

BOOK SYMPOSIUM

PRÉCIS OF *WORLDS AND INDIVIDUALS, POSSIBLE AND OTHERWISE*

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I present a version of modal realism and partially defend it. I regard this as the first of many steps in the development of nonactualist non-Lewisian modal realism. I define modal realism as the thesis that the nonactual, as well as the actual, are real. By the word “real,” I mean *real*. The notion of reality is primitive and absolutely essential to metaphysics. Different metaphysicians may have different names for reality, but any metaphysical theory worth its salt must be ultimately a study of reality.

There is a competing and more popular conception of modal realism. It says that the nonactual, as well as the actual, exist. This conception conflates reality with existence. Modal realism should be a position that affirms the most fundamental status of the nonactual in metaphysics, and that status is none other than reality. Existence is not fundamental. It is a two-place relation: an object x exists relative to a collection C of objects iff x belongs to C . Pegasus and unicorns do not exist relative to the collection of actual creatures but exist relative to the collection of creatures from the Greek and medieval mythology. Pegasus and unicorns are real. Reality does not admit an intelligible qualifier other than “absolutely” (or “completely” or “without qualification,” etc.).

A world is a modal index, just as a time is a temporal index. The temporality of an index is primitive, as is the modality of an index. In either case, the primitiveness should not hamper our ability to reason about the indices. A world is a modal relativizer of things-being-thus-and-so, or *so-sein*, just as a time is a temporal relativizer of *so-sein*. The notion of a possible world is a composite notion, constituted by the notion of a world and the notion of possibility. There are various kinds of possibility: logical, metaphysical, physical, chemical, biological, psychological, legal, and so forth. A world is a possible world of a specific kind iff it obeys a certain specific constraint on how things are. For any kind of possibility, there is the corresponding kind of impossibility. For any kind K of possibility, there is at least one K -possible world and at least one K -impossible world. This generous conception of a possible world is motivated by a drive for completely general and uniform treatment of all kinds of possibility and the resultant theoretical utility. With the inclusion of impossible worlds of all kinds, the often-maligned attempt at reducing propositions to

collections of worlds is resurrected, and a new proposal for the semantics of belief sentences is sketched. I take belief to be a relation between a believer and a proposition so reduced and apply Russell's theory of descriptions to the phrase "the proposition that *P*." This allows failure of substitutivity *salva veritate* of synonyms and of coreferential simple singular terms in a way compatible with Millianism.

You, I, and other ordinary objects are spread over physical space, time, and modal space. Modal space is where worlds are. Some worlds are metaphysically possible, and some are logically possible. The space of metaphysically possible worlds is metaphysical space, and the space of logically possible worlds is logical space. Some worlds are outside metaphysical space, and some worlds are outside logical space. Ordinary objects have (physical-)spatial, temporal, and modal parts, or stages. For you to have been sick last week is for your last-week temporal stage to have been sick. Here, my point in speaking of temporal stages is entirely metaphysical. It is not meant to eliminate a certain way of speech, viz. tensed speech. Your last-week stage was sick. It is incorrect to say that your last-week stage is sick, just as it is incorrect to say that Obama wins over McCain. Obama *won* over McCain. Your last-week stage is not temporally located at the present time, so it is incorrect to use the present tense to predicate sickness of it. Metaphysically, I sympathize with the B-theory of time, but I am not for the elimination of tense. In fact, I favor extending tense to cover modal discourse. Different world stages may require different modal tenses for correct predication.

The problem of transworld identity is genuine and any non-Lewisian modal realist must face it squarely, but it is not much worse than the problem of transtemporal identity. Temporal stages are unified into different persisting objects. I adopt the closest continuer theory without the causal element as the most plausible theory of identity through time and extend it to cover identity through worlds. My position may appear to be subject to the following objection: for any arbitrary pair of world stages of object, there is a chain of world stages appropriately related by the closest continuer relation so that the two stages are stages of one and the same transworld object; hence, every world stage is a stage of the same transworld object as every world stage. But this poses no threat to my proposal, for even though the transworld object of which every world stage is a stage is real, it is not an object of an ordinarily recognizable kind, natural or artificial.

I regard the Kripkean "stipulative" view of transworld identification not as a view on what transworld identity consists in but as a view on how we choose to speak of a particular individual transworldly. When taken this way, the "stipulative" view is compatible with my modal realist proposal.

I offer an argument for the metaphysical impossibility of Sherlock Holmes in a non-Kripkean but Kripke-inspired way. I argue that Holmes is metaphysically impossible because if Holmes is metaphysically possible, Charles Darwin would be Holmes at some metaphysically possible world and Lewis Carroll would be Holmes at some metaphysically possible world, but this contradicts the distinctness of Darwin and Carroll and the logic of identity. This argument relies on the assumption that if Darwin, or Carroll, had satisfied

the Holmes descriptions given in Doyle's Holmes stories, he would have been Holmes. I think this assumption is strongly supported by our pretheoretic intuition. In addition, I claim that it is only a modest extension of Kripke's thesis of fixing the reference by description, an extension from the actual world to the nearest metaphysically possible worlds.

I examine the content of what the viewer is invited to imagine seeing when she views a straightforward narrative movie, and claim that the content is often metaphysically impossible. In order to imagine seeing a scene, one needs to imagine oneself as seeing the scene. But to imagine oneself as seeing the scene is to imagine oneself as being situated in an appropriate relation to the scene. At the same time, in a straightforward narrative movie, the actual laws of physics are usually assumed to hold. This combination gives rise to metaphysical impossibility.

Finally, I make brief remarks about why we should expect a satisfactory treatment of the epistemological issues surrounding the nonactual.

In the book, I take pains to distinguish my proposal from David Lewis' elegant modal realist theory, but my proposal has at least two things in common with Lewis' theory: object-orientation and concretism. When you push the Kripke-inspired object-oriented outlook in modal metaphysics one way in the direction of modal realism, you get Lewis' theory. When you push it another way, you get my proposal. In this sense, Lewis' theory and my proposal are both Kripkean.¹ Also like Lewis, I try to avoid abstract objects and rely on concrete objects as much as I can. Certain abstract objects may be unavoidable, like collections or functions, but I prefer to do without others, like subjects of "encoding" in the Mally–Zalta sense, for example.² I share my intuitive predilection for concrete particulars with nominalists.

1. I do not imply that Saul Kripke would approve of this use of the adjective.

2. See Edward Zalta, *Intensional Logic and the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).