

Theistic Modal Realism II: Theoretical Benefits

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Abstract

In Sections 1–7, I provide a detailed description of some of the advantages of theistic modal realism. The aim is to show specifically how theistic modal realism solves many of the intractable problems of philosophical theology. A detailed description of all of the advantages would require a much longer treatment. The aim is to give a good sense of the theoretical benefits that theistic modal realism affords traditional theists. I offer some concluding remarks in Section 8.

1. Introduction

Arguments in favor of theistic modal realism appeal to the theoretical advantages of the view. The theoretical benefits of modal realism have been cogently rehearsed in the literature, but the theoretical benefits of theistic modal realism have gone largely unnoticed.¹ What a successful argument for theistic modal realism must do is show that the benefits of the view outweigh its costs and that the on balance benefits of theistic modal realism are greater than the on balance benefits of its alternatives.

Theistic modal realism offers a systematic solution to most of the intractable problems in philosophical theology. Theistic modal realism solves the problems of evil – every problem of evil from the logical problem to various versions of the evidential problem – since there are no non-necessary instances of evil in any modal realist world. It also satisfies the principle of plenitude – the version of the principle most closely associated with A.O. Lovejoy, but with an impressive metaphysical history – and provides a suitable object of divine creation.² Theistic modal realism ensures that the object of creation is not only unsurpassable in magnitude but also unsurpassable in goodness.

The theoretical benefits include a solution to the problem of no best world. Theistic modal realism can concede that there is no best world – if indeed there is no such world – and also show that the object of divine creation is the best possible. There is also a solution to the less than best problem. It is indeed true that our world is – on reasonable standards – less than the best possible world. But it is also true that the object of divine creation, which includes the actual world, is peerless and unimprovable. Theistic modal realism puts us in a position to say truthfully that the actual world is unimprovable since the pluriverse is necessarily unchangeable, but it also puts us in a position to say truthfully that the actual world is improvable since there are regions of metaphysical space that are better.

How is that possible? It is possible because the representation of the actual world – as with all individuals – is inconstant. Different names and descriptions of the actual world, different contextual pressures, evoke different representations. The actual world is identical to the particular region of the pluriverse that we inhabit. Despite that identity, the actual world might have been different in many ways, but the pluriverse could not have been different in any way

whatsoever. Considered as a part of the pluriverse, the actual world and everything in it is essentially as it is. Indeed, so considered, every part of every world is essentially as it is. The vast pluriverse, as we should certainly expect, is necessarily as it is. But considered as a possible world among other possible worlds, the actual world and its parts might have been different in uncountably many ways.³ Regarded as a part in the totality of divine creation, the actual world could not have been any better than it is. It is unsurpassably good. But regarded as one possible world among other possible worlds, the actual world is certainly improvable. It could have been much better.

The phenomenon of indeterminate de re representation is not an artifact of the metaphysics of theistic modal realism. It's a feature of de re representation in general that any metaphysics of modality has to explain. The fact that the actual world takes various representations depending on how we refer to it is no different from the fact that a wax statue takes different representations depending on how we refer to it. The wax and the statue are identical, though the wax can survive being smashed and the statue cannot. The representations of identical objects can diverge, or rather there can be several representations of a self-identical object under different names and in different contexts. These are instances of the same phenomenon.

It is important to note here that there is no genuine metaphysical dispute concerning whether *it* (statue/wax) *really* has the property of being able to survive being smashed or *really* has the property not being able to survive being smashed.⁴ The resolution of indeterminacy in representation is not the resolution of a dispute about which properties are being exemplified.⁵ Indeed, nothing is being disputed at all about its properties. There is similarly no genuine metaphysical dispute concerning whether *it* (actual world) has the property of being improvable or does not have the property of being improvable. The inconstancy of representation admits of contexts in which it is true to say that the actual world is improvable and also admits of contexts in which it is true to say that it is unimprovable.⁶ This is an inconstancy about how we should describe the properties the actual world exemplifies, not about which properties is exemplified. The properties are not changing under various names or descriptions; the actual world has the same properties no matter how we choose to refer to it. But those same properties are suitably described in different ways: under one name the actual world's properties are correctly described as including being improvable; under another name those same properties are correctly described as including being unimprovable.

The evidence that we do not have settled answers concerning de re representation is overwhelming. Examples abound in the literature.⁷

Attend to the variety of what we say about modality and counterfactuals de re, and I think you will find abundant evidence that we do not have settled answers, fixed once and for all, about what is true concerning a certain individual according to a certain (genuine or ersatz) world. The way of representing is not at all constant.⁸

Theistic modal realism can explain why the modal properties of the actual world are not a settled matter, as in fact they are not. Theistic actualist realism can afford no such explanation.

