

Two ways of meeting the Humphrey objection on the objector's turf

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Introduction

One serious objection to Lewisian modal realism, in particular counterpart theory without overlap, is that it violates important adequacy conditions on an analysis of modality. One such constraint, call it the *Aboutness* constraint, is that *de re* possibilities for an individual *s* be *genuinely* about *s*. What the “genuinely” qualification is intended to rule out are analyses according to which *de re* possibilities for *s* may be given without attributing a property to *s* herself (in the analysans). Kripke’s well-known “Humphrey objection” is precisely the objection that Lewis’ counterpart theory violates Aboutness:

if we say ‘Humphrey might have won the election (if only he had done such-and-such),’ we are not talking about something that might have happened to Humphrey, but to someone else, a ‘counterpart’. Probably, however, Humphrey could not care less whether someone else, no matter how much resembling him, would have been victorious in another possible world. [Kri80, p. 45]

Lewis responds by claiming that what is important for an analysis of *de re* possibilities concerning an individual such as Humphrey need not involve Humphrey in the relevant sense so long as it involves an individual that suitably *represents* Humphrey. Thus Aboutness mistakenly assumes that representation is identity: that in order for *s'* to represent *s*, *s'* must be identical to *s*.

Clearly Lewis’ response is not going to convince anyone wedded to Aboutness. I will argue, however, that there are two responses faithful to counterpart theory—which do not require overlap—that embrace Aboutness. One of these responses undermines an assumption Lewis held concerning the possible spacetime structures, viz. that they are, in the relevant sense, linear. The other concerns the ontological status of transworld individuals.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first discuss the plausibility of Aboutness for an analysis of *de re* possibilities and conclude that Aboutness ranks high as a criterion even, and surprisingly, according to Lewis' own adequacy conditions on analyses in general. I then consider two responses to the Humphrey objection that, while faithful to counterpart theory, were or would likely have been, rejected by Lewis. I conclude that Lewis should have embraced these responses.

Branching spacetimes

Lewis makes a distinction between branching *of* worlds and branching *within* worlds. He rules out the former since it requires overlap, but—at least in one place—he leaves open the possibility of the latter. Roughly, branching within worlds amounts to a world's having a branching spacetime structure. Lewis ordinarily assumes *all* spacetimes to be linear but is more adamant about the actual world's being linear. I argue the linearity assumption is unwarranted. I consider arguments of Earman [Ear08] against the actual world having a branching spacetime and show those arguments to be unavailable to Lewis. This does not provide an argument that spacetime actually branches, but the possibility itself is enough to significantly weaken the force of the Humphrey objection. For if we allow branching spacetimes and branching individuals, possibilities for Humphrey on one branch may indeed be genuinely about Humphrey in the sense that 'Humphrey could have won the election' may be true because an actual temporal part of Humphrey, *residing on a different branch*, wins the election. This is completely on a par with a four dimensionalist treatment of temporary intrinsics. Most ordinary cases considered concerning *de re* possibilities of individuals would therefore involve branching possibilities of this sort (such as Humphrey's winning the election). For this reason the Humphrey objection loses much of its intuitive force since that force relies on the consideration of cases analyzable in terms of possibilities of the branching sort.

Transworld individuals

As the "branching within" response to the argument from Aboutness is limited in scope (but arguably more to the spirit of Lewis), I consider what I take to be a more compelling response which takes seriously the idea that ordinary objects are transworld individuals. Origins of the idea may be found in [W. 76] and are rejected by Lewis in [Lew86, §4.3]. The idea is that, just as individuals are comprised of temporal parts any pair of which are worldmates, there is an analogous reason for holding that individuals are comprised of transworld parts, any pair of which are counterparts. Lewis calls these **-individuals* and accepts their existence as following from unre-

stricted mereological summation. The idea, then, is that just as an analysis of non-modal attributions to individuals genuinely involves those individuals insofar as it involves their stages—e.g. that Humphrey is sitting at a time t is true just in case his t -stage is sitting—*de re* possibilities of individuals taken in the *-sense are genuinely about those individuals insofar as they are about their *-stages, i.e. their counterparts. If one buys into the four dimensionalist analysis of non-modal attributions, I argue that one has just as much reason to buy into the “transworld individual analysis” of *de re* possibilities. Furthermore, that analysis satisfies Aboutness just as much as the four dimensionalist analysis of non-modal attributions does.

References

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