There is no Sufficiently Weak Being Constraint

$\sim$ 7200 words

Abstract

By a familiar argument, contingentists cannot accept both the Being Constraint and the principle of β-Conversion, on pain of necessitism. Given the wide endorsement and intuitive plausibility of these two principles, contingentists might be faced with an unpalatable choice. One way out for contingentists is weakening the Being Constraint so that the argument for necessitism fails to go through. This article considers the prospects of such a strategy. The article has two aims: First, I regiment two kinds of weakening proposed in the literature in a higher-order setting; Second, I propose two arguments for necessitism that go through even on the weakened version of the Being Constraint. I conclude that this should shake our confidence in there being a sufficiently weak Being Constraint for contingentists.

Keywords: being constraint; contingentism; predication; truth in a world;

1 Introduction

Consider the following three claims. (1) I exist, but had my parents not met, I would not have existed. (2) The sentence ascribing me the predicate of writing an article says the same thing as the sentence that I am writing an article. (3) For me to bear the property of writing an article, I must exist. Although these claims concern modal properties, semantic equivalence, and the necessary conditions for bearing a property, they are all plausibly true. When generalised, these claims are no less plausible: (1a) There are things that possibly do not exist; (2a) A sentence ascribing a predicate Y to a constant a is equivalent to the sentence Ya; (3a) Existence is a necessary condition for bearing properties or standing in relations. Call these claims **Contingentism**, **β-Conversion**, and the **Being Constraint**, respectively.

Before proceeding, we regiment Contingentism, β-Conversion, and the Being Constraint. To regiment β-Conversion, we employ a variable-binding operator λ that takes an open formula and outputs a predicate, with the predicate denoting a function from entities (of the type corresponding to that of the variable) to propositions. As such, given an open formula "Rx", the λ operator binds x and outputs $\lambda x.Rx$, a unary predicate. The result of applying the predicate to the constant a is written $(\lambda x.Rx)(a)$. Where Φ is an open formula with $x_1, ..., x_n$ free, $\Phi[a_1, ..., a_n/x_1, ..., x_n]$ is the result of substituting a_i for the x_i in Φ, and ϕ_i is any sentence, β-Conversion is the following claim (see Dorr (2016, p. 52)):

$$\begin{aligned}&\phi_i \leftrightarrow \phi_j, \text{ where } \phi_i \text{ is the result of replacing some constituent of } \phi_j \\ &\text{of the form } (\lambda x_1, ..., x_n.\Phi)(a_1, ..., a_n) \text{ with } \Phi[a_1, ..., a_n/x_1, ..., x_n]. \qquad (\beta\text{-Conversion})\end{aligned}$$

Intuitively, (β-Conv.) stipulates that substituting some constants for the unbound variables in a formula and applying the predicate formed by binding the variables of the formula to the constants can make no difference to the sentence in which these terms are embedded.

The property of existence plays a prominent role in both Contingentism and the Being Constraint. For the purpose of metaphysical theorising, this property is regimented as being identical to something, so that $E := \lambda x.\exists y\ x = y$. Necessitists maintain that, of necessity, everything necessarily exists (or is something).[1] With $\Box$ interpreted as metaphysical necessity and the quantifiers interpreted as unrestricted, this amounts to:

$$\Box\forall x\Box Ex \qquad \text{(N)}$$

Contingentism is the negation of (N) (i.e., either the claim that something that exists possibly does not exist, or the claim that something that possibly exists does not exist). The Being

[1] In the rest of the paper, we use the more colloquial 'exists' rather than 'is something'. Those who prefer the latter expression for our target notion may uniformly read our talk of 'existing' as talk of 'being something' – nothing substantive turns on this.

Constraint (BC) can in turn be regimented as follows (where Φ is now schematic for an n-ary predicate):

$$\Box\forall x_1 \ldots \Box\forall x_n \Box(\Phi x_1, \ldots, x_n \rightarrow (Ex_1 \wedge \cdots \wedge Ex_n)) \tag{BC}$$

Intuitively, (BC) maintains that predications (of properties and relations) are existence-entailing.

Despite the intuitive plausibility of Contingentism, (β-Conv.), and (BC), they are jointly inconsistent by the following argument:[2]

(1) $\Box\forall x\Box((\lambda z.\neg\exists y(y = z))(x) \rightarrow Ex)$ (BC)

(2) $\Box\forall x\Box(\neg\exists y(x = y) \rightarrow Ex)$ (1, by β-Conv.)

(3) $\Box\forall x\Box Ex$ (2, Tautological Equivalence)

The argument suggests that (BC) and (β-Conv.) are jointly incompatible from a contingentist perspective. As such, a committed contingentist initially motivated to accept both theses is led to revise her commitments.

Given a more expressive higher-order language, these considerations can be generalised. Before introducing higher-order analogues of (β-Conv.), (BC), and (C), a clarification of the technical apparatus of higher-order languages is in order. A higher-order language is a typed language that allows quantification into predicate, sentence, and other positions. The language I use in what follows has one *basic* type – that of individuals, denoted by e – with other types being defined inductively, so that if $\tau_1, ..., \tau_n$ is a type, $\langle\tau_1, ..., \tau_n\rangle$ is also a type. For each expression of type τ, $\langle\tau\rangle$ is the type of a function from entities of type τ to propositions. On this approach, $\langle e_1, ..., e_n\rangle$ is the type of n-ary relations between individuals of type e, $\langle\rangle$ is the type of propositions (the case of $\langle\tau_1, ..., \tau_n\rangle$ for $n = 0$), $\langle\langle\rangle_1, ..., \langle\rangle_n\rangle$ is the type of n-ary relations between propositions, and so on.[3]

If we adopt such a language, (β-Conv.), (BC) and (C) can be generalised to formulate analogues of the argument above for properties, propositions, and other entities of higher types. Indexing variables and terms by their type,[4] and adopting $\overline{x}$ as shorthand for $x_1, \ldots, x_n$ (and,

[2] Fine (2005, p. 200), Williamson (2013, pp. 186-7), and Dorr (2016, p. 55) discuss this argument.

[3] For further treatment of higher-order modal languages, see Gallin (1975), Williamson (2013, ch. 5), and Fritz (2023b). For a general defence of the use of higher-order languages for the purposes of metaphysical theorising, see Bacon (2024), (Dorr, 2016), Dorr, Hawthorne, and Yli-Vakkuri (2021), Jones (2018), and Williamson (2003). In this article, I suppose that such languages are in good standing; particularly, I suppose that such languages allow us to capture talk of properties and propositions as *sui generis* entities and not as values of first-order variables.

[4] In the discussion below, such indexing will be omitted for readability when the intended types can be inferred from context.

correspondingly, $\Box\forall\overline{x}$ as shorthand for $\Box\forall x_1 \ldots \Box\forall x_n$), we get the following generalisation:

$$\phi_i \leftrightarrow \phi_j, \text{ where } \phi_i \text{ is the result of replacing some constituent of } \phi_j \text{ of the form } (\lambda\overline{x_\sigma}.\Phi\overline{x})_{\langle\overline{\sigma}\rangle}(\overline{a_\sigma}) \text{ with } \Phi[\overline{a}/\overline{x}]. \tag{β-Conv.-Gen}$$

Similar extensions can be made for (BC) and Contingentism as long as we countenance a higher-order identity relation $\equiv$, defined as higher-order indiscernibility:

$$x_\sigma \equiv y_\sigma \ =_{df} \forall X_{\langle\sigma\rangle}(Xx \leftrightarrow Yx) \tag{$\equiv$}$$

With this in mind, the higher-order version of (BC) reads:

$$\Box\forall\overline{x_\sigma}\Box(\Phi_{\langle\overline{\sigma}\rangle}\overline{x} \rightarrow E_{\langle\overline{\sigma}\rangle}\overline{x}) \tag{BC-Gen}$$

In the same way, the higher-order generalisation of Necessitism reads:

$$\Box\forall z_\sigma\Box E_{\langle\sigma\rangle}z \tag{H.O.N.}$$

With these regimentations in hand, the argument to (H.O.N.) can be formulated by analogy to the argument to (N) above. Even without this argument, these regimentations are significant since, as we will see below, (H.O.N.) can be motivated equally with respect to properties of propositions (i.e., entities of type $\langle\langle\rangle\rangle$) as (N) can with respect to properties of individuals.

