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MANIFESTING BELIEF IN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY

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Abstract

McFetridge (1990) suggests that to treat a proposition as logically necessary – to believe a proposition logically necessary and to manifest that belief – is a matter of preparedness to deploy that proposition as a premise in reasoning from any supposition. We consider whether a suggestion in that spirit can be generalized to cover all cases of absolute necessity, both logical and non-logical, and we conclude that it can. In §2, we explain the significance that such an account of manifestation of belief in absolute necessity has for the prospects of a non-realist theory of modality. In §3, we offer a sympathetic articulation of the detail that underlies the McFetridge conception of belief in logical necessity. In §4 and §5, we show that the conception so articulated will not generalize to encompass all cases of belief in absolute necessity and proceed to offer a remedy. Our proposal is based upon a distinction between two kinds of suppositional act: A-supposing and C-supposing (§6). In §7, we then explain and defend our central thesis: (roughly) that (manifestation of) belief in absolute necessity is a matter of preparedness to deploy as a premise in reasoning under any C-supposition. Finally, we indicate that there is some promise in the parallel thesis that manifestation of the treatment of a proposition as a priori is a matter of preparedness to deploy as a premise in reasoning under any A-supposition (§8).

§1. Introduction

We begin by endorsing four principles concerning necessity that we find in McFetridge (1990).¹ (1) When one believes in the necessity of a proposition, the strength of the necessity in which one thereby believes is measured by the extent of the range of suppositions to which one is be prepared to add that proposition as a premise (in reasoning from that supposition). (2) It is, at least, a *manifestation* of belief in necessity that one should manifest such a disposition of preparedness to add as a premise over an appropriate range of suppositions. (3) The measure of *absolute* necessity is preparedness to deploy as a premise over the unrestricted range – in reasoning from *any* supposition whatsoever. (4) Belief in logical necessity is a case of (belief in) *absolute* necessity. To clarify (3) and (4) it is essential to draw a distinction between (belief in) the *absoluteness* of a kind of necessity and (belief in) the *maximality* of a kind of necessity. The distinction is illustrated by the following position: one might hold that there is a range of suppositions which is the widest range of suppositions to which any single proposition might (properly) be added as a premise, and yet think that this range is restricted (i.e., not exhaustive of *all* suppositions). In our preferred terminology, to accord a proposition this status would be treat it as maximally necessary but not as absolutely necessary: to be prepared to adduce a proposition as a premise across the unrestricted range of *all* suppositions would be to treat it as both absolutely and, a fortiori, maximally necessary.²

We join many philosophers in endorsing the following body of claims: (5) that logical necessity is absolute necessity; (6) some propositions do not count as logically necessary in a strict, or narrow, sense but (7) are necessary in a significant alethic (and non-epistemic) sense, and (8) that the necessity that attaches to them is no weaker than that which attaches to logical necessity. Thus we contend that some propositions hold with

¹ We depart from McFetridge's verbatim statement of these matters in two ways. Firstly, we make propositions rather than rules the locus of necessity. Secondly, we extrapolate general principles from cases where all that is given explicitly is the application of the principle to a particular case.

² In contrast to McFetridge, it would seem, there are those who hold: (a) that logical necessity is not absolute (even though it is maximal) and, more generally, (b) that there are no absolute necessities since, for any proposition, there is some supposition under which one ought not to add that proposition as a premise in reasoning from it. Thus, we suggest, Nolan (1997) and Priest (2005). Such a view is not only a formal possibility (showing that absoluteness and maximality are formally distinct), but may also have philosophical motivations. For instance, it may allow us to improve on the standard treatment of truth-conditions for counterfactuals with logically impossible antecedents and/or logically necessary consequents, by not making them automatically true (see also discussion in §7). Our project here is not to motivate such views; we just want to make clear how they would fit in our framework.

absolute but non-logical necessity, and, as is well known, broadly logical necessity, analytic necessity, mathematical necessity and metaphysical necessity are frequently understood that way. Our central question, then, is whether the McFetridge account of belief in absolute necessity can straightforwardly and successfully encompass the non-logical case(s).³ But some ground must be cleared before that question can be addressed to any effect.

Quite general issues are raised by any thesis, of the kind suggested by McFetridge, whereby the possession of some inferential disposition is necessary or sufficient for the possession of a belief – or even whereby manifestation of such a disposition is necessary or sufficient for the manifestation of such a belief. Among the general issues raised by claims of sufficient conditions are the following. Predictably, if we specify what appears to be a single or restricted inferential disposition, there will be the question of whether we have captured (even implicitly) all that is required by way of the belief, or its manifestation. Moreover, if we specify a condition that speaks only to the manifestation of the kind of belief in question, and not at all to any consideration of how the belief is acquired (or of phenomenology), the natural question to press is whether any such one-sided condition can be sufficient for the possession of the belief.⁴ Among the general issues raised by claims of necessary conditions is the following. If we specify an inferential disposition that reflects a controversial principle of inference – for example, double negation elimination – then we seem bound to exclude from the ranks of those who share the kind of belief in question, any and all of those whose inferential dispositions reflect reasoned rejection of the principle. Such are (some of) the generic issues associated with (broadly) “inferentialist” theses about possession of concepts of

³ That *some such* account is applicable to absolute necessity in general is a view endorsed by Peacocke (1999, 172-3) and, in discussion thereof, by Wright (2002, 656-7). In each case, the matter is barely touched upon, but the detail of the swiftly stated claims turns out to be crucial from the standpoint of our extended discussion. Peacocke (op cit) characterizes the principles that are known to be necessary truths as those “which can be legitimately employed when reasoning within the scope of *any counterfactual supposition whatsoever*”. However, Wright (op cit) presents the view that “to regard a proposition as necessary is to hold that it may safely be assumed as an auxiliary premise, or rule, when reasoning *about any arbitrary counterfactual – more generally, hypothetical – set of circumstances*.” (The emphasis is ours in both cases). The crucial point is precisely whether the account of absolute necessity ought to proceed “more generally” in terms of any arbitrary hypothesis/supposition: Wright’s formulation suggests that it ought, Peacocke’s formulation suggests that it ought not. We shall, eventually, side broadly with the latter, although we shall also show why Peacocke’s formulation, as it stands, must be further restricted.

⁴ We note that the thesis that the inferential disposition is sufficient for belief in the logical necessity of a rule is a crucial, but implicit, lemma in the “quasi-transcendental” argument for belief in (some) logical necessity that is proposed by McFetridge (1990, 153-4) and endorsed, in a significantly strengthened version, by Hale (1999).

various kinds, beliefs involving those concepts and their manifestation: but we will not explore any such general issues here.⁵ Rather, we ask the reader to allow that these general issues have not all been settled in a way that renders pointless the investigation of relevant theses in the specific case where the subject matter is belief about necessity. Within the programme of attempting to understand (manifestation of) belief in necessity in terms of an associated inferential disposition, our problematic is as follows.