The theoretical benefits of theistic modal realism include a solution to the paradox of sufficient reason. According to theistic modal realism, there is an explanation for the pluriverse that *necessitates* all of creation – the pluriverse is necessarily as it is and there could not have been another one – and everything in it has all of its properties essentially. In particular, the actual world and all actualia have all of their properties essentially. But inconstancy in representation ensures that there are other counterparts of the actual world – and other counterparts of every actual object – which exemplify different properties from those actually exemplified. The necessity of all creation does not entail a loss of contingency.⁹

As an object of divine creation it is true that the actual world has an explanation that necessitates every individual, event, property, and state of affairs. Everything that exists or occurs does so necessarily. That fact follows directly from the fact that the actual world is just one region of the pluriverse that is necessarily created. Viewed as an object of divine creation, the only counterpart of the actual world is the actual world. Viewed as one world among many, most of the individuals, events, and properties in the actual world are contingent. The actual world and its inhabitants then have various counterparts throughout the pluriverse.

It needs to be emphasized that theistic modal realism is not committed to any sort of irrealism about properties, modal or otherwise. According to theistic modal realism it is not a mind-dependent fact that the actual world has the property of being unimprovable. It is not true that modal properties are somehow in our language and not in the world. We do not make the actual world unimprovable by selecting an apt referring description of the world. Whether the actual world is unimprovable does depend on whether it is appropriate to describe its properties in that way or whether the actual world meets the standards for being unimprovable. But it is false to say that the actual world is losing or gaining properties depending on the context in which we refer to it or the manner in which we pick it out.

Whether an individual has a property depends of course on whether it meets the standards for exemplifying that property. Consider the property of being flat. On some standards of being flat it is *true* to say that the tabletop is flat. But in other contexts – perhaps contexts in which it is asserted that the tabletop isn't flat, rather graphine's flat – it is false to say that the tabletop is flat.¹⁰ Whether the tabletop exemplifies the property of being flat depends on which standards are being invoked. But this has no implications for the view that there is a single mind-independent way the world is. Theistic modal realism maintains that there is a single mind-independent way the world is.

The theoretical benefits of theistic modal realism include an account of God's freedom in creation. It is true that God necessarily created the pluriverse and so God necessarily created everything in the pluriverse. Nonetheless we need an explanation of how God maintains freedom in creation. According to theistic modal realism, it is true in the actual world that God created this world, but that God might have created a different world. God was free to create another instead.

Theistic modal realism lastly offers an explanation of the apparent arbitrariness of the actual world. It offers an explanation for why we have these particular laws and constants and not some others, for instance. It explains the whole set of contingent features of the actual world that appear to have no explanation at all.

In Sections 2–7, I provide a more detailed description of some of the advantages of theistic modal realism. The aim is to show specifically how theistic modal realism solves many of the intractable problems noted above. A detailed description of all of the advantages would require a much longer treatment. The aim is to give a good sense of the theoretical benefits that theistic modal realism affords traditional theists. I offer some concluding remarks in Section 8.

2. *Where (in Metaphysical Space) is God?*

There has been resistance to the idea that a traditional God – a maximally great being – could exist in the pluriverse of genuine modal realism. The actual source of concern is not so much modal realism, but counterpart theory and the view that individuals are world-bound. Paul Sheehy frames the concern in the following way.

Now, if we take God to be outside of space and time, then we cannot explain the necessity of God's existence in realist terms. For there is no God at the actual world or counterparts at each of the other worlds. God is not reductively analyzable into entities present in worlds or the relations in which they stand. Talk of God as a necessary being thus eludes elucidation in the realist framework of modality.¹¹

The initial problem for theistic modal realism, according to Sheehy, is that it cannot accommodate the traditional conception of God as an eternal being existing outside of time. Sheehy assumes that possible worlds for modal realists are sums of spatiotemporally related – as it happens, more or less tenuously related – individuals.¹² And that's correct. But this is not to say that possible worlds do not include abstract objects – impure sets or universals or non-repeatable tropes, for instance – all of which have locations and enter into causal relations. But Sheehy believes that it does preclude the existence of an eternal God anywhere in metaphysical reality.

Sheehy's concern is misplaced. Not everything that exists, according to Lewis, *exists in* a possible world. To exist in a possible world is to be a spatiotemporal object. But the individuals that exist in possible worlds do not exhaust the objects existing in metaphysical reality. In addition to individuals that exist in possible worlds, there are objects whose proper parts exist in various worlds, and there are still other objects that exist *from the standpoint of* possible worlds but exist in no possible world at all.