Various positions in modal metaphysics can be situated within the choice points opened by the inconsistency between [H.O.]Contingentism, (β-Conv.[-Gen]), and (BC[-Gen]) (see Rayo (2021)). Given the relatively economical derivation of necessitism, one has three standard options: either embrace necessitism, or reject either the Being Constraint or β-Conversion.[5] Nevertheless, the inconsistent triad still presents us with an unpalatable choice since all of its premises are independently plausible. As such, one might want to develop strategies that avoid all of the standard options by weakening one of the premises while keeping the weakened premise strong enough to match its initial motivations (for extant proposals along these lines, see references in Sections 2.1 and 2.3).

In this article, I consider the prospects of contingentist strategies that adopt weakened versions of (BC) supposed to avoid inconsistency. Specifically, I consider weakenings of (BC) that restrict the set of existence-entailing predications so that problematic instances of (BC) fail to hold (Section 2). Although this strategy will be explored schematically, I will point to two proposals from the literature that fit the general schema: namely, weakening (BC)

[5] The Being Constraint has been endorsed, in this context, by Jacinto (2019), Plantinga (1983), Stalnaker (1977, 2012), Stephanou (2007), and rejected by Dorr (2016), Fine (1985, 2005), and Goodman (2016a). It should be noted that some of these authors are necessitists, and suggest the relevant strategy as the best way for *contingentists* to proceed.

so that only predications that are true *in* a world are existence-entailing (Section 2.1) and weakening (BC) so that only worldly truths are existence entailing (Section 2.3). Although these weakenings counter the extant arguments for necessitism relying on instances of (BC), they arguably do not suffice. In Section 3, I outline two new arguments from the weakened version of (BC) to Necessitism, and discuss their acceptability to the contingentist. On this basis, I conclude that these and similarly motivated weakenings of (BC) are incompatible with contingentism.[6]

2 Weakening the Being Constraint

Before I survey the existing proposals for weakening (BC) in order to maintain its consistency with contingentism, I note their general pattern. Besides showing how such weakenings interact with the argument for Necessitism from (β-Conv.) and (BC), the pattern points out the family resemblance between existing proposals formalised in Sections 2.1 and 2.3.

As we saw above, (BC) captures the thesis that predications (of properties and relations) are existence-entailing. In another sense, (BC) determines, on the basis of certain true predications, which individuals exist. As such, based on facts about which conditions are satisfied by which individuals, (BC) indicates what a world's domain consists in. Roughly put: if we had no independent notion of what exists but had a sufficiently robust grasp on which conditions hold of which individuals, (BC) would deliver verdicts as to which individuals populate a world's domain. However, since most of us would claim that we *do* have a pre-theoretic notion of what exists, it is not necessary to solely rely on (BC)'s verdicts about what exists. Moreover, faced with a particularly objectionable verdict of (BC), we might even find it permissible to rule against (BC)'s verdict, as it were.

The argument from (1) to (3) shows that one is led to accept Necessitism through an application of (β-Conv.) after one has accepted an instance of (BC). Confronted with the instance $\Box\forall x\Box((\lambda z.\neg\exists y(z = y))(x) \rightarrow Ex)$, one might maintain that the formulation of (BC) is objectionably *strong* in that it delivers verdicts that do not square well with our independent grasp of what exists. (In this case, the objection is plausibly due to the fact that inferring existence from a predication of the property of non-existence appears dubious.) If (BC) is seen as a recipe for specifying what a world's domain consists in, contesting some of its verdicts amounts to claiming that the recipe *overgenerates*. If (BC) is seen as having unacceptable consequences, the appropriate response would be to weaken it so that its verdicts match the rest of our judgments.[7]

[6]The main claim of this article is in confluence with a growing body of limitative results for the Being Constraint in a contingentist setting; see Fritz (2023a), Fritz and Goodman (2016, 2017, §6.4), Masterman (2024b).

[7]Although one might object that such reasoning is *ad hoc*, this need not concern us momentarily since we are only inspecting the general pattern of the weakening strategy. Whether or not the motivations for any specific weakening are justified will be treated in due course.

If one deems this reasoning cogent, the *desideratum* would be to weaken (BC) so that it squares well with other data. As such, weakening (BC) amounts to restricting the set of existence-entailing predications so that (BC)'s theoretical verdicts match the verdicts supported by other considerations. On a general level, such restrictions are conditions that have to be met so that a predication can be deemed existence-entailing. Plausibly, then, weaker versions of (BC) obey the following schema, in which the types of variables can be disambiguated multiply:

$$\Box\forall\overline{x}\Box((R \wedge \Phi\overline{x}) \rightarrow E\overline{x}) \tag{W-BC}$$

Ideally, one's preferred restriction should be both weak enough to capture the existence-entailments of many innocuous predications and strong enough to weed out existence-entailments that lead to necessitism. As such, Weakening amounts to finding a formulation of (BC) that does not overgenerate compared to our independent, intuitive judgments as to what exists.[8] The thesis that there is no sufficiently weak Being Constraint just is the claim that, for someone who holds contingentist intuitions about what exists, the Being Constraint always overgenerates.

Several details of the strategy are yet to be filled in. As noted above, weakening (BC) so that it avoids exactly the predications that lead, via (β-Conv.), to (higher-order) necessitism without independent justification would unmistakably be judged as *ad hoc*. Consequently, the way in which one justifies one's preferred restrictions is as important as the general strategy. In what follows, I will survey two ways of doing this: (a) by a restriction to predications that are true *in* a world (Section 2.1) and (b) by a restriction to predications that are worldly (Section 2.3).

2.1 Truth In and At a World

The first proposal is to restrict (BC) to predications that are true *in* a world. Versions of this proposal have been considered by Adams (1981), Einheuser (2012), Fine (1985), and Masterman (2024a). Here is how it can be fleshed out. The instance of (BC) supporting the argument for necessitism in Section 1 is admittedly nonstandard. While it seems unproblematic to attribute, for example, the property of writing an article to me and infer from this that I exist, it is less clear that attributing the property of nonexistence to Socrates and inferring from this that Socrates exists is in good standing. Although both premises are true, there is an asymmetry in *how* they are true.

[8] I suspect that our intuitions about what exists are not perfectly on a par for individuals (entities of type e) and entities of higher-types. While, for the former, it suffices to consult intuitions, judgments are more delicate for the latter as no immediate intuitions seem to be available. Most of the literature in modal metaphysics tacitly supports this claim since first-order contingentist judgments are rarely substantiated, while higher-order contingentist judgments receive justification in terms of bridge principles specifying relations of existential dependence between first- and higher-order entities (see fns. 10 and 14).

To account for this asymmetry, one could say that whereas the former claim is intelligible from the perspective of a world that contains me, the latter claim is unintelligible from the perspective of a world that does not contain Socrates. Such distinction of perspectives is the intuitive motivation for distinguishing between a proposition's being true *in* and true *at* a world (or inner and outer truth): A proposition is true *in* w if it is true of how things stand at w from the perspective of w, while a proposition is true *at* w if it is true of how things stand at w from the perspective of some w' (see Adams (1981), Fine (1985, p. 194)).

