1. Lewis’s Thesis

(P) \( \diamond p \) is true iff there is some world \( w \) such that \( p \) is true at \( w \)
\( \Box p \) is true iff for any world \( w \), \( p \) is true at \( w \)

- Lewis takes (P) at face-value: when we talk of the different ways I could win a chess match, Lewis takes these ‘ways’ to be possible worlds.
- There exist entities of a certain description: ‘ways things could’ve been’. These entities are what Lewis calls ‘possible worlds.’ (Lewis, 1986: 84)

2. What are possible worlds?

a) A possible world is the same kind of thing as our world
b) A possible world is a maximal sum of spatiotemporally related objects
c) A possible world is causally isolated from every other world
d) Indexical theory of actuality (to call a world actual is just to say that one is part of it)

3. Analysis of modal truths

- “It’s possible that there is a pink swan” is true iff there is some world \( w \), such that some part of \( w \) is a pink swan
- “It’s necessary that there is a pink swan” is true iff for every world \( w \), some part of \( w \) is a pink swan
- “It’s contingent that there is a pink swan” is true iff there is some world \( w \) such that some part of \( w \) is a pink swan, and there is some world \( w^* \) such that some part of \( w^* \) is not a pink swan, and \( w \neq w^* \)
- “It’s impossible that there is a pink swan” is true iff for every world \( w \), no part of \( w \) is a pink swan

4. De re contexts

(9) Mark Corrigan is a loan manager but he could have been an ancient historian
- For Lewis, individuals are world-bound: if \( x \) is a part of a world \( w \), then \( x \) is part of no other world.
- (9) should be analysed as: Our world has as a part Mark Corrigan himself, who is a loan manager, and another world \( w \) has as a part ‘its very own Mark Corrigan’ — a man like Mark in origins, intrinsic character, role in society etc — who is an ancient historian.
- That is, a counterpart of our Mark Corrigan.
- An object \( y \) is a counterpart of an object \( x \) iff \( y \) resembles \( x \) in a relevant respect
- “\( a \) is possibly F”, is true iff there’s some world \( w \) containing a counterpart of \( a \) which is F.
- “\( a \) is necessarily F” is true iff for any world \( w \) containing a counterpart of \( a \), that counterpart is F
5. Evaluation

✓ **Ideology**: Lewis gives a reductive analysis of modality
✓ **Explanatory power**: first order language quantifying over worlds and possible objects

✗ **Fidelity to modal opinion**

1. Kripke’s problem with Lewis’s counterpart theory

(10) If Cameron hadn’t promised a referendum on the EU, Brexit wouldn’t have happened
   • The truth of (10) gives David Cameron grounds for regret: if only he’d not promised the referendum!
   • But the counterpart theorist cannot make sense of the regret, since (10) isn’t a claim about Cameron at all but about his counterpart, and this cannot be a source of regret for Cameron
✓ This needn’t be a revision in modality
✓ A modal claim about what might happen to Cameron is about Cameron himself

2. Missing possibilities: Lewis’s theory cannot accommodate some possibilities

(11*) There might have been no spatiotemporally extended entities
   • Lewis’s possible worlds are spatiotemporal objects - it follows that at every possible world there is at least one spatiotemporally extended object, so he must deny that there could have been no spatiotemporally extended entities

3. The Incredulous Stare: Lewis’s theory conflicts with common sense
✓ Lewis thinks this price is worth paying

4. Irrelevance: Lewis’s possible worlds are irrelevant to modal discourse

(13) A tree T, which exists in our world, could have been taller than it actually is
   • But why should facts about another tree have anything to do with how this tree, T, could have been?

✗ **Ontology**: Lewis’s concrete modal realism massively inflates our ontology
   • Qualitative: keeps down the number of different kinds of entities
   • Quantitative: keeps down the number of instances of the kind postulated
✓ Lewis’s modal realism is only quantitatively unparsimonious
✗ It might be qualitatively unparsimonious as well!

? **Epistemology**: possible worlds are causally isolated from us; we cannot perceive or observe them
   • Benacerraf’s dilemma
✓ Causal acquaintance is required for some sorts of knowledge, but not for others
✓ In modality we come by our opinions by reasoning from general principles we already accept: the principle of recombination and a dash of imagination

**Reading list**


Skyrms, Brian, (1976) “Possible Worlds, Physics and Metaphysics” Philosophical Studies 30, 323-32