

## *A New Argument from Actualism to Serious Actualism*

MICHAEL BERGMANN  
University of Notre Dame

Actualism is the thesis that necessarily everything that there is exists.<sup>1</sup> Serious actualism is the thesis that necessarily no object has a property in a world in which it does not exist. In this paper I present a new argument from actualism to serious actualism.<sup>2</sup>

Kit Fine, Mark Hinchliff and John Pollock have denied that actualism entails serious actualism.<sup>3</sup> As far as I can tell, the main reason they deny this entailment is that they think actualism is true<sup>4</sup> and serious actualism is false. In support of their denial of serious actualism, each of these philosophers proposes the following as a counterexample to it:

(1) Socrates exemplifies nonexistence in a world in which he does not exist.<sup>5</sup>

None of them claims that (1) is also a counterexample to actualism. Of course this is no surprise if each of them thinks actualism is true. So, according to Fine, Hinchliff and Pollock, (1) is a counterexample to serious actualism but not to actualism.

But consider what is involved in interpreting (1) consistently with actualism. What is it that (1) says is exemplifying nonexistence in a world in which Socrates does not exist? Is it something that exists in that world? No. Is it something that *is* in that world (i.e., something that has *being* in that world) but does not exist in that world? An actualist must answer 'No' to this question as well. Thus, according to an actualist interpretation of (1), what exemplifies nonexistence in a world in which Socrates does not exist is something which does not have being in that world. So, according to actualism, (1) can be true only if

(2) It is possible that there is something that exemplifies a property in a world  $w$  without being in  $w$  (i.e., without having the property of *being* in  $w$ ).

(2) is the thesis that transworld property exemplification (TPE) is possible.<sup>6</sup> TPE occurs when a property is exemplified in a world  $w$ , not by an object that is in  $w$  (i.e., has being in  $w$ ), but by an object that is in another world  $w^*$ . TPE is to be distinguished from *intra*world property exemplification, the exemplification of a property in a world  $w$  by an object that is in that same world (this is what we ordinarily think of as property exemplification). More specifically, it is to be distinguished from the sort of *intra*world property exemplification which occurs when an object  $x$  that is in a world  $w$  exemplifies a property in another world  $w^*$  but does so from  $w^*$  (since  $x$  *is*—i.e., has being—in  $w^*$  as well as  $w$ ).<sup>7</sup> Thus, (1) can be a counterexample to serious actualism without also being a counterexample to actualism only if (2), the thesis that TPE is possible, is true.

In light of the above remarks, I am inclined to think that those proposing (1) as a counterexample to serious actualism are taking for granted that TPE is possible. However, given that TPE seems to be a very problematic notion and that neither Fine nor Hinchliff nor Pollock explicitly affirms that TPE is possible, it may appear uncharitable to attribute such an assumption to them. But, regardless of whether or not these philosophers *are* taking for granted that TPE is possible, they are, in denying that actualism entails serious actualism, *committed* to the thesis that TPE is possible. For there is a straightforward argument from actualism and the denial of the thesis that TPE is possible to serious actualism. Let us formalize the thesis that TPE is possible as follows:

(3)  $\diamond (\exists x) (\exists w) (\exists p) [(x \text{ exemplifies } p \text{ in } w) \ \& \ \neg(x \text{ is—i.e., has being—in } w)]$ .

The denial of (3) is

(4)  $\Box (x) (w) (p) [(x \text{ exemplifies } p \text{ in } w) \ \rightarrow (x \text{ is in } w)]$ .

From (4) and

(5)  $\Box (x) (w) [(x \text{ is in } w) \ \rightarrow (x \text{ exists in } w)]$

(which follows immediately from the thesis of actualism<sup>8</sup>) we may conclude that

(6)  $\Box (x) (w) (p) [(x \text{ exemplifies } p \text{ in } w) \ \rightarrow (x \text{ exists in } w)]$ .