Although the distinction is sometimes presented as a distinction of perspective, this approach can be put into question for its reliance on metaphor. A less metaphoric distinction can be developed if we notice its connection with propositional contingentism. As noted by Fine (1985, pp. 193, 204) and Stalnaker (2012, pp. 46-7), a proposition's truth *in* and *at* a world only come apart once we accept contingency in what propositions there are. In other words, only if there is a q such that it does not exist at w can it be the case that q is true of how things stand at w without being true *in* w. Conversely, if necessarily, every proposition necessarily exists, truth *in* and *at* a world coincide. Since propositional contingentism is better understood than the distinction between truth *in* and truth *at* a world, we can use the former to model the latter. Roughly speaking, this proposal entails that q can be true (or false) *in* w only if q exists in w.[9]

Here is one way we can model contingency in what propositions there are (fuller treatments can be found in Fine (1977), Stalnaker (2012, Appendix A), Fritz and Goodman (2016), and Fritz (2016)). First, we clarify our talk of propositions. We take propositions to be *sui generis* entities of type $\langle\rangle$ and not values of first-order variables; their existence is presented model-theoretically in terms of belonging to a type- and world-indexed domain $D_w^{\langle\rangle}$. Moreover, a proposition is taken to be a set of possible worlds.[10] Roughly put, then, a proposition q is a way to draw distinctions among W so that, for all $w \in W$, either $w \in q$ or $w \notin q$.

Second, we clarify what it means for a proposition to have contingent existence. The basic idea behind propositional contingentism is that not all partitions of W that can be made are 'available' at each $w \in W$; in other words, some worlds in W cannot distinguish between worlds that are partitioned into different sets by some proposition. To model talk of

[9]Fine (1980, p. 196) offers a similar regimentation of truth *in* a world. Working in a first-order modal language and taking propositions to be entities of type e, Fine introduces a truth-in-a-world predicate T^+ defined as follows: $w \models T^+p$ iff $\langle w, p\rangle \in t$ and $p \in \overline{A}_w$. The condition $\langle w, p\rangle \in t$ corresponds to the claim that p is true *simpliciter* (i.e, that $w \in p$), while the condition $p \in \overline{A}_w$ corresponds to the claim that p is in w's (propositional) domain (i.e., that $p \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$). (The notation I employ to capture these claims is introduced in the text below.) As such, for p to be true *in* w is for it to be true *simpliciter* and to exist at w.

[10]The account of propositional contingentism in what follows assumes Intensionalism, taking necessarily equivalent propositions to be identical: $\Box(p \leftrightarrow q) \to (p \equiv q)$. Although controversial, Intensionalism is naturally paired with acceptance of (β-Conv.) since rejecting the latter is often associated with more fine-grained theories of propositions. In Section 3.1, I will discuss why some higher-order contingentists might want to reject this thesis.

available distinctions, a world-indexed equivalence relation on W, namely $\approx_w$, is introduced. Intuitively, $\approx_w$ relates all pairwise indistinguishable worlds from the perspective of w. This equivalence relation on W allows us to model which propositions exist at w, so that only propositions distinguishing between worlds *not* related by $\approx_w$ belong to $D^{\langle\rangle}_w$. Thus, for any $u, v \in W$ such that $u \approx_w v$, and any $p \in D^{\langle\rangle}_w$, $u \in p$ if and only if $v \in p$; similarly, for any $u, v \in W$ such that $u \approx_w v$, and any q such that $u \in q$ and $v \notin q$, $q \notin D^{\langle\rangle}_w$.[11]

To see how this account of propositional contingentism connects to truth *in* a world, consider the example of the proposition attributing nonexistence to Socrates, $q := (\lambda x.\neg\exists y\ x = y)(s)$. This proposition distinguishes between any $u, v \in W$ such that $s \in D^e_u$ and $s \notin D^e_v$. Supposing w is such that $s \notin D^e_w$, w is 'assorted' by this proposition as any other world in W. However, intuitively, if w does not contain Socrates (or indirect means by which Socrates can be uniquely characterised), the difference between u and v is not 'registered' at w, and u and v are pairwise indistinguishable from w's perspective. As such, $\approx_w$ relates any $u, v \in W$ that differ only as to whether Socrates exists.

Now, by the distinction account of propositional contingentism, any proposition that draws a distinction between $\approx_w$-related worlds does not exist at w. Thus, $q \notin D^{\langle\rangle}_w$. If q's existence in w is a necessary condition for its truth *in* w, q is not true *in* w,[12] and so despite the fact that, from the perspective of a Socrates-containing world, q correctly describes how things stand in w. Thus, to summarise, if $s \notin D^e_w$ and $q \notin D^{\langle\rangle}_w$, q is true *at* w and not true *in* w. More generally, for any p such that $p \notin D^{\langle\rangle}_w$, p is not true *in* w.

From the example above it is immediately clear how the distinction between truth *in* and *at* a world can be applied to the argument for necessitism in Section 1. Given the discussion above, restricting (BC) to predications that are true in the world amounts to restricting (BC) so that only propositions contained in a world's propositional domain contain existence-entailing predications. The required condition substituting R in (W-BC), then, is that the relevant proposition exist. Building on above, we can stipulate that $E_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}p_{\langle\rangle}$ is true at w iff

[11]A simpler and more popular way of fleshing out propositional contingentism is by considering what propositions are about (i.e., their subject matter); see Masterman (2022, p. 20) for references. If a proposition is about an individual, say that the former is the 'abouter' and the latter the 'aboutee'. If we accept that the abouter existentially depends on the existence of the aboutee, then any world at which the aboutee fails to exist, the abouter does as well. (This treatment can easily be generalised to properties and other entities of higher types.) Spelling out the notion of aboutness in more detail contains important choice points for a propositional contingentist, since different ways of formulating what it is for a proposition to be about an individual involve different commitments for the contingentist, once we accept the thesis of existential dependence. It is worth mentioning that aboutness-theoretic strategies are generally hyperintensional as they require distinguishing between necessarily equivalent propositions in terms of their subject matters. A fuller treatment of aboutness within modal metaphysics would involve clarifying how much hyperintensionality is required to vindicate standard contingentist commitments, as well as whether such hyperintensionality is plausible. Thus, although the aboutness approach is *prima facie* simpler, it also requires adjudicating notoriously difficult issues regarding hyperintensionality. I will return to these issues in Section 3.

[12]More precisely, q is neither true nor false *in* w, from which it follows that it is not true *in* w.

$p \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$. The restricted reading of (BC) can then be formulated as follows:

$$\Box\forall\overline{x_\sigma}\Box((E_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}\Phi[\overline{x}/\overline{z}] \wedge (\lambda\overline{z_\sigma}.\Phi\overline{z})_{\langle\overline{\sigma}\rangle}(\overline{x})) \rightarrow E_{\langle\overline{\sigma}\rangle}\overline{x}) \qquad (\text{BC}_{in})$$

Once we restrict (BC) to predications that are true *in* a world, the problematic instance

(1) $\Box\forall x\Box((\lambda z.\neg\exists y(z = y))(x) \rightarrow Ex)$

fails to hold since the existence condition in (BC_{in}) is not met. In other words, it is not the case that, for instance, the proposition that Socrates does not exist itself exists at a world at which Socrates does not exist. The discussion above makes it clear, moreover, that predications of nonexistence systematically fail to meet the condition of being true *in* the world since, in those worlds, the relevant propositions fail to exist. As such, no inconsistency arises from $(BC)_{in}$, (β-Conv.) and Contingentism, and the proponent of $(BC)_{in}$ can arguably stave off Necessitism.

