of metaphysical and anti-metaphysical arguments issues in a stalemate. Resolution of this debate seems to require that someone find some nonlinguistic place from which to test the adequacy of one's linguistic claims. Representationalism thus involves the urge to escape history and language in order to assume a "God's eye view" or a "view from nowhere," untainted by the contingencies of language and social convention. Rorty suggests that it is implausible to believe that a non-causal link between beliefs and non-beliefs is forthcoming. There is no test that can tell us whether representations are accurate, other than the success which is supposedly explained by that accuracy.

But if the world does not make beliefs true, what does? Rorty's answer is, "nothing." Beliefs are not "made true." It is precisely this question that Rorty wants philosophers to drop. Rorty proposes that on the subject of truth philosophers rest content with a true proposition's utility and leave the question of what makes it useful as an empty one. "True" does not *stand for* anything, and so one need not try to define or explain it.[40] Rorty proposes that

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[39] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* 178.

[40] In one typically incisive passage, Rorty argues that "it would be a mistake to think of 'true' as having an explanatory use on the basis of such examples as 'He found the correct house because his belief about its location was true' and 'Priestley failed to understand the nature of oxygen because his beliefs about the nature of combustion were false.' The quoted sentences are not explanations but promissory notes for explanations. To get them cashed, to get real explanations, we need to say things like 'He found the correct house because he believed that it was located at...' and 'Priestley failed because he thought that phlogiston ...' The explanation

one simply drop the idea that propositions mirror the world-what Dewey called "the spectator theory of knowledge"-and consider them instead as tools developed to work upon the world. "It is the vocabulary of practise rather than of theory, of action rather than contemplation, in which one can say something useful about truth."[41] This pragmatism is itself not a proposal for a new, pragmatic answer to the question of truth, but the dissolution of the question. "[I]t is simply anti-essentialism applied to notions like 'truth,' 'knowledge,' 'language,' 'morality' and similar objects of philosophical theorizing."[42] What Rorty proposes is philosophy as a therapeutic, nonsysternatic, edifying conversation, not as the inquiry into truths which lie "beyond" or "above" all other disciplines. Such a strategy might be distinguished from Quine's and Hick's by saying that, whereas the first two strategies were anti-metaphysical, Rorty's is simply non-metaphysical. It simply drops the question.

How does Rorty justify his pragmatism? To give a positive account of what makes his position true would clearly play into the metaphysician's hands, and Rorty is very conscious of the self-referential traps involved in trying to overcome what he has called the representationalist tradition. Rorty concludes that there is no way to argue for a non-metaphysical philosophy, except by replying to its critics.[43] What one can do is make ad hoc criticisms of necessary claims as they arise, limit oneself to negative points, and refuse the attempt to explain or theorize one's position.[44] In this, one emulates the later Wittgenstein who, "at his best, just makes fun of the whole idea that there is something here to be explained" and the later Heidegger who offers

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of success and failure is given by the details about what was true or what was false, not by the truth or falsity itself.... If truth *itself* is to be an explanation of something, that explanandum must be of something which can be caused by truth, but not caused by the content of true beliefs." Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth," *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth,* 140-41.

[41] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism," 162.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* 181. See also *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 44, 78, for an explanation of why "'argument" is not the right word" for Rorty's method.

[44] On purely negative points, see Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism,* xx, and "Solidarity or Objectivity?" *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth,* 23-24. For explanation refusal see *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* 176, 180.

only an "endless, repetitive, literary-historical 'deconstruction' of the 'metaphysics of presence'." [45] If others persist in asking constructive, metaphysical questions such as "are there necessary features of the world?" one ought simply to "change the subject."[46]

Rorty's ironic gestures should not give the impression that he refuses to justify his position, but only that he refuses to be drawn into justification by correspondence. For Rorty, the unit of persuasion is the vocabulary and the justification of a vocabulary turns on its utility, on whether it helps one do what one is interested in doing. "The question whether the pragmatist view of truth-that it is not a profitable topic-is itself *true* is thus a question about whether a post-Philosophical culture is a good thing to try for."[47] One might object that Rorty's justification of pragmatism is circular, that he proposes that one adopt the vocabulary of pragmatism because it will be pragmatic. But Rorty's point is this: if there are no necessary claims to serve as transcendental standards for the choice of vocabularies as a whole, then all justification is circular. Neither the pragmatist nor the metaphysician can justify their position *without* circularity.[48]