. . . Numbers, properties, propositions, events – all these are sets, and not in any world. Numbers et al. are no more located in logical space than they are in ordinary time and space . . . Let us say that an individual exists from the standpoint of a world iff it belongs to the least restricted domain that is normally – modal metaphysics being deemed abnormal – appropriate in evaluating the truth at that world of quantifications. I suppose that this domain will include all the individuals in that world; none of the other individuals; and some, but not all, of the sets. There will be many sets that even exist from the standpoint of all worlds, for instance the numbers . . . Thus we have three relations: being in a world, i.e. being part of a world; being partly in a world, i.e. having a part that is wholly in that world; and existing *from the standpoint of* a world.¹³

Numbers, properties, propositions are not actual spatiotemporal objects; still, they exist. They exist from the standpoint of the actual world. But other possible worlds are ontologically on a par with the actual world. So they exist from the standpoint of those worlds, too. There is no reason why other beings that are not spatiotemporally located might also exist from the standpoint of all possible worlds. Theistic modal realism holds that God is among the objects that exist from the standpoint of each world.¹⁴ What is crucial in this view is that God's properties do not vary from world to world. The well-known Leibnizian worries arising from contingent intrinsic properties present no problems at all for the God that exists from the standpoint of each world.¹⁵

3. Divine Creation and Modal Knowledge

Does genuine modal realism present a problem with the divine attribute of omniscience? Some philosophers believe it does.

God is the creator of all the possible worlds. . . . Divine knowledge is not knowledge of worlds as they stand independently before God; the worlds do not determine the content of what God knows. The worlds reflect what God knows, namely the possible ways in which propositions may be consistently

conjoined or ordered. . . . In order to bring worlds into being which delimit the range of possibilities God must know what those possibilities are. Modal realism entails that the knowledge of God is knowledge of those worlds. In this sense the worlds are prior to God's knowledge of them; that is, God's knowledge is dependent and so less than ultimate or perfectly held if perfect knowledge requires knowledge to be wholly non-dependent¹⁶

There are no concerns in the context of creation about which 'propositions can be consistently conjoined or ordered'. Possible worlds are *not* maximally consistent sets of propositions or sentences or maximal properties or anything like that. If they were, then God simply could not create more than one possible world. The set of propositions describing the totality of metaphysical reality – every possible world – is massively inconsistent. Possible worlds are instead mereological sums of more or less closely related individuals. The principle of recombination ensures that any individual can coexist with any other individual, and any part of any individual – any world or object – can coexist with any part of any other individual. There are possible worlds for every way of combining particular individuals and parts of individuals. Possible worlds are not 'conjoined or ordered' sets of propositions.

Does God's modal knowledge depend on there existing concrete possible worlds? Theistic modal realism holds that God necessarily creates the pluriverse. It is not as though there are other possible pluriverses that God might have created instead or that God selected one pluriverse over another. There is only one possible pluriverse and God necessarily creates it. The view then is that the pluriverse is both necessarily existing and metaphysically dependent.

4. Plenitude and Evil

Theistic modal realism is the view that God created all of metaphysical reality – every possible world and everything existing in every possible world. God created everything unrestrictedly. The *creation* of possible worlds is a largely unfamiliar notion. Possible worlds are typically regarded as uncreated abstract objects – maximal sets of sentences or maximal states of affairs or maximal properties, or the like. But theistic modal realism takes the position that possible worlds are not abstract objects. Possible worlds are maximal mereological sums.¹⁷ Possible worlds are the mereological sums of spatiotemporally connected objects. According to theistic modal realism, God necessarily creates all possibilities – every creatable object – and therefore necessarily creates every possible world. In short, God necessarily creates the pluriverse.

Theistic modal realism entails a version of the principle of plenitude. The principle of plenitude is closely associated with Arthur Lovejoy and his seminal work in the history of ideas, *The Great Chain of Being*. The principle of plenitude, according to Lovejoy, states that no genuine potentiality can remain unfulfilled.

. . . I shall call it the principle of plenitude but shall use the term to cover . . . not only the thesis that the universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of kinds of things is exhaustively exemplified, but also . . . that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, that the extent and the abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a 'perfect' and inexhaustible Source, and that the world is the better the more things it contains.¹⁸

According to Lovejoy, the extent and abundance of creation must, in some sense, be commensurate with the Source of creation. Theistic modal realism takes a similar position. Maximal greatness – the greatness of God – entails the general principle of plenitude. The

simple formulation of the most general form of the principle of plenitude asserts that every *possible world and all possibilities* exist at some time or other where the existence of a merely possible world does not differ ontologically from the existence of the actual world.

No doubt many will balk at the ontological extravagance of theistic modal realism. The suggestion that there exist talking donkeys, flying pigs, rational wombats and the like is at least peculiar. But there are major theoretical advantages forthcoming from the principle of plenitude. Because theistic modal realism entails that God creates the entire pluriverse, all possible worlds and all possibilities, it can offer a solution to every problem of evil, the problem of no best world, the problem of less-than-best, the paradox of sufficient reason, the problem of arbitrariness, the problem of why there is anything at all, and the hard problem of philosophical theology. These are just a sample of the problems in philosophical theology that theistic modal realism can solve.