2.2 A Problem for (BC_{in})

However, not all arguments for Necessitism from (BC) and (β-Conv.) rely on instances of (BC) that involve the property of nonexistence. Here are some examples. Consider the predicate (of type $\langle e\rangle$) $\lambda x.Sx \vee \neg Sx$.[13] The argument is as follows:

(4) $\Box\forall y\Box((\lambda x.\ Sx \vee \neg Sx)(y) \rightarrow Ey)$ (BC)

(5) $\Box\forall y\Box((Sy \vee \neg Sy) \rightarrow Ey)$ (4, by β-Conv.)

(6) $\Box\forall y\Box Sy \vee \neg Sy$ (Tautology)

(7) $\Box\forall y\Box Ey$ (5, 6)

Second, consider the predicate (of type $\langle\langle\rangle\rangle$) $\lambda p.p \rightarrow p$.[14] The argument is as follows:

(8) $\Box\forall q\Box((\lambda p_{\langle\rangle}.p \rightarrow p)(q) \rightarrow Eq)$ (BC)

(9) $\Box\forall q\Box((q \rightarrow q) \rightarrow Eq)$ (8, by β-Conv.)

[13] See Rayo (2021) for a discussion of this argument. The argument below goes through, *mutatis mutandis*, for property (of type $\langle e\rangle$) $\lambda x.\neg(Sx \wedge \neg Sx)$. Similarly, if it be accepted that everything is necessarily self-identical ($\Box\forall x\Box x = x$), the argument goes through via the property $\lambda x.\exists X\Box Xx$. However, relying on this property is less dialectically effective against contingentists since proving that $\Box\forall x\Box x = x$ involves commitments that straightforwardly entail necessitism. I thank [OMITTED] for this caveat.

[14] See Fritz (2023a) for a discussion of this argument. As noted by Dorr (2016, p. 57), another such property is $\lambda p.\Diamond p \vee p$ (*being either possible or true*). The argument below goes through, *mutatis mutandis*, for this property as well.

(10) $\Box\forall q\Box(q \to q)$ (Tautology)

(11) $\Box\forall q\Box Eq$ (9, 10)

Does the $(BC)_{in}$ strategy help to resist instances (4) and (8)? For this to work, one would need the verdict that the propositions $(Sx \vee \neg Sx)[y/x]$ and $(p \to p)[q/p]$ fail to exist at a given world.[15] On our account above, q fails to exist at w if and only if for all $u, v \in W$ such that $u \in q$ and $v \notin q$, $u \approx_w v$ holds. Roughly put, q fails to exist at w if and only if w cannot distinguish between any worlds that can be distinguished in terms of q. Although this account works well for propositions about contingent states of affairs (e.g. Socrates' existence) which demand non-trivial distinctions between worlds, it breaks down in the case of necessary propositions. Since necessary propositions hold of all possible worlds, even a minimally discerning world (that $\approx_w$-relates every world in W to every other world in W) is able to make the trivial distinction between all possible worlds and none. In short, if $q = \top$, $q \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$ no matter how coarse-grained the distinctions w can draw are. Thus, instances (4) and (8) are in good standing since they meet the restriction of $(BC)_{in}$. It seems, then, that the restriction proposed by $(BC)_{in}$ does not suffice to stave off all arguments for necessitism.

2.3 Worldly and Unworldly Truth

How might a contingentist resist the necessitist conclusions (7) and (11)? The second proposal is to restrict (BC) not only to predications that are true *in* a world, but also to predications that are *worldly*.[16] To see the motivation behind the proposal, consider the argument to the necessary existence of Socrates relying on $\lambda x.\ Sx \vee \neg Sx$. The crucial use of (BC) is an instance of (4):

(4) $\Box((\lambda x.\ Sx \vee \neg Sx)(s) \to Es)$

Since it is routine to derive that necessarily, Socrates either has or does not have a given property, this implies that necessarily, Socrates exists.

Admittedly, however, there is an asymmetry between, on the one hand, attributing to Socrates the property of either having or not having a given property and inferring that he exists and, on the other hand, attributing to Socrates the property of being snub-nosed and inferring that he exists. The asymmetry consists in the fact that while the latter attribution

[15] Note that a variant of the aboutness approach on which tautologies are about some individuals and not others can sidestep these issues by delivering the required verdict in individual cases (see Masterman (2022, p. 20)). For instance, if "Socrates is either snub-nosed or not snub-nosed" is about Socrates and not Plato, it follows that the proposition expressed by this sentence fails to exist at worlds at which Socrates fails to exist (for further discussion, see Section 3.1). As before, adjudicating whether the degree of hyperintensionality involved in such judgments is plausible is a further question.

[16] Although this kind of restriction finds less explicit support, proposals along these lines are found in Fine (2005) and Rayo (2021).

turns on how things are in the world where Socrates is snub-nosed, the former attribution holds true without special reference to Socrates in the given world. Moreover, on a certain contingentist picture, had Socrates not existed in w, it would not have been the case that he is snub-nosed, while it would still have been the case that Socrates either has or does not have a given property (on account of the claim that necessarily, everything has such a property). Such distinction between different ways of making a proposition true is the intuitive motivation for distinguishing between 'worldly' and 'unworldly' truths: a (true) proposition is *worldly* if its truth depends, in Fine's terminology, "upon the circumstances or how things turn out" (Fine, 2005, p. 324) while a (true) proposition is *unworldly* if its truth does *not* depend on such considerations.

Since the distinction between worldly and unworldly truths is developed in some part by relying on the notion of a 'circumstance', it can be criticised for failing to successfully determine a salient distinction (see Stalnaker (2012, pp. 112-3) and Williamson (2013, pp. 154-5) for similar criticism). However, it is not necessary to resort to a notion of circumstance beyond the one warranted by a simple truthmaker approach to semantics. In fact, one can make sense of the worldly/unworldly distinction in terms of a what is needed to make a sentence true: whereas some propositions are made true by reference to specific contents, others are made true trivially, without reference to content (Linnebo, 2022, p. 366). A paradigmatic example of the latter kind of proposition are tautologies, or generalised and necessitated tautologies. As such, a distinction in the vicinity of the one between worldly and unworldly propositions is one distinguishing between tautologous and non-tautologous propositions.

We can formalise this proposal as follows. First, we introduce a predicate (of type $\langle\langle\rangle\rangle$) $\mathcal{T}$ as follows:

$$\mathcal{T} := \lambda p.p = \top$$

and a corresponding predicate $\mathcal{C}$ (of type $\langle\langle\rangle\rangle$):

$$\mathcal{C} := \lambda p.p \neq \top$$

These two predicates intuitively express the properties of *being identical to a tautology* and *not being identical to a tautology*.[17] Given these stipulative definitions, we can formulate the second restriction of (BC) as follows:

$$\Box\forall\overline{x_\sigma}\Box((\mathcal{C}_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}(\Phi[\overline{x}/\overline{z}]) \wedge E_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}(\Phi[\overline{x}/\overline{z}]) \wedge (\lambda\overline{z_\sigma}.\Phi\overline{z})_{\langle\overline{\sigma}\rangle}(\overline{x})) \rightarrow E_{\langle\sigma\rangle}\overline{x}) \qquad (\mathrm{BC}^{\mathcal{C}}_{in})$$

[17] Note that $\mathcal{T}$ corresponds to Bacon's "broadest necessity", or the modality of logical necessity (Bacon, 2018). This parallel leads to a further motivation for adopting the second restriction of (BC) since it amounts to a non-arbitrary stipulation as to which predications are existence entailing: namely, only logically possible, and not logically necessary predications.

With this new restriction in hand, we can consider the arguments for necessitism that were not blocked by $(BC)_{in}$. Consider again the argument relying on $\lambda x.\ Sx \vee \neg Sx$. Once we restrict $(BC)_{in}$ to non-tautologous predications, the problematic instance (6) fails to hold since the relevant condition is not met. In other words, since $\Box\forall y\Box(\lambda x.\ Sx \vee \neg Sx)(y) = \top$, the property $\mathcal{C}$ does not apply to it and thus fails to count as a proper instance of $BC^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. Moreover, since other arguments relying on $\lambda p.p \to p$ or $\lambda p.\Diamond p \vee p$ also have premises that do not count as proper instances for the same reason, this gives us sufficient motivation to think that $BC^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$ manages to avoid inconsistency with Contingentism and H.O. Contingentism on assumption of (β-Conv.) and (β-Conv.-Gen).