Little, if anything, has been done by way of attempting to articulate the concept that figures centrally in McFetridge's various principles – preparedness to add a premise to any supposition – or to make plausible his account of belief in logical necessity. Here, we take on these tasks in (prima facie) defence of the following two theses:

(LN1) For all X, if X believes that it is logically necessary that P then X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S

(LN2) For all X, if X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S then X believes that it is logically necessary that P.

We will subsequently turn our attention to the following theses:

(AN1) For all X, if X believes that it is absolutely necessary that P then X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S

(AN2) For all X, if X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S then X believes that it is absolutely necessary that P.

We will argue that when read in light of the charitable elaboration that sustains (LN1) and (LN2), the theses (AN1) and (AN2) fail. Thus, we lack both an effective necessary condition, and an effective sufficient condition, for (manifestation of) belief in absolute necessity in general. That case is made in §3-5, and the remedy pursued in §6-7. But what follows immediately is an interlude in which we address important questions concerning the motivation, and the metaphysical presuppositions and implications, of the project.

⁵ For a relatively recent exchange that covers this general ground see Boghossian (2003) and Williamson (2003).

§2. Motivation and Metaphysics

In this paper, we remain neutral on several further questions that concern with the manifestation of belief in necessity might provoke. Firstly, on explanatory priority: whether X believes it absolutely necessary that P *because* X has the appropriate inferential disposition, or vice versa. Secondly, on semantics: which is the correct (form of) semantic theory for either the modal sentences, or for any of the various conditional sentences that we consider? Thirdly, on any (broadly) metaphysical issue of the sort that puts modal realists (of various kinds) at odds with non-realist opponents. In this last matter, however, we do make the exception that we presume – contra strict non-cognitivist positions – that it is perfectly appropriate to characterize the relevant kind of modal “commitment” as *belief* that it is (absolutely) necessary that P, and that the content *it is absolutely necessary that P* is truth-apt. But while our account excludes such a radical non-cognitivism, it is consistent with error theory about absolute necessity. As indicated, we believe that for certain P, it is absolutely but non-logically necessary that P; and that an adequate account of (manifestation of) belief in absolute necessity must make room for such a position is an important part of our dialectic. However, the account of (manifestation of) belief in absolute necessity that we will eventually present (§7) is perfectly consistent with the view that some agents do not believe in the absolute necessity of any proposition and even with the view that all such beliefs are false.

Alongside our present and extensive metaphysical neutrality we also maintain, nonetheless, that interest in our project is strongly motivated by its potentially crucial implications for the prospects of (a certain kind) of modal non-realism. Awareness of this point, as we shall now explain, informs our overall approach.

Some will question any attempt to give directly non-trivial necessary (or sufficient) conditions for *belief* in absolute necessity when one might (it seems) proceed, instead, by giving directly a metaphysical, or semantic, account of absolute necessity “itself”, and then, perhaps, give a subsequent account of (manifestation of) belief in absolute necessity to suit.⁶ The latter approach will seem the more promising, and the more natural, to those with realist pre-dispositions: but it will strike others as worrying. One prominent worry is

⁶ For direct approaches to absolute necessity “itself”, see McFetridge (1990, §1) and Hale (1996).

whether such a realist approach can yield an appropriate explanation of why we are *concerned* to form (correct) beliefs about the absolute necessity of any P – concerned, that is, in a way that outruns our concerns in forming beliefs, simply, about whether non-modal P is the case. And a standard non-realist strategy of response to that worry is to reverse the realist order of explanation: that is, to seek a functionally-driven conception of the kind of belief in question – one that focuses on the conditions under which we typically acquire, manifest and regulate such beliefs, as the basis of a minimal, or thin, explanation of what the talk of “facts” here amounts to.⁷ Such an account of belief in the case of absolute necessity might be hoped to present both an illuminating explanation of our attachment to such beliefs and, also, a challenge to anyone who is inclined to presuppose that a more substantive account of modal facts (along with a substantive account of the cognition of such facts) is required. To reiterate, we do not intend to make in this paper any claim that is incompatible with any form of realism about absolute necessity, or with the “realistic” order of explanation wherein we have certain inferential dispositions in virtue of having beliefs about absolute necessity (rather than vice versa). However, we also emphasize that the success of our proposal would add significantly to the resources that modal non-realists have at their disposal. So, we trust, in addition to its speaking to the (neutral) questions of how (certain of) our modal beliefs are manifest, and of why we are concerned to make (correct) modal judgements, our project is further motivated by its potential relevance to the dispute between modal realists and their opponents: it speaks to the prospects of a non-realist theory of modality, and as such ought to interest non-dogmatic realists and neutrals as well as to those who are already of non-realist pre-dispositions. Finally, in that regard, it is particularly significant that our account of belief in absolute necessity is, following McFetridge, rooted in the matter of the *manifestation* of such belief. One long-standing obstacle to the development of a plausible non-realist account of necessity has been the absence of an alternative to the following, persistent but unsatisfactory, idea: that to treat a proposition as necessary is to

⁷ The non-realist approach we envisage is very broad and inclusive. As indicated, it does require acceptance that the propositional surface of modal talk is in order – that we speak properly of modal beliefs, of modal truth etc. – and, as such, excludes radical (traditional) non-cognitivist positions. However, the still broad non-realism that remains is intended to encompass (for example) various positions described generically as “anti-realist” in Wright (1992) and also the quasi-realism of Blackburn (1986). For present purposes, we need not isolate any particular non-realist position within the acceptable range.

accord it a special epistemic status – typically, to protect it, in some special way, from the ordinary standards of appraisal or revision.⁸ Such an account of the manifestation of belief in (absolute) necessity strains all credibility and has few defenders these days, even in the case of a priori necessities: but it seems downright untenable once the prospect of (belief in) a posteriori absolute necessity is entertained. Consequently, the efforts of many relatively recent modal non-realists, such as Blackburn (1986), display two notable features. Firstly, there is great emphasis on the question of how belief in necessity is *acquired* (rather than how it is manifest). Secondly, there is an uncomfortable combination of awareness that an account of manifestation of belief in necessity as “putting in the archive” seems moribund, with the attempt, for want of an alternative, to make something of such an account – even in the a posteriori case (Blackburn 1986, 63-4). In seeking an account of the manifestation of belief in necessity that is not tied (disastrously) to misplaced and excessive epistemic commitments, we join with the spirit of McFetridge (1990): but we cannot accept in the generic case of absolute necessity, the letter of the McFetridge proposal concerning the instance of logical necessity.

§3 Understanding McFetridge on Logical Necessity

In this section, we attempt to articulate McFetridge’s conception of the inferential disposition that is associated with (manifestation of) belief in logical necessity in such a way as to make it worth considering whether its possession is an effective necessary and sufficient condition for such belief, as per theses (LN1) and (LN2):

(LN1) For all X, if X believes that it is logically necessary that P then X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S

(LN2) For all X, if X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S then X believes that it is logically necessary that P.