I believe that, like the attempts to deny metaphysics, this attempt to abandon or circumvent it is not successful. To show why, let me focus on Rorty's claim that, when one drops the idea of representationalism, the urge to find necessary truths falls with it. Rorty considers representationalism and necessity linked because he treats necessity as "that special sort of certainty associated with visual perception."[49] "The idea of 'necessary truth' is just the idea of a proposition which is believed because the 'grip' of the object on us is ineluctable.'[50] Rorty then argues that, if one ceases to think of justification as the accurate relation of beliefs to objects and thinks of it rather as the coherent relation of beliefs to each other, then distinctions such as that between necessarily-existing objects and contingently-existing objects lose their force. In their place one has the Quinean distinction between those beliefs with which one is willing to part, and those with which, for the sake

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[45] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism,* 34, xxii.
[46] Ibid, xiv.
[41] Ibid, vliii.
[48] Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" 28-29.
[49] *Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* 181.
so Ibid, 157.

of present purposes at least, one is not. Representationalism was the problematic that generated skepticism, and thereby generated a need for necessary truths. When one abandons it, one also should lose the feeling that one needs more than every day, "retail," contingent truths.

But do all necessary claims depend on representationalism, or can there be pragmatic necessary claims? Imagine the following thought experiment. Rorty proposes that philosophers abandon the vocabulary of contemplation and objects, where the problems of representationalism arose, infavor of the vocabulary of practice and action, where they would not. Let us say that metaphysically minded philosophers agree to this. They agree, that is, that no appeals to prelinguistic awareness, intuitions, or inner representations can be used to justify knowledge and that justification must always be between propositions. Let us say that they agree also that all theoretical judgments are implicitly judgments of value, and that all reflection is conditioned by the social and linguistic context in which it occurs. In short, they abandon representationalism and embrace pragmatism (at least to this extent). What follows? It still seems natural and legitimate that one of the questions in which these philosophers will be interested will be whether any of their socially and linguistically mediated beliefs cannot be consistently denied. Granting that all of their beliefs arise in a particular context and for a particular purpose, the question remains whether any of them successfully transcend their origins, however tentatively and fallibly, to describe necessary features of reality. [51] In other words, there seems no reason why transcendental philosophy cannot make the "pragmatic tum," and seek the necessary conditions of human understanding in purposeful, social agency just as it earlier had sought them in the make-up of the solitary knowing subject. [2]

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[51] In fact, one might take James's dictum that "the vocabulary of practice is ineliminable" (quoted by Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism," 163) as itself a necessary claim about the character or conditions of meaning.

[52] Two major proposals for such a shift are those of Karl-Otto Apel and Charles Taylor. For programmatic statements, see Apel, "The Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy," in *Understanding an Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective,* translated by Georgia Warnke (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 232-42; and Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (1978-79): l51-*65.*

Of course, Rorty may protest that the shift to pragmatism does not discover anything positive about the nature of social practice, "that it is more prevalent than had previously been thought."[53] He may believe that human actions have no transcendental features. But it is not clear what reasons he can give. As I hope to have showed, anti-representationalism by itself is not a reason to abandon metaphysics, and Rorty identifies his pragmatism with anti-representationalism. [54]

A transcendental pragmatism like the one I am here outlining would seek to describe the character or conditions of human subjectivity as such. Otherwise put, it would seek to identify logically necessary claims about human subjectivity. To be sure, this task is not the same as that of a transcendental metaphysics which seeks to describe the character or conditions of reality as such, but the former would include the latter, for the simple reason that human subjects are part of reality, and so some of the conditions of being a human subject are the conditions of being anything at all. This relationship is often denied (for example, by Kant) on the grounds that transcendental reflection may uncover the conditions for the possibility of phenomena or things insofar as they appear, but it cannot reveal the character of things in themselves. This objection, however, assumes representationalism; it assumes, that is, the intelligibility of the idea of a reality that is outside the mind and can never be known. But transcendental arguments, I have argued, can make the pragmatic turn and drop this assumption. Precisely because representationalism is incredible and there can be no access to the world as it is in itself, one cannot restrict necessary claims to claims about human subjectivity. A transcendental claim about the world really is *about the world.* If this argument is sound, genuine metaphysical inquiry is actually made possible by the pragmatic critique of

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[53] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism,* xx.