3 There is no Sufficiently Weak Being Constraint

In this section, I outline two arguments for necessitism that employ instances of $BC^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$, thereby showing that even this relatively restricted form of the Being Constraint allows conclusions unfriendly to the contingentist. Roughly stated, the arguments' upshot is that the set of predications that are potentially existence-entailing is too wide to be systematically weeded out, and that weakening is not a plausible strategy. Although this is not a knock-down argument for the inconsistency of Contingentism and any rendition of the Being Constraint, it lends plausibility to the claim that contingentists should not generally be comfortable with the Being Constraint.

3.1 First Argument

Here is the first argument for necessitism that goes through on $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. Consider any contingent existent c and the proposition $Sc \vee \neg Sc$. Now, take any contingent proposition p, true at an arbitrary world w at which c fails to exist, and conjoin it to $Sc \vee \neg Sc$. The λ-operator then allows us to produce the unary predicate: $\lambda x.\ p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx)$. This allows us to instantiate (BC), as follows:

$$\Box((\lambda x.p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx))(c) \to Ec) \tag{*}$$

By the intensional criterion of individuating propositions, the proposition $p \wedge (Sc \vee \neg Sc)$ is identical to p. Since, by hypothesis, p is true in w and, moreover, contingently true, $p \wedge (Sc \vee \neg Sc)$ is also true in w and contingently true. Thus, the proposition $(\lambda x.p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx))(c)$ is contingently true in w: $E((\lambda x.p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx))(c)) \wedge \mathcal{C}((\lambda x.p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx))(c))$. Since this suffices to meet the restriction of our weakened being constraint, (*) is a valid instance even of $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. From this, however, it follows that c exists even at a world where, by hypothesis, it fails to exist. Since for any world there exists a contingent proposition true only in that world, the procedure generalises, yielding the necessary existence of c.

Roughly speaking, what this argument demonstrates is that even significant weakenings of (BC) are not sensitive to all the existential commitments of propositions. In other words, restricting (BC) to propositions that exist in a given world and that are contingent does *not* guarantee that some predications with unwelcome existential commitments cannot be construed so as to meet the restrictions. The example above shows that this is quite a general phenomenon: the existence of c is implied by one conjunct, while the other conjunct ensures that the whole proposition meets the requisite conditions. The entailment goes through since $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$ is not sensitive to such fine-grained, structural properties of propositions.

There are two ways a contingentist might respond to this argument: (a) by adopting a fine-grained view of propositional identification, or (b) by further restricting (BC). I will briefly consider the two in turn and suggest that both incur significant costs.

(a) Although not spelled out in full formal detail, the argument relies on a relatively coarse-grained view of propositions, on which $p \equiv p \wedge \top$.[18] On popular views of what propositions are *about*, it is standard to assume that tautologous propositions can be about something, but not about everything. (For instance, while $Fa \vee \neg Fa$ and $Gb \vee \neg Gb$ are both tautologies, only the former is about a (Hawke, 2018).) Relying on similar considerations of aboutness, a sufficiently committed contingentist could resist the identification of p with $p \wedge \top$, on account of the latter having a different subject matter than the former.

If, as this view suggests, $p \not\equiv p \wedge \top$, it does not follow that properties holding of p hold of $(\lambda x.p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx))(c)$, and the relevant instance of $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$ is not guaranteed. Although adopting a fine-grained view of propositions able to distinguish between logically (or necessarily) equivalent propositions, the view of higher-order contingentism outlined in Section 2.1 rests on a coarse-grained view of propositions. Moreover, even if our preferred contingentist picture is fleshed out through a notion of aboutness which permits a finer individuation of propositions, two points remain to be made. First, it needs to be shown that the hyperintensionality required to distinguish p and $p \wedge \top$ does not impose inconsistent conditions on propositional granularity (see Goodman (2016b) for discussion). Second, even if our theory of aboutness *is* provably consistent, it needs to be shown that p and $p \wedge \top$ are distinguishable on one's theory (Goodman (2019) considers an algebra that treats $p \equiv p \wedge \top$ as an axiom).

Even if such a theory is found, further trouble arises since the problem is not localised to the identity of p and $p \wedge \top$. In fact, other Boolean equivalences suffice to derive necessitism from $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. For an example, take Absorption, or the equivalence of p with $p \wedge (p \vee q)$. The argument for necessitism follows analogously to the one above. Take any contingent existent c and assume q attributes some property F to an individual. Take any contingent proposition p, true at an arbitrary world w at which c fails to exist. The λ-operator then

[18] Note that it is not necessary to identify propositions with sets of possible worlds to make this identification. It suffices to accept that logically equivalent propositions are identical (i.e., if $\vdash p \leftrightarrow q$, then $\vdash p \equiv q$), as per Booleanism (Bacon & Dorr, 2024).

allows us to produce the unary predicate $\lambda x.\ p \wedge (p \vee Fx)$. Predicating it of c allows us to infer, via $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$, the existence of c even at a world where, by hypothesis, it fails to exist. Thus, even if we gerrymander our models so that they avoids identifying p and $p \wedge \top$, this is no guarantee that other equivalences will not lead to undesirable results.

In sum: since $p \equiv p \wedge \top$ is a basic commitment of minimal theories of propositional granularity, since hyperintensional theories of aboutness risk imposing inconsistent requirements on propositional granularity, and since at least some provably consistent theories of aboutness identify $p \wedge \top$ with p, adopting an aboutness-theoretic fine-grained theory of propositions is a less promising strategy than it might at first seem.

(b) Suppose the contingentist accepts that the proposition $(\lambda x.p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx))(c)$ meets the requisite conditions of $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. She might, nevertheless, argue that there are further requirements a predication needs to meet to count as a proper instance of the Being Constraint. However, the restrictions that come to mind as a response to the relevant instance run into issues.

The contingentist could argue, for instance, that trouble comes from the relevant instance being 'conjunctive', and that only 'atomic' predications are existence-entailing (see Fritz and Bacon (MS) for a sympathetic regimentation of this distinction). On this view, while predicating the property $\lambda x.Px$ of a entails a's existence, predicating a 'conjunctive' property $(\lambda x.p \wedge Px)$ does not. However, this restriction is implausible. Suppose $\lambda x.Px$ is the property of being the president of the US and a is a constant denoting Joe Biden; as long as p is free for a, predicating $\lambda x.Px$ of a entails a's existence as much as predicating $\lambda x.p \wedge Px$ does. Unlike the restrictions to existing and worldly propositions, then, this restriction appears too weak since 'conjunctive' predications of this kind do not usually prevent existence-entailments.

Nevertheless, perhaps there is something to be salvaged from this proposal. There is, arguably, an asymmetry between $(\lambda x.p \wedge Px)(a)$ and $(\lambda x.p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx))(a)$, since the latter proposition 'contains' a tautology (or, since a tautology is 'recoverable' from the latter proposition). On the second proposal, we should restrict (BC) not only to contingent propositions, but to propositions all of whose *contents* are contingent propositions. Although, intuitively, this is a more satisfying claim, fleshing out the details requires specifying what it means for a tautology to be contained in a proposition. On a coarse-grained view employed above, talk of 'recovering' a tautologous proposition is hardly useful since *any* proposition can be rewritten as a conjunction of that proposition and a tautology, resulting in the fact that a tautology is 'contained' in all propositions. It would not be wrong to suspect, then, that talk of containment and recovering is a sign of a more fine-grained view of propositions.