By way of charitable expansion and articulation of these theses, we propose the following:

⁸ McFetridge (1990, 146-50) finds fault in this respect with the anti-skeptical but non-realist view of logical necessity presented by Wright (1980, 1986): the point is taken in Wright (2002, 658).

(a) In understanding and defending the theses, we need be concerned only with two doxastic states: belief in the logical necessity of P, and non-belief in the logical necessity of P. Degrees of belief are not germane.

(b) We restrict our attention, for the sake of present exposition and argument, to reasoning that is broadly deductive in intent, and monotonic in character. However, we see no obvious danger in expanding the scope of our final theses on belief in absolute necessity to other kinds of inference.

(c) The theses are to be read as constrained by a requirement of rationality: made explicit – for any *rational* X, Perhaps it is psychologically possible to have the belief and lack the disposition (or vice versa). Equally, perhaps it is psychologically possible to believe a conjunction without being prepared to infer its conjuncts, or to believe the conjuncts without being prepared to infer the conjunction. But just as there is some kind of irrationality afoot in the conjunction case, so (we intend) there would be in the case of absolute necessity.

(d) The notion of *preparedness* (to add P as a premise ...) needs to be construed sensibly. In the first place, preparedness is a *disposition*, the realization (manifestation) of which might be frustrated by the operation of any number of psychological causes (amounting to inattention, failure to recognize etc.). In the second place, the intended disposition cannot be taken as requiring for its realization that, in reasoning from any S, X would actually add as a premise any P believed logically necessary, no matter how irrelevant or redundant any such P might be, and no matter how many such P there are. One might, therefore, attempt to specify the disposition of preparedness by putting constraints on the conditions under which P will be added as a premise: conditions of (believed) relevance, non-redundancy, manageable number etc. We will not argue here that such an approach is doomed to failure. Our alternative suggestion is that the right sort of preparedness is passive rather than active: belief in logical necessity would not be played out in the manic addition of premises but, rather, in non-resistance to the addition of any such proposition as premise, or in the treatment of each such proposition as permanently available for that purpose.

(e) The relevance of the rationality of X is the involvement of a certain kind of directed normativity: preparedness is to be understood as preparedness to add P as a premise (to any S) in attempting to reason *well* in certain respects. But which is the appropriate norm of reasoning? To establish this, let us focus on the sufficiency thesis (LN2).

Certain norms are too weak to be fit for purpose because they generate attitudes that rational X will take to any proposition whatsoever (and not only to those she believes logically necessary). It is for this reason that no simple variant on validity is promising. For each S, *then for every P*, it is perfectly in keeping with one's aim simply to reason validly that one should be prepared to form the set of assumptions (that is, premises and/or suppositions) {S, P}. Moreover, for each S, *then for every P*, if X judges valid the inference from {S...} to C, then (reflecting the orthodox assumption of monotonicity) X will judge valid the inference {S, P...} to C. Certain stronger norms are still too weak since they generate attitudes that X will take to any proposition that X believes to be *true* (and not only to those she believes logically necessary). Thus consider the norm of soundness – understood as meaning that inference is valid and all (non-discharged) assumptions, true. That X should aim to reason soundly from every supposition S is, of course, a non-starter as an effective norm in this context: for, in general, reasoning from S (in which S is not discharged) is often aimed at establishing what follows from S even when X is confident that S is false. Moreover, the norm of soundness-preservation is not apt either. On orthodox assumptions, if X judges as sound any inference from {S...} to C, (rational) X will also judge as sound any inference from {S, P...} to C just in case X judges P true. So preparedness to add P as a premise, to any supposition S, for the purpose of preserving the soundness of reasoning, is a mark of confidence in the truth of P and of no more. Therefore, as with validity, soundness *simpliciter* is a hopeless candidate to be the norm that renders (LN2) effective. But one norm that does render (LN2) effective, and the norm that we propose as (most) appropriate, is that of *stability-preservation*.⁹ We explain this norm in two stages. Firstly, the structure: (for any X, P, S) X judges that the addition of P to {S} is stability-preserving just in case, if X judges that

⁹ There are hints in McFetridge (1990) that he has in mind something very much along these lines: for example, in articulating the key concept that figures in his explanations as the “co-tenability” of supposition and premise (ibid, 151).

{S} is stable, then X will also judge that {S, P} is stable. Secondly, the content: a set of assumptions being stable (or non-explosive) consists in it being the case that it does not have an arbitrary proposition as a consequence.¹⁰ The structure of the proposed norm is crucial. For that structure ensures that it is irrelevant to the satisfaction of the norm, and to X's proper attempts to comply with it, what happens in the cases where X judges, or aims to show that, {S} is *unstable*, or in which X aims to form unstable {S, P}.¹¹ The identification of the norm of stability-preservation articulates the precise respect in which necessity-believing X has a conviction to the effect that nothing will (ever) be lost by the addition of P as a premise. And what might be gained is – as always with premise addition – the opportunity to reach, properly or more easily, from S some conclusion C that was not, properly or so easily, attainable before.

(f) Finally, as given in (e), we emphasize that we read both theses as being concerned with first-person reasoning: reasoning in which the aim of the reasoner is to establish to her own satisfaction, that certain propositions and inferences have certain features. We are not concerned with second-person, or third-person, reasoning in various dialectical or pedagogical contexts where the aim of the reasoner, X, is to convince others of what

¹⁰ As a heuristic, we suggest a broadly semantic understanding of “consequence”. We acknowledge, however, that further work on the project requires serious investigation of this (potentially) very important matter.

¹¹ Here we expand in response to a point raised by a referee. There is – of course – an important kind of reasoning wherein we (aim to) form an unstable set {S, P}, from stable S and stable P, and then discharge S in order to conclude on the basis of premise P, that not-S. (Note also the distinct and not strictly relevant case, in which we form unstable {S, P}, “discharge” P, and conclude on the basis of S that not-P; then we are not using P as a *premise*.) So our understanding of (LN1) and (LN2), since it is based on the norm of stability-preservation, does *not* speak to every case in which X believes P logically necessary and adds P as a premise in reasoning from S. Our proposed articulation of the McFetridge condition, in imposing the constraint that {S}, and then {S,P}, should be stable, restricts (in effect) the account of the manifestation condition of belief in logical necessity to consideration of the kind of reasoning that is aimed at establishing what is true-in-S, or what is the case according to S. But what, then, justifies that restriction? Our response is that there is no *further* justification. We contend that we have isolated a feature (norm) that allows articulation of the McFetridge condition in a way that (we will argue) succeeds in providing a necessary and sufficient condition for manifestation of belief in logical necessity. It does not detract from, or otherwise bear on, the effectiveness of that condition that the norm in question does not hold sway in (other) inferential contexts in which a proposition believed logically necessary might be deployed for other purposes – in particular, in contexts where discharge of an initial supposition is intended or enforced. Our account suffices to isolate the phenomenon of belief in absolute necessity (we claim), without aiming to encompass its full richness, and only the former is required in the context of the dialectic. We do not deny that it might be distinctive of belief in absolute necessity that when P is taken to be absolutely necessary it can be used in a kind of reductio to “rule out” the supposition S and so arrive at the belief that S is absolutely impossible. If that is so, then an account, in the spirit of ours but aiming, more ambitiously, to encompass the full richness of belief in absolute necessity, might have to enrich the ideas of stability and the aim of the relevant forms of reasoning, so that it is overall stability (achieved by rejecting S) rather than stability within a supposition, and whether S can be “ruled out” as well as what is true according to S, that are at issue. We do not take the exploration of such delicate issues to be crucial to the dialectic of this paper. For one thing, it would be unhelpful as an account of the inferential role of belief in absolute necessity to focus on interactions with other clearly modal beliefs; those interactions should eventually be explained once the inferential role has been characterised in relation to suppositional reasoning that is not itself aimed at modal belief.

would follow from a supposition *by lights other than X's own*. For reasoning well in these other kinds of argumentative context, may require the satisfaction of constraints that differ from those required in the first-person case: e.g. the avoidance of question-begging against an opponent.