According to theistic modal realism, the problems of philosophical theology noted above arise only if we fail to observe that the object of God's creation is *not* a particular region of metaphysical reality, but the entire pluriverse. Unrestrictedly everything that God creates exists necessarily and unrestrictedly everything God creates exemplifies its properties essentially. Could the pluriverse have been different from the way it is? No, the pluriverse could not have been different. Could any part of the pluriverse have exemplified any properties other than the properties it does exemplify? No, unrestrictedly every part of the pluriverse – including you and your properties and me and my properties and the properties of every actual object – necessarily exemplifies all of its properties. If we are asking about all of creation unrestrictedly, then our answer is that *it is necessarily as it is*.

The totality of God's creation is usefully viewed as a very large possible world – a very large *necessitarian* world. It is indeed the largest possible region of reality. It is false that the totality of God's creation might have included any less evil than it does. It is false as well that any part of the totality of God's creation might have included any less evil than it does. Every instance of evil in every region of the pluriverse – every instance of evil in every possible world – is necessary to the greatest possible good. There is no gratuitous or pointless evil anywhere in the pluriverse. Indeed, there is no eliminable evil anywhere in the pluriverse. There is therefore no problem of evil anywhere in the pluriverse.¹⁹

The problem of less-than-best is based on the observation that the actual world is not the best possible world. The thought is that an omnipotent, supremely rational and supremely good being would not create a world that is less than the best possible. The problem of less-than-best plagues theistic actualist realism since it entails that the totality of metaphysical reality is less good than it might have been.²⁰ But it presents no problem for theistic modal realism according to which the totality of metaphysical reality could not be any better than it is and neither could any part or region of metaphysical reality.

5. *Plenitude and Arbitrariness*

Peter Unger puts the problem of arbitrariness as the unanswered question of why the actual world happens to be as it is.

Another sort of philosopher will press on with these feelings, even in the face of the enormous scientific success just imaginatively envisioned. He is an extreme rationalist, and even in that happy situation, he will say this: Though the working of our world is as elegant as might be, why should everything there behave in accord with just this specific principle? Why should any specific way, even a most metaphysically elegant, be preferred to any other specific way for a world to be . . . ?²¹

According to theistic modal realism, the answer to why there exists our specific set of laws and why there exists our specific set of objects and so on is not that God created the best possible world as a matter of moral necessity.²² It is not that the actual world displays the best overall arrangement of variety of phenomena and simplicity of laws or anything of the kind. Theistic modal realism is not forced into the position of having to make such incredible claims. It is quite apparent that the actual world is not the best possible. According to theistic modal realism God created every possible world and so every possible world exists. Every possible arrangement of laws and phenomena obtains in various worlds throughout the pluriverse. There is no reason why our particular world would have to exemplify any specific arrangement of laws or display any specific range of phenomena. The actual world is not ontologically distinguished in a way that would give the arbitrariness objection any traction at all.

6. *Paradox of Sufficient Reason Solved*

The paradox of sufficient reason was initially developed in Peter van Inwagen, Jonathan Bennett, and William Rowe and states that the actual world is *explicable* only if there are no contingent facts. The argument in brief is that there is an explanation for the actual world – an explanation for why our particular world is actual and not some other possible world – only if there are no contingent facts at all. An explicable world obtains as a matter of metaphysical necessity.

Someone might suggest, for example, that the actual future became actual not for any reason to be found in the natural world but rather because God chose that it should, God's choice being in that case the sufficient reason . . . However, PSR must be rejected, for it has an absurd consequence: the collapse of all modal distinctions.²³

The paradox of sufficient reason is in fact a problem for theistic actualist realism. It is not a problem for theistic modal realism. On theistic modal realism, the pluriverse as a whole, and everything in it, exists as a matter of metaphysical necessity. So the pluriverse and everything in it fully satisfies the principle of sufficient reason. There is a necessarily true proposition – viz. that God creates the pluriverse – that entails (and so explains) the existence of the pluriverse and everything in the pluriverse.

Nonetheless contingency is preserved throughout the pluriverse. It is true, for instance, that the Earth might have been a larger planet. That is true because there are counterparts of the Earth in other regions of the pluriverse that are larger. It is true as well that our universe might not have any life in it, since there are counterparts of our universe in which there is nothing living. The same goes for every possible world in the pluriverse. In general, the contingency of *x*'s properties – for any *x* in any world – does not depend on it being true that *x* has different properties in other regions of the pluriverse. *x* itself could not *in that sense* have had any properties other than those *x* does have, and the same of course goes for everything in the pluriverse. Rather the contingency of *x*'s properties depends on it being true that a counterpart *y* of *x* has different properties in other parts of the pluriverse. And that is certainly possible despite the fact that the pluriverse and everything in it fully satisfies the principle of sufficient reason. Theistic modal realism makes explicability consistent with contingency.