Even if we disregard the possible criticism of such views, the proponent of this general strategy was supposed to have accepted that $(\lambda x.p \wedge (Sx \vee \neg Sx))(c)$ meets the conditions stipulated by $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. Recall, however, that the central argument for *this* claim itself relied on a coarse-grained view of propositions (i.e., the claim that $p \equiv p \wedge \top$). As such, if the contingentist is to appeal to recoverability to further weaken $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$ as a consequence of accepting that (*) meets $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$'s requirements, specifying what recoverability amounts to should not speak against the motivations for regarding (*) as a proper instance of $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. Briefly put: imposing conditions on what can serve as a conjunct of existence-entailing predications equally flaunts with structured theories of propositions, despite initial appearance to the contrary.

To summarise, then, the argument for necessitism relying on (*) gets past the restrictions imposed by $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$, and some immediate contingentist rejoinders are found wanting. However, the argument against these rejoinders is not airtight as it only offers defeasible evidence against further refinements. Importantly, since no definitive argument was given against the existence of theories of aboutness that avoid inconsistency and can moreover carry the weight of rejecting troublesome propositional identifications (notably, $p \equiv p \wedge \top$), the prospect of such a theory remains open. Setting aside its undoubtedly revisionary nature, the contingentist's motivation for adopting the theory can nevertheless be questioned if it turns out that the only reason for doing so is avoiding the argument in this section. At present, then, the balance is pointing against combining contingentism with the Being Constraint, but our conclusion is by no means definitive. The next subsection offers another argument against combining contingentism with the Being Constraint.

3.2 Second Argument

Here is the second argument for necessitism that goes through on $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. Informally stated, the two-part argument is as follows. Consider the property of propositions *being not true in* w, delineating a set of propositions that are *not* true in w, and any proposition that is not true in w.[19] Suppose that the world in question is one whose domain does not contain Socrates and that the proposition in question is one attributing nonexistence to Socrates. According to the account in Section 2.1, this proposition is not true in w, and so the property of *being not true in* w applies to it; thus, the proposition attributing this property to the proposition is true. If this proposition is, moreover, true in w and if its truth is a contingent matter, then the proposition *that Socrates does not exist* exists in w. Furthermore, if it be accepted that a necessary condition for a proposition's existence is that the entity it is about exists, Socrates exists in w. As such, Socrates must exist even at the world at which, by hypothesis, he fails to exist. Since the argument generalises easily to all individuals, the conclusion amounts to necessitism. In what follows, I formalise this argument, first laying the groundwork and then going over the two steps.

The Groundwork. We introduce a property $\mathcal{F}$ (of type $\langle\langle\rangle\rangle$) intuitively corresponding to the property of propositions *being not true in* w. Relying on our analysis of truth in w, $\mathcal{F}$ applies at least to all propositions q such that $q \notin D^{\langle\rangle}_w$ since propositions that do not

[19]Note that, per the account of Section 2.1, a proposition q is not true *in* w either if (i) $q \notin D^{\langle\rangle}_w$ or if (ii) $q \in D^{\langle\rangle}_w$ and $w \notin q$. The argument of this Section focuses on the former case.

exist at w are not true in w. As such, $\mathcal{F}q$, for all q witnessing the condition $q \notin D_w^{\langle\rangle}$. We also introduce a relation of aboutness $\mathcal{A}$ stipulated to relate propositions to individuals (i.e., to be of type $\langle\langle\rangle, e\rangle$).[20] The result intuitively corresponds to the proposition that a given proposition is *about* a given individual. The premise needed to motivate the argument above is that, for any $p_{\langle\rangle}$ and a_e, if $\mathcal{A}(p, a)$ and $E_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}p$, then $E_{\langle e\rangle}a$. Intuitively, this corresponds to the claim that, if p is about a and p exists, a exists.[21] As above, let the denotation of s be Socrates and $q := \neg\exists y\ s = y$.

The Argument (Summary). If it is true in w that $\mathcal{F}q$ and $\mathcal{C}(\mathcal{F}q)$, then $E_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}q$ (by $(BC)_{in}^{\mathcal{C}}$). Moreover, if $E_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}q$ and $\mathcal{A}(q, s)$, then $E_{\langle e\rangle}s$. In one conditional statement: if it is true in w that $\mathcal{F}q$, and $\mathcal{C}(\mathcal{F}q)$, and $\mathcal{A}(q, s)$, then $E_{\langle e\rangle}s$.[22]

Defense. To reach the conclusion that $E_{\langle e\rangle}s$ and later generalise it to all individuals, we defend each of the antecedents (in reverse order).

(a) First, we justify that $\mathcal{A}(q, s)$. Above, we specified that $\mathcal{A}$ relates entities of type $\langle\rangle$ and e in a way that intuitively corresponds to the claim that the former is *about* the latter. Although the claim that q is about s is intuitively plausible, we can stipulate the applicative conditions of $\mathcal{A}$ in terms of the already available λ-operator. In line with Goodman (MS) (also see Bacon (2020, pp. 559-60)), we stipulate that

$$\mathcal{A}(p, a) \text{ iff } \exists F(p \equiv Fa) \tag{$\mathcal{A}$}$$

In rough terms, p is about a iff there is a property F such that applying it to a yields p. To get the result that $\mathcal{A}(q, s)$, it suffices to check that $\exists F((\neg\exists y\ s = y) \equiv Fa)$ holds. But clearly $\lambda x.\neg\exists y\ x = y$ is such an F, since $(\lambda x.\neg\exists y\ x = y)(s) \equiv (\neg\exists y\ s = y)$ by (β-Conv.) and Intensionalism.

(b) Second, we justify that $\mathcal{C}(\mathcal{F}q)$ or, intuitively, that it is contingently true that q is not true in w. What is needed is a witness to the possible falsity of q not being true in a world, and this amounts to q being possibly true in a world. Since it is a contingent

[20] This stipulation is only made for the purposes of the argument below; the relation of aboutness can also be stipulated to hold between, for example, properties of individuals and individuals.

[21] This premise is better known as the thesis of Existentialism (see Plantinga (1983)): namely, the thesis that a proposition exists only if the objects it is about exist. The thesis is here taken for granted as a central contingentist commitment (see Stalnaker (2012)). The notion of aboutness, for which the thesis is sometimes admonished, is justified in (b) below.

[22] In the inference from $E_{\langle\rangle}q$ and $\mathcal{A}(q, s)$ to $E_{\langle e\rangle}s$, the argument resembles Williamson's argument for necessitism (Williamson, 2002) and recalls Plantinga's argument for higher-order necessitism (Plantinga, 1983). However, since Williamson relies on an instance of (BC) for propositions that infers a proposition's existence from its truth, the restriction to $(BC)_{in}$ resists the necessitist conclusion. Importantly, although Williamson considers and dismisses the distinction between truth in and at a world, our argument is more dialectically effective since it grants the distinction to the contingentist and shows that a necessitist conclusion follows even on the assumption that the distinction is in good standing.

matter whether q, q is possibly true and, hence, $\mathcal{F}q$ is possibly false. Thus, $\mathcal{F}q$ is a contingent truth, or $\mathcal{C}(\mathcal{F}q)$.

(c) Finally, we justify that $\mathcal{F}q$ is true in w. Given the arguments in (a) and (b), conditional on $\mathcal{F}q$ being true in w, it follows that s exists in w.