The upshot, then, to be read within the scope of these various qualifications, but, introducing the crucial norm explicitly, is our preferred articulations of (LN1) and (LN2) – thus, (LN1+) and (LN2+):

(LN1+) For all X, if X believes that it is logically necessary that P then, in aiming at stability-preservation, X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S.

(LN2+) For all X, if, in aiming at stability-preservation, X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S, then X believes that it is logically necessary that P.

We shall now argue for both of these theses. Throughout, since we are testing for *stability-preservation* we need only consider, and so restrict attention to, (all) cases in which {S} is judged stable by X: the subsequent question is whether X, if rational by her own lights, will also judge stable the set, {S, P}, formed by adding P as a premise to S.

To test for sufficiency, (LN2+), we consider the contrapositive: if X does not believe it logically necessary that P then there will be some (counterexemplary) S* such that it is not the case that X is prepared to add P as a premise to S*. We then show that there are counterexamples in both of the relevant sub-cases of contrary belief: (i) belief that P is logically impossible and (ii) belief that P is logically contingent.¹²

(i) For any P that X holds logically impossible, *every* (stable) S is a counterexample: there is no supposition, S, such that X will hold that the set {S, P} is stable, for all such

¹² The proper complement of the attitude of *belief that is logically necessary that P* is that of non-belief-that-it-is-logically-necessary-that-P, and the latter admits of various agnostic sub-cases (e.g. complete agnosticism about necessity, or believing in non-impossibility but being no further opinionated). We cover those cases by pointing out that, in any case that encompasses agnosticism about the logical impossibility of P, preparedness is eliminated by awareness of *risking* (not being able to rule out) the dissipation of stability as it occurs in cases where one has *belief* in logical impossibility: similarly, *mutatis mutandis*, for any case that encompasses agnosticism about logical contingency.

sets are rendered (for X) unstable by the presence of such a P. (ii) For any P that X holds logically contingent, we can generate a counterexample (under orthodox assumptions) by putting $S^* = \text{not-P}$. P is logically contingent, in which case not-P is also logically contingent, and therefore stable: so S^* (= not-P) is stable. But the addition of P to S^* gives $\{S^*, P\} = \{\text{not-P}, P\}$ which is unstable. So for each such P we have some supposition S^* , that is a counterexample.

To justify the converse, (LN1+), consider what would be required of a counterexemplary S^* : namely, that X is not prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from S^* , even though X believes it logically necessary that P. It is required, then, that $\{S^*\}$ be (judged by X to be) stable, and $\{S^*, P\}$ unstable. Since the latter requires that $\{S^*, P\}$ has as a consequence any proposition, it requires, in particular, that $\{S^*, P\}$ has as a consequence $\sim P$. But it follows then, under orthodox conditional reasoning, that $\{S^*\}$ should have as a consequence $(P \rightarrow \sim P)$ and, thus, that $\{S^*\}$ alone should have as a consequence, $\sim P$. However that is contrary to the requirement (for a counterexample) that $\{S^*\}$ be stable, because X takes $\sim P$ to be a logical falsehood and, as such, to have any proposition as a consequence. So there are no counterexamples to (LN1+).

We do not commend the above as a watertight proof of the theses (LN1+) and (LN2+) - one that ought to compel any rational being. And, certainly, our justification relies implicitly on (certain versions of) principles of inference, such as conditional proof and *ex falso quodlibet*, that are – although entirely orthodox – controversial in some quarters.¹³ However, having attempted to articulate the crucial notion of preparedness sympathetically, and in a way that maximizes its plausibility and effectiveness in the case of belief in logical necessity, we fix that understanding and turn to the question of

¹³ We must distinguish our present concession that our recent justification of (LN1+) and (LN2+) relies on classical logical principles from the contention that (LN1+) or (LN2+) *apply* only to reasoners who adhere to such principles. The latter contention is far from evident, and we are strongly inclined to resist it. For our theses are intended to be tolerant of heterodox views about all sorts of matters as long as variations from the orthodoxy on one side (convictions about logical consequence, conditions of stability etc.) are matched by variations on the other (beliefs about logical necessity). Thus, see n2 above. We fully accept that the cases of variously non-classical logicians call for far more extensive consideration of the justification and formulation of the conditions than we offer here. And we signal again our reliance on an unspecified notion of logical consequence (see n10 above). However, we also seek permission to put aside such an enormous package of under-explored issues, pleading that the present treatment has already gone much further in exploring the underlying issues from a classical standpoint than has previously been attempted.

whether the condition that emerges can be applied immediately to the case of belief in absolute necessity in general. Our answer will be that it cannot.

§4. The Case of Belief in Non-Logical A Priori Absolute Necessity

We will argue (for a start) that (LN1+) does not allow generalization to all cases of belief in absolute necessity. Consider, then, the generalized thesis, (AN1+):

(AN1+) For all X, if X believes that it is absolutely necessary that P then, in aiming at stability-preservation, X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S.

The case of absolute, non-logical, a priori necessity does enough to raise serious worries about (AN1+): but the case of absolute, non-logical a posteriori necessity, we contend, provides a refutation. The problem, common to both cases, is clear. Take a proposition P that you believe to be absolutely but non-logically necessary. Consider then the supposition that not-P. Since you do not consider P logically necessary, you will consider not-P (strictly) stable. But then there is a supposition (not-P) which you regard as intrinsically stable, but such that you cannot take the addition of P as a premise to that supposition to preserve stability.

One strategy of response is to broaden the understanding of what is involved in stability-preservation or, to invoke McFetridge's term, "co-tenability". In the a priori case, that might play out as follows. Imagine that you have the conviction that certain mathematical or analytic truths are absolutely but non-logically necessary: that $1 \neq 0$, perhaps, or that all bachelors are male. The aim, then, is to introduce a notion of stability or tenability such that the negations of these propositions would not be (intrinsically) stable or tenable, since it would then be the case that their negations are not eligible to figure as counter-exemplary suppositions: they are not suppositions such that stability would be *dissipated* by adding as a premise the proposition held necessary.