7. *The Hard Problem Solved*

Theistic modal realism offers a solution to the hard problem of philosophical theology. No version of theistic actualist realism offers any solution to this problem. The hard problem of

philosophical theology is to make the maximal greatness of God consistent with a plenitudinous pluriverse. God exemplifies the property of maximal greatness only if, among other things, God necessarily creates an unsurpassably good world. Of course if God *necessarily* creates such a world, then it is hard to see how the pluriverse could be plenitudinous. If the pluriverse includes one world – the best possible world – then the pluriverse lacks most of the worlds that we know are possible. Of course analogous problems ensue if we take the position – a position that is incoherent in my view – that God is maximally great and creates a good enough world.²⁴ A solution to the hard problem of philosophical theology would show that there are no gaps in metaphysical space. Every world of every kind – including those worlds that are less than the best and those worlds that are not good enough – is consistent with the existence of a God that exemplifies maximal greatness.

According to theistic modal realism, God necessarily creates the pluriverse. There are no alternative pluriverses that he might have created instead. There are no possible larger or smaller pluriverses he might have created, so the pluriverse could not have been any different from the way it is. Since the pluriverse exists as a matter of metaphysical necessity, it is the best possible pluriverse. There are no other possible pluriverses that are even as good, since there simply are no other possible pluriverses. Every part of the pluriverse – every region of metaphysical space – also exists as a matter of metaphysical necessity, and so every region of the pluriverse is the best possible.

Couldn't God have created a pluriverse that did not include the bad regions of metaphysical reality? No, there are no such alternative pluriverses. Couldn't God have created a pluriverse that did not include the truly terrible regions of metaphysical reality? Again, no, that is not possible. There are no such alternative pluriverses.

Despite the vast variation in possible worlds – every possible world of every kind is included in the plenitudinous pluriverse – the object of God's creation is necessarily unequalled in value. The totality of metaphysical reality is therefore consistent with the existence of a maximally great being, no matter the nature of the worlds it contains. The existence of God is consistent with a plenitudinous pluriverse that includes the full range of possible worlds from the very best worlds to the very worst worlds. Since all of these possible worlds exist necessarily, we know their existence is necessary to the greatest possible good.

8. Conclusions

Few philosophers believe that genuine modal realism is compatible with traditional theism. Theistic modal realists, on this view, are burdened with an extravagant ontology, a dubiously flexible account of modality, and an implausible account of the nature of worlds. In exchange theistic modal realists get a view of metaphysical reality that offers some important benefits but affords no specifically theological benefits at all. It's a bad deal.

But we have found that theists should reconsider the advantages that modal realism offers. The conception of metaphysical reality that modal realism offers is in fact far more welcoming to theists than the conception of metaphysical reality that any version of actualist realism offers. Indeed, most of the intractable problems of philosophical theology are *generated by* widespread commitment to actualist realism of one form or another.

Theistic modal realism offers a solution to these otherwise intractable problems. We noted specifically that it offers a solution to all of the following atheological problems: the problem of no best world, the problems of evil (every version), the existence of gratuitous evil, the less-than-best problem, the problem of arbitrariness, the paradox of sufficient reason, and the hard problem of philosophical theology. And these constitute just a sample of the theoretical benefits modal realism affords theists.

The ontological extravagance of theistic modal realism is a consequence of the principle of plenitude. The vast pluriverse is exactly what we should expect if the Source of creation is a maximally great being. As Lovejoy noted, the extent and the abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a 'perfect' and inexhaustible Source. No account of creation could contain more than we find in the pluriverse of modal realism. God's creation includes all possibilia and all actualia. The actual world is just one small region of divine creation.

The source of most of the difficult philosophical problems for theism is traceable to the limited account of metaphysical reality we find in actualist realism. For anyone with theistic commitments, the deeper problem is actualist realism, and the solution is genuine modal realism.

Short Biography

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Notes

¹ But see Ross Cameron, 'God Exists at Every (Modal Realist) World: A Reply to Sheehy' *Religious Studies* 45 (1) (2009) 95–100, and Michael Almeida, 'Theistic Modal Realism?' *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* (3) (2011) 1–15

² See A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932)

. . . I shall call it the principle of plenitude but shall use the term to cover . . . the thesis. . . that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, that the extent and the abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a 'perfect' and inexhaustible Source, and that the world is the better the more things it contains.

For fascinating discussion of the history of the principle of plenitude, see Simo Knuuttila (ed.) *Reforging the Great Chain of Being* (Dordrecht-Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, 1980).