Given our discussion above, to establish that $\mathcal{F}q$ is true in w, we first need to establish that the condition for its truth in w holds: namely, its existence in w (or that $\mathcal{F}q \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$ holds). Relying on Section 2.1, for $\mathcal{F}q \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$ to hold there must be at least two worlds, u and v, such that $u \in \mathcal{F}q$ and $v \notin \mathcal{F}q$ and such that $u \not\approx_w v$. In other words, w must be able to distinguish between two worlds such that $\mathcal{F}q$ is true in one and not true in the other. It might be thought that, on account of the hypothesis that $s \notin D_w$, w would not be able to distinguish between any worlds in which q has distinct truth-values. After all, if the case for $q \notin D_w^{\langle\rangle}$ relied on the pairwise indistinguishability of any worlds u and v such that $u \in q$ and $v \notin q$, what would make worlds distinguished by the proposition $\mathcal{F}q$ distinguishable from the perspective of w?

I would like to argue that, contrary to appearances, there is an asymmetry between these cases, and that a world can distinguish between worlds in which $\mathcal{F}q$ holds and those at which it does not (i.e., that $\mathcal{F}q$ exists at w, and that $\mathcal{F}q$ can therefore be true in w). To see why w can make this distinction, first recall that what $\mathcal{F}q$ expresses is that either (i) $q \notin D_w^{\langle\rangle}$ or that (ii) $q \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$ and $w \notin q$. Since case (ii) involves a false proposition, and since false predications of properties are not existence-entailing, we can avoid this case in our discussion. Case (i), on the other hand, indicates what is at stake in maintaining that $\mathcal{F}q$ is true in w: namely, the fact that it is true in w that q is not in w's propositional domain.

Given the account of the contents of world-indexed propositional domains from Section 2.1, the question of whether $\mathcal{F}q$ is true in w amounts to the question of whether w can express the fact that q's partition is not expressible at w. Very roughly, this question can be posed as follows: does w 'know', of any given proposition (i.e., any given partition of W into two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive sets), whether it has the resources to express the given partition? Since this question is *distinct* from the question of which $w \in W$ are such that $w \in q$, the fact that a world cannot settle the latter does not imply that a world cannot settle the former. In fact, the former question can be resolved, by any world, by *considering which distinctions it can draw*. Indeed, for all p such that $p \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$ and any q such that $q \not\equiv p$, it is true in w that q is distinct from all existing propositions. But this is equivalent to q not existing in w, from which it follows that $\mathcal{F}q$. Since these considerations *can* be made from the 'perspective' of w, this arguably shows that $\mathcal{F}q$ can be true in w. Once this is established, however, the argument sketched earlier in this section goes through even with $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$.

To make the situation clearer, consider a standard contingentist example. Let @ be the actual world, and c be a certain chemical substance undiscovered by our science. (Clearly, reference to such a substance must be abstract, if in good standing at all, since it is wholly unknown to us.) Considering the space of possibilities open to our world, it is possible that two worlds, u and v, coincide to the utmost detail and yet differ as to which contains c. It seems right to assume that, from the perspective of our world, any two worlds answering to this description are indistinguishable ($u \approx_{@} v$) and yet that a proposition p expressing that c exists can only be true in one of u and v (depending on which contains c). Our regimentation of truth in a world mandates that $p \notin D_{@}^{\langle\rangle}$ and, as such, that $\mathcal{F}p$. Moreover, since p is a partition that is distinct from any partition @ can express (i.e., for all r such that $r \in D_{@}^{\langle\rangle}$, $p \not\equiv r$), it is true in @ that p is *not* true in @ (i.e., that $\mathcal{F}p$ is true in @).

It might be useful to connect the justification above with a general thesis about propositions that are true of an arbitrary w but that do not exist at w, dubbed 'Covering' by Fine (1980, p. 182). In Fine's formulation, Covering "says that for any true (but possibly non-existent) proposition there is a true and existent proposition which necessarily implies it." Adapting Fine's definition to the notation we used throughout, the claim is as follows:

$$\Box\forall q\Box((\neg E_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}q \wedge \mathcal{F}q) \rightarrow \exists p(E_{\langle\langle\rangle\rangle}p \wedge \neg\mathcal{F}p \wedge \Box(p \rightarrow q)) \quad \text{(Covering)}$$

We can likewise parse the thesis model-theoretically: for any proposition q such that $w \in q$ and $q \notin D_w^{\langle\rangle}$, there is a proposition p such that $w \in p$, $p \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$, and $p \subseteq q$. It is easily seen that the propositions considered above answer to this description. For $q := (\lambda x.\neg\exists y\ x = y)(s)$ and a w such that $s \notin D_w$, it holds that $w \in q$ and $q \notin D_w^{\langle\rangle}$; moreover, for $p := \mathcal{F}q$, it holds that $w \in p$, $p \in D_w^{\langle\rangle}$, and $p \subseteq q$, as (19) would suggest.[23] Thus, intuitively speaking, the proposition that Socrates does not exist, although not true *in* a world where Socrates fails to exist, is nevertheless necessarily implied by a proposition that is true *in* w. What my argument exploits, then, is that propositions serving as 'covers' may have non-trivial consequences if they cary significant existential commitments.

With this defense in mind, we can piece together our argument for necessitism from $(BC)_{in}^{\mathcal{C}}$. Abbreviating $(\lambda z.\neg\exists y\ z = y)(x)$ with p, the argument is as follows:

(12) $\Box\forall x\Box(p \rightarrow \mathcal{A}(p, x))$ (see (a))

(13) $\Box\forall x\Box(p \rightarrow \mathcal{C}(\mathcal{F}p))$ (see (b))

[23]Fine considers another proposition that 'covers' q, to the effect that s is not contained in the set of all individuals that exist at a world. Since this is just another way of parsing the proposition that s does not exist, these propositions would be necessarily coextensive.

(14) $\Box\forall x\Box(p \to E(\mathcal{F}p))$ (see (c))

(15) $\Box\forall x\Box(p \to \mathcal{F}p)$ (By hypothesis)

(16) $\Box\forall x\Box((\mathcal{A}(p,x) \wedge Ep) \to Ex)$ (Existentialism)

(17) $\Box\forall x\Box(p \to (\mathcal{F}p \wedge \mathcal{C}(\mathcal{F}p) \wedge E(\mathcal{F}p))$ (13, 14, 15)

(18) $\Box\forall x\Box(p \to Ep)$ (17, by $BC^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$)

(19) $\Box\forall x\Box(p \to Ep \wedge \mathcal{A}(p,x))$ (12, 18)

(20) $\Box\forall x\Box(p \to Ex)$ (16, 19)

(21) $\Box\forall x\Box Ex$ ((20), Tautological Equivalence)

The crucial premises of this argument – namely, (12), (13), and (14) – have been defended above, on contingentists grounds. (15) follows from the definition of truth *in* a world. (16) is the thesis of Existentialism, which is generally accepted by contingentists (see Stalnaker, 2012). The rest of the argument follows by uncontroversial reasoning.

Two comments are in order. First, it might be thought that the argument is not importantly different from the argument for necessitism outlined in Section 1. After all, (20) maintains that necessarily, for all x of which the property of non-existence is predicated, it necessarily follows that x exists. Nevertheless, it bears emphasis that (20) is *not* an instance of (BC), but rather of considerations about the existential dependence of singular propositions on entities they are about. Indeed, a variant of (BC) is used in order to derive an auxiliary claim necessary for inferring the existence of x (namely, Ep), but this variant is relatively weak and, judging by the existing contingentist literature, acceptable to the contingentist. As such, the similarity with the argument from Section 1 is superficial and does not warrant objection.

Second, it is useful to note how this argument dialectically differs from the one offered in Section 3.1. Despite the elegance and relative simplicity of the first argument, the premises it requires are arguably more controversial for contingentists. Although, in this article, I assumed intensionalism in my exposition of higher-order contingentism (notably, in Section 2.1), the discussion of the first argument indicated that alternative approaches to higher-order contingentism are also possible, despite being comparatively less understood than the intensional approach. Since this avenue remains open, it is likely that a committed contingentist would rather adopt alternative approaches than renounce the Being Constraint. One's view of such moves notwithstanding, the strategy is at least not immediately foreclosed.

