

Abstract: Essentialism and context-dependence: a New Argument against Lewisian Counterpart Theory

According to David Lewis's counterpart theory, de re modal claims, including essentialist de re modal claims, are interpreted in terms of a counterpart relation that is a relation of similarity. Hence, according to Lewis, since similarity is context-dependent, these de re modal claims are also context-dependent. I argue that, however it may be with de re modal claims in general, essentialist de re modal claims are 'absolute' (context-invariant) rather than context-dependent, and that this spells trouble for the Lewisian interpretation of de re modality. My argument against Lewis differs from those of some other 'absolutists' about essentialist de re modality (notably L. A. Paul) in that it is compatible with a wide variety of views about which essentialist claims are the true ones, including my own 'minimalist essentialism'. In addition, my argument against Lewis applies equally to his original (1968) version of counterpart theory, according to which de re modal predications are referentially transparent, and to its later variants (presented in 'Counterparts of Persons and Their Bodies' (1971) and *On the Plurality of Worlds* (1986)), according to which they are referentially opaque.