³ Here I use 'actual' in the non-shifty sense, rigidly referring to the portion of metaphysical reality that we inhabit. A referee asks whether possible worlds can be counterparts of other possible worlds. Three quick points on this question. First, theistic modal realism does aim to defend the compatibility of traditional theism with modal realism, but the theistic modal realist is not committed to every detail of Ludovician modal realism. Divergence from Lewis's view is perhaps unavoidable, since Lewis abjures perfect beings – they exist nowhere in the totality of metaphysical reality – and theistic modal realism affirms them. Specifically Lewisian realism might be better suited – contrary to Lewis's avowed position – with the existence of no gods at all (see Stephanie Lewis, 'Where (in Metaphysical Reality) is God?' in Barry Loewer and Jonathan Schaffer (eds.) *A Companion to David Lewis (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy)* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015). So theistic modal realists are prepared to endorse a moral realism that is not entirely Lewisian. Second, Lewis does allow that possible worlds have counterparts. See, for instance, 'Postscript to Things Qua Truthmakers'.

What is a counterpart of the world? Must it be an entire possible world, the totality of all there is in its world? . . . Or might it be just a proper part of a world? . . . We suppose this is one of those questions about 'the' counterpart relation that has no determinate answer; in other words, there are counterpart relations under which the world is essentially total, and there are counterpart relations under which it is not. But for present purposes, we need to consider counterpart relations under which the world is essentially total. 'The entire world' or 'the world qua total', or 'the world qua unaccompanied' can be taken as names for the world that evoke such counterpart relations. (see Gideon Rosen and David Lewis Postscript to 'Things Qua Truthmakers: Negative Existentials' in Hallvard Lillehammer and Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra (eds.) *Real Metaphysics Essays in Honor of D. H. Mellor* (London: Routledge, 2003))

Finally, another non-Lewisian thesis that theistic modal realists might find congenial is that collections of possible worlds are themselves individuals in the pluriverse and that possible worlds can include island universes. It would be useful to discuss the relative value of larger regions in the pluriverse. Cian Dorr possibilities like this in 'How to be a Modal Realist' (unpublished).

⁴ See David K. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) p. 252 ff.

The way of representing is not at all constant. Different answers are often right in different contexts, as witness the comfort with which we adhere to, or presuppose, opposed answers. 'It would have included the Bristol-Gloucester-Birmingham line'. 'It would have been only part of a still Greater Western'. – Can you really take this as a dispute? It can very well happen that no answer is determinately right, for lack of the contextual guidance that normally does the determining.

⁵ I do not mean to suggest that there is no dispute at all concerning which properties the statue/clay exemplify. Some philosophers deny that the statue is identical to the clay, some maintain that there is an identity but deny the sort of de re flexibility I'm describing. A referee notes that the case is controversial since some deny that it, the statue/clay, could survive being smashed. I agree that it is in that sense controversial. My claim here is more narrow. I mean to say that, for Lewis, the flexibility of de re representation is not the view that objects like the statue/clay have some properties under some counterpart relations and different properties under other counterpart relations. Compare the difference between nomological necessity and logical necessity. When we say that p is necessary in one context and deny that p is necessary in another context we are not saying that its properties are changing. We are saying that under one accessibility relation it is necessary (nomologically necessary) but under another accessibility relation it is not necessary (logical necessity). It's worth noting that Lewis takes accessibility relations and counterpart relations to be similarity relations (*On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) p. 8 ff.

⁶ It can sound like I'm claiming that the actual world has the property of being unsurpassable and that it lacks that property. That's of course not possible, and it's not what I'm claiming. The properties of the actual world are not inconsistent and they are not changing. It is rather the case that the standards of unsurpassability vary from context to context. The actual world fails to meet the standards of unsurpassability in some contexts and so *deserves to be called* surpassable; but in other contexts, the actual world meets the standards of unsurpassability and so *deserves to be called* unsurpassable.

The view does not depend on some metaphysical trick or require a commitment to some odd metaphysical view. Just as standards vary from one context to the next for the application of other properties – the property of being tall, wise, free, square, new, fast, happy, good, fluent, capable, and almost every other property you can think of – so the standards vary for being unsurpassable as we determine the conditions under which something is properly so-called.

⁷ See David K. Lewis, 'Counterparts of Persons and Their Bodies'; Allan Gibbard, 'Contingent Identity'; Peter van Inwagen, 'The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts'; and Robinson, *The Metaphysics of Material Constitution*. Burke, M. B. (1994). Dion and Theon: An essentialist solution to an ancient puzzle. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 91(3), 129–139. Burke, M. B. (2004). 'Dion, Theon, and the many-thinkers problem', *Analysis*, 64(3), 242–250. Peter Geach (1980) *Reference and Generality*, 3rd edition. E. J. Lowe (1995). Coinciding objects: in defence of the 'standard account'. *Analysis*, 55(3), 171–178. Michael Rea (1995). 'The problem of material constitution' *The Philosophical Review*, 104(4), 525–552. David Wiggins. 1968. "On Being in the Same Place at the Same Time" *Philosophical Review* 77: 90–5

⁸ See *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). p. 252 ff.

