

## Lewis's Modal Realism

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### 1. Lewis's analyses of basic modal notions

A *world* is defined as a maximal sum of spatiotemporally related objects.

The world we are part of is the *actual* world. Much of the time we ignore other possible worlds altogether, restricting our quantifiers to the actual world.

'At  $w$ ' is an operator whose function is to restrict all the quantifiers in 'P' to things that are part of  $w$ . Works just like 'In Australia'.

'Possibly P' is analysed as 'There is some world  $w$  such that at  $w$ , P'.

'Necessarily P' is analysed as 'Not possibly not P', or equivalently, as 'For every world  $w$ , at  $w$ , P'.

'Necessarily' and 'Possibly' can express various kinds of *restricted* modality, like *nomological* modality, or *epistemic* modality: the restriction is given by an *accessibility* relation among worlds. Or they can be absolutely unrestricted.

### 2. Lewis's views about what there is

The following three claims are jointly inconsistent

1. Possibly, there are talking donkeys
2. There are no talking donkeys, speaking absolutely unrestrictedly
3. Lewis's analysis of 'Possibly' is correct.

Lewis reacts by giving up claim 2. Many other philosophers react by giving up claim 3. Someone could conceivably react by giving up 1.

In general, Lewis holds on to most "commonsense" views about what there *could* be. Because of this, and his analysis of possibility, he has a lot of unusual opinions about what there *is*.

### 3. De re modality

The analysis of possibility and necessity described above needs to be supplemented when it comes to *de re* modal claims: claims like 'Gore could have won the election' that are about specific things.

If we just apply the analysis, we get that 'Possibly, Gore wins the election' is true if there is a world  $w$  such that at  $w$ , Gore wins the election. But since 'at  $w$ ' is supposed to be analogous to 'In Australia', and since Gore is part of only one world, it's not obvious what this could mean if it's true.

Instead: 'Gore could have won the election' is analysed as 'Gore has a counterpart who wins the election'. That is: there is an election-winner (at some world or other) who is similar to Gore in certain respects.

Just as there are different things for 'possibly' to mean in *de dicto* modal sentences, which correspond to different accessibility relations among worlds, so there are different things for 'possibly' to mean in *de re* modal sentences, which correspond to different counterpart relations among individuals.

(Harder question: what about sentences that are about what could have happened to more than one thing, like 'Gore could have beaten Bush'?)

#### **4. Context-sensitivity in *de re* modal notions**