Metaphysics of Modality Lecture 2: Lewis's Concrete Modal Realism
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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
Kripke, Saul, (1980) *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell)
Lewis, David, (1986) *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell) Chs. 1, 2, and 4
Lewis, David, (1973) "Possible Worlds" in Loux, Michael (ed.) *The Possible and the Actual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979) pp. 182-189
Melia, Joseph, (2003) *Modality* (London: Acumen) Ch. 5

Benacerraf, Paul, (1973) "Mathematical Truth" *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, 661-679
Richards, Tom, (1975) "The Worlds of David Lewis" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 53, 105-118
Skyrms, Brian, (1976) "Possible Worlds, Physics and Metaphysics" *Philosophical Studies* 30, 323-32