But (6) is the thesis of serious actualism. Thus, unless TPE is possible (i.e., unless (4) is false), actualism entails serious actualism. Those who deny that actualism entails serious actualism are, therefore, committed to the thesis that TPE is possible.

I have shown that those who resist the conclusion that actualism entails serious actualism are committed to the thesis that TPE is possible. I now want to argue that TPE is not possible. Suppose (3), the thesis that TPE is possible, is true. Then there is some world  $w$  in which there is an instance of a property  $p$  being exemplified but not by anything in  $w$ . Now what is true in a possible world is what would be true if that world were actual. Thus, if (3) then

(7)  $(\exists w) (\exists p)$  (It is true in  $w$  that there is an instance of  $p$  being exemplified but not by anything in  $w$ ).

From the conjunction of (7) with the truism

(8)  $(w)$  (It is true in  $w$  that there is nothing except what there is in  $w$ )

it follows that

(9)  $(\exists w) (\exists p)$  (It is true in  $w$  that there is an instance of  $p$  being exemplified but not by anything *at all*).

But (9) contradicts

(10) Necessarily, every instance of property exemplification is an instance of a property being exemplified by something.

Since (10) is obviously true, (9) is false. And since (3) implies (9), (3) is also false. Thus (4), the denial of the thesis that TPE is possible, is true.

One might try to resist this conclusion by denying that (8) is true. A suggested counterexample to (8) might be

(11)  $(\exists w)$  (It is true in  $w$  that *there is something* (i.e., something in another world  $w^*$ ) that is not in  $w$ ).

But, as I said above, what is true in a world is what would be true if that world were actual. If the world  $w$ , mentioned in (11), were actual then, although it would be the case that there *could be* something that is not in  $w$  (which is what it would mean to say there *is* something in  $w^*$  that is not in  $w$ ), there, in fact, *would not be* anything that is not in  $w$ . Thus, (11) is not a counterexample to (8). Resistance to (8) (and, therefore, to (4)) seems to

be a result of mistakenly reading ‘there is something in another possible world’ as a claim about what there is rather than as a claim about what there could be.

To sum up, my argument from actualism to serious actualism runs as follows. If (4), the denial of the thesis that TPE is possible, is true and (5), which follows immediately from the thesis of actualism, is true then (6), the thesis of serious actualism, is true. But (4) is true. Therefore, if actualism is true then serious actualism is also true. The false assumption which seems to be responsible for resistance to this conclusion (or at least to which those who resist this conclusion are committed) is (3), the thesis that TPE is possible. And this false assumption appears to be the result of reading ‘there is something in another possible world’ as a claim about what there is rather than as a claim about what there could be.<sup>9</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Thus, actualism is opposed, for example, to Meinong’s claim that there are objects which have being but not existence. See Meinong (1968).

<sup>2</sup>The major proponent of the claim that serious actualism follows from actualism is Alvin Plantinga who has published two arguments for this claim. The first is in Plantinga (1979), pp. 108–9. He later rejects this argument (under the influence of John Pollock) in Plantinga (1983), pp. 11–12. Plantinga’s second argument from actualism to serious actualism is in Plantinga (1985), pp. 318–19.

<sup>3</sup>See Fine (1985), pp. 165–6, Hinchliff (1989), pp. 182–5 and Pollock (1985), p. 130.

<sup>4</sup>That is, actualism as defined above. See note 1.

<sup>5</sup>See Fine (1985), pp. 164–5, Hinchliff (1989), pp. 182–3 and Pollock (1985), p. 126.

<sup>6</sup>It is also the case that, according to actualism, (1) can be true only if TPE is *actual*. It will be more convenient for me to focus on the weaker thesis that TPE is possible. But of course, by discrediting this weaker thesis, as I do in this paper, I am thereby discrediting the stronger thesis that TPE is actual.

<sup>7</sup>In explaining what TPE is in terms of possible worlds, I am not suggesting that it is a coherent notion.

<sup>8</sup>Actualism may be stated formally as  $\Box (x) [(x \text{ is}) \rightarrow (x \text{ exists})]$ .

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