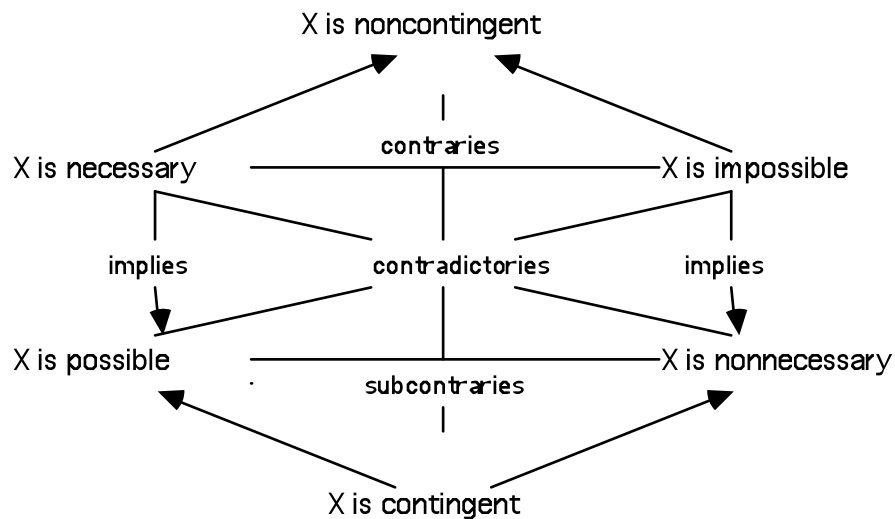


CONTINGENCY

Raymond D. Bradley

The MODAL property of contingency is attributed to something X (for instance, a PROPOSITION, STATE OF AFFAIRS, EVENT, or - more debatably - an object) just when X is neither impossible nor necessary, i.e., is both possible and nonnecessary.

Muddles about the relationship between this and other modal properties have abounded ever since ARISTOTLE who initially conflated contingency with possibility but later realized that something which is possible may also be necessary while something which is contingent cannot be necessary. Even today many philosophers are less than clear about the nature of the "opposition" between contingency and NECESSITY, mistakenly supposing them to be contradictory notions (probably because within the domain of *true* propositions the contingent and the necessary are indeed both exclusive and exhaustive of one another). But the contradictory of "necessary" is "nonnecessary" while that of "contingent" is "noncontingent", as the following extended modal SQUARE OF OPPOSITION shows:



These logico-syntactical relationships are preserved through various semantical interpretations such as those involving: (a) the logical modalities (proposition P is logically contingent just when P is neither a logical truth nor a logical falsehood); (b) the causal or physical modalities (state of affairs or event E is physically contingent just when E is neither physically necessary nor physically impossible); and (c) the deontic modalities (act A is morally indeterminate just when A is neither morally obligatory nor morally forbidden).

In none of these cases does "contingent" mean "dependent" as in the

phrase "is contingent upon". Yet just such a notion of contingency seems to feature prominently in certain formulations of the COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT, all created objects being said to be contingent beings and God alone to be a necessary or noncontingent being. Conceptual clarity is not furthered by assimilating this sense of "contingent" to the others.