For our purposes, and especially since we are not concerned to defend the next move, we need only make a basic point about the direction in which it is likely to be made.

Concerns about how belief in necessity is manifest call into play, at this point,

considerations about how such belief is acquired. It is a venerable theme that, in the case of the range of a priori necessities (narrowly logical or otherwise) the (epistemological or phenomenological) basis of the conviction is a certain kind of inability – in a relatively recent version, inability “to make anything of” the contrary.¹⁴ And, of course, if one finds oneself unable to make anything of the supposition that (say) $1=0$, whether or not one takes it to be strictly explosive, one is not in a position where there is a kind of tenability or stability attained and which risks subsequent *dissipation* by the addition of any premise.

§5. The Case of Belief in A Posteriori Absolute Necessity

We do not wish to explore here whether or not the strategy of enriching stability succeeds in the a priori case, because we are more confident that such a strategy cannot succeed in allaying concerns about the a posteriori case, as we shall explain. Our thought is that the a posteriori case is the hardest to square with McFetridge’s account of belief in absolute necessity, and thus that in defending and amending the account we do best to confront that most recalcitrant case squarely. We will then arrive at an account which can cope with both the case of belief in a posteriori absolute necessity and the case of belief in non-logical a priori absolute necessity.

Consider an essentialist who – following her reading of Kripke (1980) – comes to believe that some claims of kind, or origin, or composition are absolutely necessary; moreover, she claims that she has an a posteriori warrant for her belief in the (metaphysical) necessity of these propositions (subsequent to her having an a posteriori warrant for belief in the relevant the non-modal propositions). Counter-essentialist suppositions appear to offer further counterexamples (to (AN1+)) since stable reasoning from them seems eminently feasible – the suppositions, for example: (i) that Socrates was a robot; (ii) that (actual) Water is an element, or (iii) that George W is not the son of George. It would appear to follow from the respective suppositions (and taking other things we

¹⁴ See Blackburn 1986. We emphasize here that it is no part of our present concern whether any kind of necessity is co-extensive with any kind of inability to conceive or inability to make anything of. We are presently concerned only with the (canonical) psychological circumstances that prompt such belief, and while an account of justification might be constructed out of those resources, we do not claim that the obtaining of these circumstances is inevitably justificatory of such belief, far less what “makes it true”.

believe as further premises): (i*) that there was a robot in ancient Greece; (ii*) that the predominant stuff in Lake Geneva is an element and (iii*) that Jenna is not the granddaughter of George. Moreover, there is no prior or independent case for thinking that just *anything* follows from any of these suppositions (provided we do not add other premises which bring about instability). But, for example, were our (classical) essentialist to add to the stable supposition, (i), that Socrates was a robot, the further (stable) premise, (i*) that Socrates was not a robot, then clearly (she would find that) stability would not be preserved.

The first strategy of response is that, previously advertised in the a priori case, of finding a suitably broad norm that would allow us to classify the counter-essentialist suppositions as unstable (or untenable) and, thus, enable their removal from the realm of stability-dissipating, counterexamples. However, the kind of norm on which hopes might be pinned in the a priori case is simply not in prospect in the a posteriori case. It is not remotely plausible, on any prior and neutral understanding of the notion, that those with Kripkean (or other) modal sensibilities find themselves “unable to make anything of” the thoughts that Socrates is a robot, that Water is an element, or that George W is not the son of George. It certainly appears that one can have these thoughts and make something of them – for example, in all sorts of non-trivial and discriminating reasoning from them (see above). How else – especially in such matters as the determination of the composition of Water – other than by making such thoughts the content of our suppositions, and reasoning from them, are we to discover whether they are false? On that observation we rest our case for the hopelessness of the first strategy.

The second strategy of response is to attempt to deal with these cases by ruling against there being a belief in absolute necessity. We note, again, that the pursuit of this strategy is unsatisfactory if based on simple insistence. Why can the Kripkeans not have their self-ascribed beliefs, and manifest them appropriately, even if these might be described as from the standpoint of an alternative modal sensibility, as false beliefs or beliefs that they *ought* not to have? Yet this strategy might be supported by some justification that goes beyond simple insistence, and in the present case it may appear that such justification is at hand. For one might attempt to scrutinize, and then weasel away at, the non-modal

content of the essentialist's beliefs with a view to making the case that – seen aright from her own perspective – she does not believe in the absolute necessity of exactly *those* propositions which are intimated. Thus, for example, one might observe that our essentialist does not quite believe that – say – Socrates is human, or that George W is the son of George in *every* possible world (to advert temporarily to that idiom): what she believes, rather, is that *at every possible world at which Socrates exists*, Socrates is human, or that *at every possible world at which George W exists*, George W is the son of George. So, in line with such restricted quantification over possible worlds, it may seem perfectly reasonable to say that our Kripkean essentialist does not believe in the absolute necessity of the propositions in question. However, behind such ‘weak’ necessities, ‘strong’ necessities lurk, and they are outed by conditionalization. For what our essentialist does believe, under this hypothesis, is that at (unrestrictedly) every possible world, *if Socrates exists, then Socrates is human*, or that at (unrestrictedly) every possible world, *if George W exists then he is the son of George*. Consider, then, the supposition (iv) that George W exists and is not the son of George. It is clearly the case that the essentialist cannot properly aim to reason stably from that supposition if prepared to add as a premise that *if George W exists then he is the son of George*. For (logical) instability is delivered from that combination in short order and, thus, a new set of counterexamples emerges.

Finally, before turning to our strategy for amending of (AN1+), and its companions, it is natural at this point to raise, and to address, the suspicion that the moral of the a posteriori counterexamples is that the McFetridge conditions on belief in logical necessity track the presence in that case (and elsewhere) of a conviction in the *a priori* of P. Hence the alternative hypothesis, (AP1+):

(AP1+) For all X, if X believes that it is a priori that P then, in aiming at stability-preservation, X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S.

This alternative hypothesis would have to get past the issue already raised for the application of (LN1+) to cases of a priori non-logical necessity: namely, that counterexamples will emerge unless some credible, but not narrowly logical norm of

stability is available. However, a further obstacle to (AP1+) is presented by an obvious test case. Thus, consider our Kripkean's conviction that it is an a priori truth that the Standard Metre Rod, ("Rod"), at the time the standard is set, was *1m* in length, and consider the supposition that Rod (at the time the standard is set) had turned out to be a little shorter than *1m* in length. Clearly, our Kripkean cannot properly aim to reason stably from *that* supposition while being prepared to add as a premise that Rod is *1m* in length – despite her conviction that this is an a priori truth: for logical instability is delivered from that combination in short order. So just as the necessary a posteriori generates counterexamples to (AN1+), so the contingent a priori generates counterexamples to the alternative hypothesis (AP1+). As always, we could legislate the counterexample away by insisting that no-one ever really, and rationally, believes to be a priori that which she also believes to be contingent. But it would be an undesirable feature of any envisaged condition on belief in a priority that it should rely on such sweeping legislation. And, in any event, a better explanation, of the appropriate kind, is available of both belief in a posteriori necessity and of belief in a priori contingency.

