

Two Arguments against Modal Existentialism

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Arthur Prior's work on quantified modal logic was built upon by idea that, had an individual x not existed, there would have been no information about x . A more overtly platonistic way of expressing the idea is to say that, if x hadn't existed, there would have been no *singular propositions* about x , no propositions in which x is a "constituent". Following Plantinga, call this thesis *modal existentialism* (ME). In this talk I will discuss two arguments against ME. The first and better known argument (AE-1) is from Plantinga himself, and purports to find an overt contradiction in ME. The second (AE-2) can be traced to the work of Robert Adams and, more recently, Greg Fitch, and purports to show that ME is incompatible with the characteristic axiom schemas $\lceil \Box\phi \rightarrow \Box\Box\phi \rceil$ and $\lceil \Diamond\phi \rightarrow \Box\Diamond\phi \rceil$ of the modal propositional logics S4 and S5, respectively. While not as devastating to ME, if sound, AE-2 makes the thesis much less attractive philosophically and much more problematic logically. Several philosophers, myself included, have already noted that AE-1 hinges upon a failure to distinguish two ways — identified initially by Adams — of evaluating a modal proposition at a possible world. After clarifying how this failure renders AE-1 unsound, I will show that — somewhat ironically, given AE-2's origins — this failure is also evident in AE-2 as well. I will conclude that ME is not only internally consistent, *contra* AE-1, but fully compatible with a robust modal logic, *contra* AE-2. I will close by briefly illustrating the point by laying out a complete quantified modal logic whose propositional basis is S5 and (unlike similar logics) whose quantification theory is fully classical.