⁹ This can seem inconsistent. How can a necessitarian world allow for contingency? Perhaps the best way to think about it is to consider standard *accessibility relations* for modal claims. The claim that it is nomologically impossible for Jones to fly is consistent with the claim that it is metaphysically possible for Jones to fly. Nomological possibility invokes a set of worlds that stand in a certain similarity relation to the actual world – they all have the same laws. Metaphysical possibility invokes a different – broader than nomological, but more narrow than logical – similarity relation to the actual world. In each case we allow different relations of similarity to determine what is possible. There is no concern about inconsistency in this account. But a perfectly analogous account goes for de re possibility generally.

Sometimes one hears a short list of the restricted modalities: nomological, historical, epistemic, deontic, maybe one or two more. And sometimes one is expected to take a position, once and for all, about what is or isn't possible de re for an individual. I would suggest instead that the restricting of modalities by accessibility or counterpart relations, like the restricting of quantifiers generally, is a very fluid sort of affair: inconstant, somewhat indeterminate, and subject to instant change in response to contextual pressures. Not anything goes, but a great deal does. (*On the Plurality of Worlds*, p. 8)

The short list of restricted modalities is expanded indefinitely for de re possibilities in general. In considering what is possible for you we consider a set of accessible individuals, but which ones? We consider the individuals that are like you under a suitable similarity relation. But different accessibility relations are evoked in different contexts. Under different accessibility relations, it is true to say that different things are possible for you. These varying possibilities are not inconsistent. Similarly, there is no inconsistency in the fact that the actual world is improvable under one accessibility relation and unimprovable under another.

It is natural to suggest that we should be concerned with the metaphysical possibilities rather than any other possibilities. The metaphysical possibilities are the ones that matter to this discussion. Right. That's just what we are concerned about.

To underline the analogy, we might usefully borrow some terminology. In the broadest sense, all possible individuals without exception are possibilities for me. But some of them are accessible possibilities for me, in various ways, others are not. . . . My qualitative counterparts are metaphysically accessible possibilities for me; or better, each of many legitimate counterpart relations may be called a relation of metaphysical accessibility. My epistemic alternatives – those possible individuals who might, for all I know, be me – are epistemically accessible possibilities for me; my doxastic alternatives are doxastically accessible; and so on, whenever content may be given by a class of alternative possible individuals (see section 1.4). Metaphysical and (for instance) epistemic possibilities for me are not things of two different sorts. They are possibilia out of the same plurality of worlds. The difference is in the accessibility. (*On the Plurality of Worlds* p. 234).

¹⁰ Focusing on the metaphysical possibilities for me – or for the actual world – doesn't narrow down de re possibility to a single similarity relation or a single accessibility relation. There's an indefinite number of metaphysical accessibility relations for the actual world and for every other individual. It is still de re metaphysically possible that the actual world is improved and, under another accessibility relation, de re metaphysically impossible that it is improved.

The example is misleading since standards vary in all sorts of ways. Do I have the property of being able to speak Finnish? Yes, if the standard is having a larynx suitable for doing so. No, if the standard is being ready to translate for you. Do I have the property of being able to run a four-minute mile? Yes and no, depending on your standards. Lewis offers another example.

But if the plastic and the dishpan are identical, what would have happened to 'them', or rather to *it*, if the plastic had been made in the form of a wastebasket, and the dishpan had been made the next day out of different plastic? *It* would have been a wastebasket; *it* would have been a dishpan made the next day – those answers, I submit, are both correct.

On one standard it has the property of being possibly a wastebasket and on another standard it has the property of being possibly a pan composed of different plastic. See *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1986) p. 253.

¹¹ See Paul Sheehy, 'Theism and Modal Realism', *Religious Studies*, 42 (2006), 315–328.

¹² Lewis was keen to include immaterial spirit worlds wherein spirits are only loosely connected spatiotemporally. See *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1986) p. 73

I do not say that all worlds are unified by spatiotemporal interrelatedness in just the same way. So the interrelation of a world of spirits might be looser than that of a decent world like ours. If the spirits and their doings are located in time alone, that is good enough.

¹³ David Lewis, 'Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic', op. cit. p. 40 ff.