§6. A-Supposition versus C- Supposition

The explanation of the counterexamples to (AN1+), and the proper development of the McFetridge insight from the logical case, depends on drawing a distinction between *kinds* of supposition that is overlooked in the various theses formulated thus far. This distinction between kinds of supposition echoes other distinctions that are drawn in the literature on modality. Perhaps even more importantly, it is (arguably) an entirely natural and pre-philosophical distinction, since it is reflected in familiar distinctions of mood (indicative versus subjunctive) and tense (conditional versus non-conditional) in natural languages.

At first pass, consider the data on which Lewis (1973: 3ff) (following Adams (1970)) famously draws in order to motivate the recognition that *conditional statements* differ in semantic kind (content). One might hold true: (a) that if Oswald *didn't* kill Kennedy then someone else *did*, while not holding true, (b) that if Oswald *hadn't* killed Kennedy (if Oswald were not to have killed Kennedy) then someone else *would have*. It seems a short step from recognition that some important difference of (broadly) meaning is afoot in

these conditionals, to recognition that there is some important difference afoot in the related suppositions: suppose that Oswald didn't kill Kennedy, versus, suppose that Oswald hadn't killed Kennedy.

At second pass, consider the different kinds of conceiving – prompting thoughts of different kinds of possibility, and of different kinds of proposition – discerned by the advocates of 2-dimensional semantics for modalities (e.g. Chalmers 2002). In that tradition, it is suggested that while one can conceive-as-actual a world of a certain character, one cannot conceive-as counterfactual such a world (and vice versa). It seems a short step from recognizing that some important difference is afoot in these kinds of conceiving to recognition that there is some important difference afoot in the following pair of suppositions: suppose (actually) that Hesperus isn't identical to Phosphorus, versus, suppose (counterfactually) that Hesperus were not identical to Phosphorus.

Thus, we claim, there is a natural, compelling and operable distinction between the *activities* of A-supposition and of C-supposition. And while more detailed investigation of this distinction is merited than can be offered here, initial explanation and elucidation, at least, might be offered along the following lines.¹⁵

When we A-suppose, we typically project assumptions that vary from our beliefs about what is *actually* the case: and we do so – usually – for such purposes as working out how things would look if certain things *are* true which we currently believe false, or about which we are presently agnostic. When engaging in such reasoning, what is A-supposed is treated in some respects as if it were believed (but not in every respect – in particular one may not infer from the A-supposition that P, that one believes that P in the supposition). The way in which what follows from an A-supposition deviates from what is antecedently believed is epistemic: when we believe that P, and A-suppose that S, P will still be believed under the supposition unless S is (taken to be) a defeater for our knowledge that P. For example, under the A-supposition that Oswald didn't shoot

¹⁵ To forestall misunderstanding, in our usage, one and the same proposition may be the object of A-supposing and the object of C-supposing. An A-supposition (C-supposition) is a propositional attitude of A-supposing (C-supposing) that P. We also note, following a referee's suggestion, that some suppositions may be neither determinately A-suppositions nor determinately C-suppositions yet may (nonetheless) be fit for inferential purpose (taken either way), e.g. suppose the rationality of the square root of 2...

Kennedy, we still believe that someone shot Kennedy, since what is supposed is not a defeater for that belief. Our evidence that someone shot Kennedy goes beyond our evidence that Oswald shot Kennedy. Under the A-supposition that George is not George W's father, we no longer believe that George is Jenna's grandfather, because the supposition is a defeater for the latter belief. We have no evidence that George is Jenna's grandfather that retains its force if George is not George W's father. Reasoning under A-supposition is thus linked to issues of epistemic or evidential dependence.

When we C-suppose, we are concerned not with such evidential dependence but instead with some form of (broadly) worldly dependence. It is not entirely illuminating to say that this kind of dependence is *counterfactual* dependence, but at least we point to a salient distinction when we say that counterfactual dependence is not (in the earlier sense) epistemic. What is C-supposed is treated less as if it were believed than what is A-supposed; rather it is considered as a limiting condition on a world, where that world may be non-actual, and the conclusions of the suppositional reasoning concern that world.¹⁶ The interest of such reasoning lies in the constraint that the world under consideration must (in one development of the thought) be as similar as possible to the actual world, with some priority in the relevant similarity relation given to general facts over particular ones. For example, under the C-supposition that Oswald hadn't shot Kennedy (if we believe that Oswald, alone, did shoot Kennedy) we are agnostic about whether someone shot Kennedy. This is because, after adjusting our view of the world under consideration to take into account both the supposition and the general facts, we do not get a clearly more coherent view of that world either by affirming or denying that someone shot Kennedy. Under the C-supposition that Rod is a little shorter (than it actually was) on the day that the standard was set, Rod is not *1m* long: and that is because we are considering how the length of a non-actual rod, as it were, compares to the standard fixed in the actual case.

§7. C-Supposition and Treating a Proposition as Absolute Necessity

¹⁶ We intend here – as throughout, and as an instance of our official metaphysical neutrality – to be neutral with respect to realist versus non-realist conceptions of talk of possible worlds.

Given that the (natural, compelling and operable) distinction between the activities of A-supposition and of C-supposition, there should be no surprise in our subsequent contention that it is C-supposition to which belief in absolute necessity is primarily and essentially connected. A-supposition has an epistemic flavour, in a way that C-supposition does not. We are familiar with the idea that there is a notion of absolute necessity (possibility) that differs from that of epistemic necessity (possibility). Consequently, a theory which connects belief in such absolute, and non-epistemic, necessity to just one kind of supposing ought not to seem ad hoc so long as (as in our case) it is the kind of supposing that is non-epistemic (in the foregoing sense) to which such belief is connected. If we follow Kripke in enforcing the distinction between the concept of absolute necessity and (at least superficially) related concepts such as that of a priority, we should likewise enforce the distinction between different kinds of supposition when trying to connect these to the concepts of absolute necessity and a priority. And once we insist on the distinction between these kinds of supposition, the appropriate advertising slogan for an effective McFetridge-like condition on (manifestation of) belief in absolute necessity is that it is a matter of *preparedness to deploy as a premise under every C-supposition*. In what follows, we shall often revert to that slogan, but not before we proceed towards (the justification of) the more restricted formulation that underpins it.