[54] See, for example, "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth," 127, and "Introduction: Pragmatism as Anti-Representationalism," in John P. Murphy, *Pragmatism: From Peirce to Davidson* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 1-6. This is not to deny that, "in its wholeness," pragmatism is also "a project for a social democratic utopia," that is, a political movement. Rorty, "Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism," *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 47.

representationalism. [55]

In order to clarify my differences from Rorty, one can distinguish between those necessary claims that are dependent upon representationalism and those that are independent of it. In the first case, there are claims that are alleged to be necessary in the sense that they describe immediate, and therefore epistemically certain, sensory knowledge. Such claims are typically empirical claims about a particular experience or aspect of an experience upon which one can base or legitimize more complex empirical knowledge. It is this kind *of foundationalist* claim that Rorty's critique of representationalism excludes. In the second case, there are claims that are alleged to be necessary in an altogether different sense, namely, that they describe the formal or generic features of all things. Such *metaphysical* claims cannot be used to legitimize empirical claims, nor can empirical claims be derived from them. Examples of such claims include Aristotle's suggestion that all things are composed of substances or Whitehead's that all things are composed of events. On the view outlined here, these metaphysical claims are not subject to Rorty's criticisms as long as one recognizes that metaphysical claims, like all claims, are linguistically mediated and epistemically fallible. Although Rorty collapses what I am here calling foundationalism and metaphysics, and he writes as if representationalism is equally the condition for metaphysics, [56] it is difficult to see how the critique of representationalism could be relevant to it.

One last point. The idea that one can simply abandon metaphysics seems confused. One can abandon metaphysics without inconsistency only if one can find an alternative form of discourse that does not imply any metaphysical features. But if one recognizes metaphysics as a discipline that reveals "the traits and characters that are sure to turn up in every universe of

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[55] One can tum for support for this argument to the transcendental philosophy of Donald Davidson, who argues that an inquiry which studies "the most general aspects of language" also studies "the most general aspects of reality." See Davidson, "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, l984), 201. See also the last paragraph of "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 198.

[56] For example, "Only what Dewey called a spectator theory of knowledge can lead one to think that metaphysics . . . might someday penetrate through the veil of appearances and allow us to glimpse things as they are in themselves." Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism as Anti-Representationalism," 2.

discourse," [57] then one cannot consistently refuse metaphysics unless one (secretly) denies that metaphysics is possible. In other words, for Rorty to insist to those who share his pragmatic presuppositions that one can change the subject or simply refuse to answer the question whether there are metaphysical characteristics is in effect to assert that there are none. For, if there are any such characteristics, all human discourse will imply them. Hence it seems that there is no difference in principle between being non-metaphysical and being anti-metaphysical, between denying that there are necessary statements and refusing to answer the question whether there are any. Those who seek to avoid metaphysics can do so only by arguing with Quine or with Hick, two strategies with serious obstacles of their own.

The arguments of this paper have been solely negative. I have not laid out a positive understanding of metaphysics, nor have I shown how such an understanding would prove compatible with naturalism. I hope only that the reader has gotten the impression that defending naturalism without metaphysics is a problematic task. [58]

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[57] Dewey, *Experience and Nature,* 413.

[58] An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Group on Pragmatism and Empiricism in American- Religious Thought at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, 1993, November 23. I would like to thank that group, and in particular its co-chairs, Professor Nancy Frankenberry and Professor Jerome Stone, for the opportunity to raise and defend ideas critical of their own.