On the other hand, this argument employs premises that either follow directly from our discussion of contingentism above or are plausible commitments of a contingentist position. The only potentially controversial commitments are (1) the aboutness-theoretic claim that a negative-existential proposition is about the entity to which it attributes non-existence, and (2) the claim that the proposition $\mathcal{F}q$ exists in a world in which q is not true.

For (1), two things should be noted. First, accepting a claim concerning the subject matter of a given (type of) proposition does *not* require commitment to any theory of aboutness, since one can motivate the claim in minimal ways (see [a] above). Second, even if one adopts a hard-line 'distinction' approach to higher-order contingentism (as I did in Section 2.1), the verdicts of this approach concerning negative-existential propositions *match* the verdicts of the aboutness-approach. In other words, all the negative-existential propositions that the aboutness-approach considers non-existing (on account of their existential dependence) are also considered non-existing by the distinction approach (on account of the world not being able to make the relevant distinctions). Thus, even if we would decide to 'read off' the notion of aboutness from the verdicts of the 'distinction' approach, we would be led to accept the aboutness-claims needed to motivate the argument.

For (2), the situation is admittedly more delicate. Could a contingentist contest the claim that the proposition $\mathcal{F}q$ exists in a world at which it is true? As always, a sufficiently committed contingentist might do so, and this would resist the inference relying on $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. The contingentist could claim, perhaps, that the asymmetry between the existence of $\mathcal{F}q$ and the non-existence of q, on the distinction view of higher-order contingentism, is dubious. Until further argument is provided that the asymmetry is unacceptable, however, the contingentist's contention is suggestive at best.

The lesson I am inclined to take from the argument in (c) is that, for some propositions, different ways of formulating the distinction they draw may lead to surprising verdicts. More specifically, the argument indicates that, for some ways of formulating a given distinction, a world has the resources to express it even though, on another formulation, it seemed not to have them. This asymmetry has surprising consequences for contingentists who claim that what exists at a world depends on what distinctions a world can draw, but surprising consequences are sometimes welcome. In this context, what the surprising consequence indicates is that even relatively weak variants of the Being Constraint are too strong for the contingentist.

4 Conclusion

Contingentists are commonly thought to be faced with an unpalatable choice of giving up either the Being Constraint or β-Conversion, on pain of necessitism. A seductive way of avoiding this choice is finding a variant of (BC) that blocks instances unfriendly to the contingentist. In this article, I considered the prospects of this strategy.

First, I systematised the extant proposals for weakening (BC) by means of a typed, higher-order language. I maintained that two proposals are particularly plausible: restricting

(BC) to predications that are true *in* a world, or $(BC)_{in}$, and restricting (BC) to predications that are contingently true, or $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$. Arguably, this double restriction counters the extant direct arguments for necessitism that rely on (BC).

Second, I claimed that contingentists should not be comfortable with $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$ since even this variant allows some arguments for necessitism to go through. The main upshot is that not even significant weakenings of (BC) are sufficiently restrictive, in the sense that some predications acceptable to the contingentist still have unfriendly existence-entailments. This is not a knock-down argument, since restricting $(BC)^{\mathcal{C}}_{in}$ further is always available to a contingentist who is sufficiently committed to the Being Constraint. Nevertheless, as I suggested in my discussion, such restrictions are either implausible or overly reliant on structured theories of propositions. The arguments suggest, then, that contingentism and the Being Constraint might be unhappily married. As such, I conclude that, for a contingentist, there is no sufficiently weak Being Constraint.

References

Adams, R. M. (1981). Actualism and thisness. *Synthese*, *49*(1), 3–41.

Bacon, A. (2018). The broadest necessity. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, *47*(5), 733–783.

Bacon, A. (2020). Logical combinatorialism. *The Philosophical Review*, *129*(4), 537–589.

Bacon, A. (2024). *A philosophical introduction to higher-order logics.* New York London: Routledge.

Bacon, A., & Dorr, C. (2024). Classicism. In P. Fritz & N. K. Jones (Eds.), *Higher-order metaphysics* (pp. 109–190). Oxford University Press.

Dorr, C. (2016). To be f is to be g. *Philosophical Perspectives*, *30*(1), 39–134.

Dorr, C., Hawthorne, J., & Yli-Vakkuri, J. (2021). *The bounds of possibility: Puzzles of modal variation.* Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Einheuser, I. (2012). Inner and outer truth. *Philosopher's Imprint*, *12*(10), 1–22.

Fine, K. (1977). Properties, propositions and sets. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, *6*(1), 135–191.

Fine, K. (1980). First-order modal theories. ii: Propositions. *Studia Logica*, *39*, 159.

Fine, K. (1985). Plantinga on the reduction of possibilist discourse. In J. E. Tomberlin & P. van Inwagen (Eds.), *Alvin plantinga* (pp. 145–186). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Fine, K. (2005). Necessity and non-existence. In K. Fine (Ed.), *Modality and tense: Philosophical papers* (pp. 321–354). Oxford University Press.

Fritz, P. (2016). Propositional contingentism. *Review of Symbolic Logic*, *9*(1), 123–142.

Fritz, P. (2023a). Being somehow without (possibly) being something. *Mind*, *132*(526), 348–371.

Fritz, P. (2023b). *The foundations of modality.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fritz, P., & Bacon, A. (MS). *The algebra of logical atomism.* Retrieved from `https://andrew-bacon.github.io/papers/The%20Algebra%20of%20Logical%20Atomism.pdf`

Fritz, P., & Goodman, J. (2016). Higher-order contingentism, part 1: Closure and generation. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, *45*(6), 645–695.

Fritz, P., & Goodman, J. (2017). Counting incompossibles. *Mind*, *126*(504), 1063–1108.

Gallin, D. (1975). *Intensional and higher-order modal logic: With applications to montague semantics.* New York: American Elsevier Pub. Co.

Goodman, J. (2016a). An argument for necessitism. *Philosophical Perspectives*, *30*(1), 160–182.

Goodman, J. (2016b). Reality is not structured. *Analysis*, *76*(4), 437–452.

Goodman, J. (2019). Agglomerative algebras. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, *48*(4), 631–648.

Goodman, J. (MS). *A theory of aboutness.*

Hawke, P. (2018). Theories of aboutness. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *96*(4), 697–723.

Jacinto, B. (2019). Serious actualism and higher-order predication. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, *48*(3), 471–499.

Jones, N. K. (2018). Nominalist realism. *Noûs*, *52*(4), 808–835.

Linnebo, O. (2022). Generality explained. *Journal of Philosophy*, *119*(7), 349–379.

Masterman, C. J. (2022). Propositional contingentism and possible worlds. *Synthese*, *200*(5), 409.

Masterman, C. J. (2024a). Serious actualism and nonexistence. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *102*(3), 658–674.

Masterman, C. J. (2024b). Contingentism and fragile worlds. *Inquiry*, *0*(0), 1–32.

Plantinga, A. (1983). On existentialism. *Philosophical Studies*, *44*(1), 1–20.

Rayo, A. (2021). Beta-conversion and the being constraint. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, *95*(1), 253–286.

Stalnaker, R. (1977). Complex predicates. *The Monist*, *60*(3), 327–339.

Stalnaker, R. (2012). *Mere possibilities: Metaphysical foundations of modal semantics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Stephanou, Y. (2007). Serious actualism. *Philosophical Review*, *116*(2), 219–250.

Williamson, T. (2002). Necessary existents. In A. O'Hear (Ed.), *Logic, thought and language* (pp. 233–252). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williamson, T. (2003). Everything. *Philosophical Perspectives*, *17*, 415–465.

Williamson, T. (2013). *Modal logic as metaphysics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.