Firstly, we can quickly argue – rather than merely intuit – that an effective sufficient condition on belief in absolute necessity cannot be given, primarily, in terms of A-supposition. It is insufficient to believe a proposition absolutely necessary that one should be prepared to deploy it as a premise under every A-supposition, for that condition is satisfied by the Kripkean who believes in the contingency and a priority of any P. Such a thinker may be fully prepared to add to every A-supposition, S, the premise that Rod is 1m in length while maintaining conviction in contingency of that proposition. If preparedness with respect to all A-suppositions is insufficient then so, a fortiori, is preparedness with respect to any restricted range of A-suppositions. So if a sufficient condition (in the McFetridge style) for belief in absolute necessity is to emerge, it must be formulated in terms of attitudes to C-supposition. In this regard, we also observe that in the case of belief in absolute a posteriori necessity, the kinds of supposition that generated counterexamples to (AN1+) were, invariably, A-suppositions – suppositions

about how things actually are which vary from our beliefs about how things actually are in those respects: that Socrates is a robot, that Water is an element and that George W is not the son of George. Restriction to consideration of what one does when reasoning from C-suppositions disqualifies such, previously eligible, counterexamples.

Secondly, however, we do not achieve an entirely accurate necessary condition on belief in absolute necessity by a simple formulation that adverts (as per our *slogan*) to what X would be prepared to add as a premise when reasoning under every C-supposition.¹⁷ The reason is that for every a posteriori proposition, Q, even the Kripkean will allow, one can, properly C-suppose that Q, and one can properly C-suppose that not-Q: one can properly C-suppose that Socrates is human (suppose that Socrates had still been human but instead of having gone in for philosophy ...) and one can, *under the A-supposition that Socrates is not human*, properly C-suppose that Socrates is not human (suppose that Socrates had still been non-human but instead of having gone in for philosophy ...). So, to take the case in residence, the Kripkean thinker believes that it is absolutely necessary that Socrates is human and yet there is a proposition Q (that Socrates is not human) such that she will allow that she can properly C-suppose that Q, but to which she cannot (with stability-preservation in mind) add the premise that Socrates is human. The point is that we sometimes C-suppose *within the scope of an A-supposition*, and if we allow those *nested* C-suppositions to count we get counterexamples to the slogan. It is the *un-nested* kind of C-supposition that we want to restrict ourselves to here: the kind where the background to C-supposition is the reasoner's (non-modal) beliefs, not A-suppositions which may be contrary to those beliefs. What happens under nested C-suppositions concerns what the reasoner believes to be absolutely necessary *under the relevant A-supposition*, not what she believes to be absolutely necessary tout court, and the two may differ when what is A-supposed differs from what she believes. The slogan can thus easily be fixed by employing that restriction: (manifestation of) belief in absolute necessity is a matter of preparedness to deploy as a premise under every *un-nested* C-supposition.

¹⁷ The formulation of Peacocke (1999) is as per our slogan, and our explanation here will justify why we say (in n3 above) that that formulation will not do as it stands.

The upshot is that we propose a pair of theses expressing that a single (complex) condition in the style of McFetridge is necessary and sufficient for (manifestation of) belief in absolute necessity.

(AN1-C) For all X, if X believes that it is absolutely necessary that P, then in aiming at stability-preservation X is prepared to add P as a premise to any un-nested C-supposition S (that she makes with her non-modal beliefs, rather than some contrary A-supposition, in the background).

(AN2-C) For all X, if in aiming at stability-preservation X is prepared to add P as a premise to any un-nested C-supposition S (that she makes with her non-modal beliefs, rather than some contrary A-supposition, in the background), then X believes that it is absolutely necessary that P.

We note that it is possible to argue, as below, for (AN1-C) from reasonably plausible principles concerning belief in counterfactual conditionals.

(C1) For all X, if X believes that it is absolutely necessary that P, then, for every S, X will be prepared to believe $S > P$ [i.e. any counterfactual conditional which has P as its consequent].

(C2) For all X, for every S (if X is prepared to believe $S > P$, then X will also be prepared to add P as a premise when aiming to reason stably from S as an un-nested C-supposition).

Therefore,

(AN1-C) For all X, if X believes that it is absolutely necessary that P, then in aiming at stability-preservation X is prepared to add P as a premise to any un-nested C-supposition S.

To see that this argument is valid, consider a purported S which was a counterexample to (AN1-C), i.e. such that X believed that P was absolutely necessary but was not prepared to add P as premise in reasoning aiming at stability preservation from the un-nested C-supposition of S. By the relevant instance of (C2), it follows that S is not prepared to

believe $S > P$. Yet (C1) states that, whatever S is, X is prepared to believe $S > P$ given that X believes that P is absolutely necessary. So any purported counterexample to the conclusion generates a contradiction when conjoined with the premises.

We do not propose to defend our premises, (C1) and (C2), at any length here, but note the following. Firstly, some (e.g. Nolan (1997)) will want to hold that some counterfactual conditionals with necessary consequents (and with impossible antecedents) are false, e.g., if Hesperus were not identical to Phosphorus, then Hesperus would be identical to Phosphorus. But in light of that observation, we apply here our view (see n2 above) that such philosophers do not believe that the relevant necessity is absolute, and so they do not provide compelling counterexamples to (C1). We note here the intuitive difficulty in making sense of someone who claims that P is absolutely necessary but who denies that P would be true whatever the circumstances. Secondly, the principle (C1) represents a link between *belief* in counterfactuals and *belief* in necessity, and a relatively weak link at that. To see this, it is important to emphasize various theses to which we are not committed via (C1). Thus (C1) does not bring commitment to its non-doxastic relative, (C1*):

(C1*) If it is absolutely necessary that P , then, for any S , $S > P$

Nor, a fortiori, does (C1) bring commitment to any strengthening of (C1*) which expresses logical or semantic entailment. Nor does commitment to (C1) involve commitment to any converse thesis – not the converse of (C1) itself, nor the converse of (C1*). Nor does (C1) commit us to any properly *epistemic* thesis that concerns the conditions (concerning knowledge of counterfactuals) under which X *knows* that it is absolutely necessary that P . So in all of these respects, (C1) is weaker than – for example – the central claims of Williamson (2007).¹⁸ As for (C2), we will simply note the intuitive plausibility of moving from, “Were it that S , it would be that P ”, to “Supposing that S were the case, it would be that P ”, and thence to adding P as a premise in reasoning (aiming at stability) under the un-nested C-supposition that S . We are not aware of these moves being controversial

¹⁸ To point out absence of commitment in these respects is not, of course, to express opposition.

Having formulated, defended and offered argumentative support for our principle (AN1-C) we return, finally, to the matter of its distance from inappropriately epistemic accounts of what it is to manifest belief in absolute necessity.¹⁹ (AN1-C) and (AN2-C) share with the earlier McFetridge-like conditions for logical necessity ((LN1) and (LN2)) the feature that they specify an inferential disposition (of X) that need not be permanent, nor perceived by X as such. It is perfectly in keeping with the ascription of an inferential disposition of such a shape and content that X should lose that disposition – perhaps under the impact of X's coming to make something of the proposition, not-P, of which she was previously unable to make anything and treated as untenable. Indeed, it is in keeping with the ascription of such an inferential disposition, that one should lose that disposition for having come to believe that it is not actually the case that P. One might be able to perfectly well conceive of evidence that would persuade one not to believe P, and our account allows for that because such epistemic connections concern A-supposition rather than C-supposition. And so, we have an account of what it is to treat a proposition as absolutely necessary – to believe that it is so and to manifest that belief – that is perfectly consistent with the defeasibility of belief in the absolute necessity of P and even of P itself.