¹⁴ For a similar view, see Ross Cameron 'God Exists at Every (Modal Realist) World: Response to Sheehy' *Religious Studies*, 45, (2009) 95–100. It's worth noting that there are versions of modal realism that allow for overlap and would make it perfectly possible for a temporally everlasting God to *exist in* more than one world. See for instance, Kris McDaniel's 'Modal Realism with Overlap' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1) (2004) 137–152. There are more daring possibilities. Panentheist modal realists defend the position that parts of God exist in each possible world. God is identical to the pluriverse as a whole. The view affords the modal realist another way in which an Anselmian God – or a near Anselmian God – is consistent with the metaphysics of genuine modal realism. See Yujin Nagasawa, 'Modal Panentheism' in *Alternate Concepts of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 91–105.

¹⁵ But see Stephanie Lewis, 'Where (in logical space) is God?' in Barry Loewer and Jonathan Schaffer (eds.) *A Companion to David Lewis (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy)* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

But Ludovician possible worlds are causally insulated from one another, with no common members, and are such that nothing has causal impact on more than one world. Each world has its contents, and nothing that is in one world is in another. Something in one world may have counterparts elsewhere, but no individual can be in more than one possible world. This is what makes them possible worlds, distinct from one another, and is fundamental to David's mad-dog modal realism. To say that something out there in logical space can have causal impact on all the possible worlds, indeed, created them, but is itself a member of no single world, is profoundly, fundamentally, completely, and utterly inconsistent with David's modal realist metaphysics of possible worlds.

The position expressed here, for all its enthusiasm, is not obviously true. Lewis allowed that lots of things are in more than one world, and many of those things enter into causal relations. Universals can enter into causal relations, since something's being red or yellow, for instance, can cause someone to notice it. But that same universal enters into causal relations in many possible worlds. Still, for all that, it should be clear that we cannot preserve the specifically Ludovician view of metaphysical reality, since Lewis quite emphatically rejected the thesis that the traditional God is metaphysically possible.

¹⁶ See Paul Sheehy, 'Theism and Modal Realism', *Religious Studies*, 42 (2006), 315–328.

¹⁷ Theistic modal realism is neutral on various other aspects of Lewisian modal realism or genuine modal realism. For Lewis, there are two basic ontological categories: concrete objects and classes. Concrete objects are (loosely) spatiotemporal entities that can be related to each other via spatiotemporal relations. Properties are just classes of objects. Propositions are classes of possible worlds. Lewis's modal realism requires a commitment to very few primitives. There is just one primitive predicate: membership. There are any number of positions one could take in contrast to these and nonetheless hold a view properly called modal realism. For a discussion of some interesting alternatives, see Kris McDaniel 'Modal Realisms', *Philosophical Perspectives, Metaphysics* 20 (2006) 303–331.

¹⁸ A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932).

¹⁹ A referee observes that there are vast amounts of evil that at least seem to be inconsistent with a maximally great being.

If we suppose that ‘the Source of creation’ is necessarily perfectly good, then there is plainly still a question whether ‘the Source of creation’ would have included, in the pluriverse, a world in which all of the genocide of the twentieth century – not to mention all of the rest of the suffering of sentient creatures in the past half a billion years – occurs. It remains open that evil is evidence – perhaps even conclusive evidence – against theistic modal realism.

The point is taken, there is a lot of evil in the pluriverse. But the existence of evil does not count against the goodness of God unless that evil is preventable or eliminable. But there is no evil in the pluriverse that is preventable or eliminable. All of the evil in the pluriverse exists necessarily. But not even an omnipotent being can be required to eliminate what exists as a matter of necessity. God is not any less good for failing to do the impossible. A quick point about this. Robert M. Adams (‘Theories of Actuality’ *Noûs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1974): 211–231) once objected that the necessity of evil in the pluriverse leads to moral indifference. Lewis replies to the objection in section 2.6 *The Road to Indifference, On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). There is a genuine worry that Theistic Modal Realism leaves agents with less reason to respond to evil since the kind and amount of evil in the pluriverse cannot be altered. One response to reject the suggestion that anyone in the actual world has any obligation to reduce the amount of evil in the pluriverse as whole. That’s impossible to do.

²⁰ There are complications. Multiverse theories are actualist realists, and they allow that God actualizes the best possible world. But multiverse theories, as I argue elsewhere, are not coherent. See *Theism and Modal Realism* (unpublished manuscript). Other actualist realist theories urge that there is exactly one possible world and it, of course, is the best possible. All of these theories violate the principle of plenitude.

²¹ See Peter Unger, ‘Minimizing Arbitrariness: Toward a Metaphysics of Infinitely Many Isolated Concrete Worlds’, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* IX (1994) 29–51.

²² See Austin Farrer (ed.) G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (Lasalle: Open Court, 1996) p. 201.

²³ Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) pp. 202–204 and his *Metaphysics*, third edition (Boulder: Westview, 2009), p. 150 ff. But see also Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), p. 115 and William Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998) p. 94 ff.

²⁴ A plenitudinous pluriverse includes every possible world we non-skeptically know to exist including worlds that are not good enough.

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