MODAL RATIONALISM, STRONG NECESSITIES AND ESSENTIALIST INTUITIONS

by

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**Abstract:** My aim is to show that advocates of “weak modal rationalism” (thesis that ideal positive primary conceivability entails primary possibility) can reply successfully to so called “strong necessity thesis”, according to which there are *a posteriori* known statements with necessary primary and necessary secondary intensions. In particular, I address Anand Vaidya’s interpretation of (Nathan Salmon’s interpretation of) the essentiality of origin example (Vaidya 2008), whose intention is to show that modal rationalism rests on modal monism view (according to which the space of logically possible worlds is coextensive with the space of metaphysically possible worlds), which contravenes our ordinary essentialist intuitions. I propose several responses to that objection. First, I notice that Chalmers’ notion of *ideal positive primary conceivability* (Chalmers 1999; 2002), beside logical possibility, requires conceptual possibility as well. Given that logical necessity is absolute (in Bob Hale’s sense; see Hale 1996), while conceptual necessity is relative, it seems more plausible to spell out modal monism in terms of the thesis that logical modality is absolute, while conceptual modality is a relative modality, which is also coextensive with metaphysical modality. This maneuver avoids some objections to modal rationalism that are based on *prima facie* reasons that logical necessity and metaphysical necessity are not coextensive (Vaidya 2008). Another option for modal rationalists is to claim that ideal positive primary conceivability, which is used in constructing conceivability arguments, is different than intuitions on which the essentiality of origin example is based. I argue that thought experiments based on conceivability have methodological priority over thought experiments based on intuitions. Third option for modal rationalists is to claim that they are not obliged to explain phenomena that some of their critics think they are. This can be done by making the distinction between “modal epistemology” and “epistemology of modality” (these two phrases are usually considered interchangeable), in which the latter phrase is used to denote a discipline of which aim is to provide “a systematic account of all of our modal knowledge” (Vaidya 2008, 206; see also Vaidya 2010; Roca-Royes 2011, 22–23), while the former phrase is used to denote a discipline that explores the relation between apriority (conceivability) and modality (see e.g. Bealer 2002, 71). Debates over the validity of conceivability argument, which belong to the subject matter of modal epistemology, serve as a good example in which these two phrases should not be conflated. Something that is taken for granted in the epistemology of modality (*e.g.*, various sorts of essentialism, modality *de re*, and so on) can be a matter of dispute in modal epistemology. However, my aim is also to show that even if we accept many important essentialist intuitions (regarding, for instance, *quidditas*, *haecceitas*, individual qualitative essence, *etc.*),modal rationalism is still compatible with almost all of them. Finally, I propose some prospects of how weak modal rationalism might be formulated in order to avoid some popular attempts of making parodies of conceivability arguments (like in, *e.g.* Frankish 2007).