§8. A-Supposition and Treating a Proposition as A Priori

In light of the earlier diagnosis of the failure of (AN1+), and the ensuing distinction between A-supposition and C-supposition, a further, and more speculative, hypothesis is suggested. Just as treatment of a proposition as absolutely necessary is essentially a matter of having a certain inferential disposition with respect to C-supposition, so – one might think – treatment of a proposition as a priori is essentially a matter of having a similar inferential disposition but with respect to A-supposition.²⁰ In particular, consider the following hypotheses:

¹⁹ See the final part of §2 above.

²⁰ The notion of treating a proposition as a priori may sound initially odd, but we hope to convince the reader in what follows that this is exactly what is at issue in certain discussions of a priority – in particular, that of Quine (1951).

(AP1-A) For all X, if X believes that it is a priori that P, then, in aiming at stability-preserving reasoning, for any S, X is prepared to add P as a premise to the A-supposition that S.

(AP2-A) For all X, if in aiming at stability-preserving reasoning, for any S, X is prepared to add P as a premise to the A-supposition that S, then X believes that it is a priori that P.

Recall the earlier considered necessary condition, (AP1+):

(AP1+) For all X, if X believes that it is a priori that P then, in aiming at stability-preservation, X is prepared to add P as a premise in reasoning from any supposition S.

The new hypothesis (AP1-A) shares with its predecessor (AP1+) that it would have to get past the issue already raised for the application of (LN1+) to cases of a priori non-logical necessity: namely, that counterexamples will emerge unless some credible, but not narrowly logical, norm of stability is available. However, what was a further obstacle to (AP1+) is no obstacle to (AP1-A). For in the contingent a priori case, the kind of supposition that generated the counterexample to (AP1+) was a C-supposition: given that Rod is actually 1m in length, suppose that it had not been so. And the restriction to A-suppositions puts that kind of counterexample to (AP1+) out of the range of counterexamples to (AP1-A). What remains is that when our Kripkean thinker, A-supposes about Rod, and intends to reason stably from that supposition, she must not add as a premise that Rod was shorter than 1m when the standard was set: for that is effectively to suppose the contradiction that the Rod was (actually) shorter than it (actually) was.

The secondary hypothesis pair (AP-A) is problematic (at least) in that it is controversial whether the kind of status (if any) it picks out among beliefs really deserves to be called belief as *a priori*. There is, certainly, a question about whether the status picked out by (AP-A) matches (even in extension), various traditional or antecedent conceptions of the a priority of propositions – for example as propositions that can be known (or belief in them acquired or warranted) independently of experience. Also, we note that it will be

natural for certain 2-dimensional semanticists, again following Chalmers (2002), to characterize (AP-A), in relation to (AN1-C) and (AN2-C), as picking out belief in a second kind of necessity (necessity-1, versus necessity-2) that might attach to a proposition. However, while (AP-A) is (undoubtedly) problematic, we offer here some justification of the claim that it is also attractive, and potentially illuminating in ways which encourage its exploration.

Firstly, given (AP-A) in addition to the conditions on belief in absolute necessity, we have an explanation not only of the limitations, but also of the attraction that many have felt, to McFetridge-like theses (such as (AN1+)) even though they do not benefit from the distinction between A-supposition and C-supposition. From the present standpoint, given the (AN-C) theses as well as the (AP-A) theses, we can appreciate that the effect of framing a McFetridge condition in terms *all* supposings, is to capture the sort of belief that passes *both* the C-supposition tests and the A-supposition tests: that is, belief that a certain proposition is absolutely necessary and a priori – the Kripke-analyticity of a proposition (Kripke 1980: 39). So, those who take propositions of (broad/narrow) logical necessity to be Kripke-analytic will find an unrefined McFetridge condition compelling as a necessary condition for belief in logical necessity: and such a condition will strike as a compelling sufficient condition those who take *only* propositions of (broad/narrow) logical necessity to be Kripke-analytic. That, perhaps, is enough to account for why many have been drawn to the McFetridge account as an account of belief in logical necessity.

Secondly, and of much wider interest, we commend (AP-A) as capturing *the Quinean a priori*. Certainly, it seems that given the A-supposition theses in addition to the C-supposition theses we have richer resources from which to construct an appropriately fine-grained Quinean position in this region. One might think that it is (at least) desirable that the result of subjecting an orthodox Quinean to the C-supposition tests (in particular the sufficient-condition test, (AN2-C)) should be that she emerges from those as treating *no* proposition as absolutely necessary. However, for such a Quinean, a more fundamental question hangs over *any* C-supposition thesis. One can see why it would be of interest to isolate a class of propositions which we hold tenable under all C-suppositions, or indeed to establish that the putative class of such propositions is empty –

or at least that is so *if*, but perhaps also *only if*, one could tell a story about why we go in for C-supposition *at all*. In that light, (AN1-C) and (AN2-C) offer the prospect of an explanation of the function, purpose or utility of belief in (absolute) necessity in general – the desirability of which is a common theme of McFetridge (1990) Peacocke (1999) and Wright (2002). However, the explanation in prospect is *partial* in light of the further question of the very point of C-supposition: and whether there is any such serious point, is another familiar focus of Quinean modal skepticism. But the activity of A-supposing is in Quinean good standing. Our Quinean, we suggest, will be happy to grant that the framing of A-suppositions is indispensable and central to our cognitive and scientific activity – for example, for the purpose of framing and testing the observational consequences of hypotheses. Accordingly, great, and easily explicable, importance would attach to any propositions that we ought to hold invariant under every A-supposition. One might think it illuminating, then, to re-cast central claims of Two Dogmas (Quine 1951) as the theses: (a) that any A-supposition can be made stable (in some holistic context) and (b) that there is no proposition which merits addition as a premise in aiming to reason stably from *every* A-supposition (in every holistic context). In that light, we attribute to our orthodox Quinean, via (AP2-A), the following central commitment: she does not, for any P, believe it a priori that P. If we isolate further the case of belief in the analyticity, or analytic necessity, of P as belief which *requires* belief that it is a priori that P, then our Quinean does not, for any P, believe that it is analytic that P, nor that it is analytically necessary that P. Moreover, our Quinean will diagnose belief in others that some P is analytic, or that some P is analytically necessary, as manifestation of (what the history of science shows to be) *unwarranted* preparedness to add P as a premise to every A-supposition S, when aiming to reason stably to conclusions which are true-in-S.

However, our main topic has been the treatment of propositions as absolute necessity, rather than as a priori and in conclusion we recapitulate our core contention as follows. The central insight of McFetridge (1990), there trained on the case of belief in logical necessity in particular, can be developed into a version that applies to belief in absolute necessity in general and *tout court*: but only if we are prepared to draw, and apply, a fundamental and crucial distinction between A-supposition and C-supposition, and to explicate belief in absolute necessity as, essentially, a matter pertaining to the latter.

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