

# FREE WILL V

## Lewis: Modal Realism

Our modal talk makes reference to how things might have been. Lewis takes such talk straightforwardly. Following Quine, he thinks that if we quantify over objects, then we are ontologically committed to them: we must believe in their existence. (See Quine, 'On what there is') Or at least, that is so unless you can either stop quantifying over the objects; or else paraphrase your talk away. (We talk of doing something for somebody's sake, but are we really committed to the existence of sakes? Perhaps that is just another way of saying: we did it so that they would be benefited. The apparent commitment has been paraphrased away.)

Lewis thinks that we can't do philosophy and stop talking about possible worlds. Such talk is too useful. It enables us to give an account of modality and of counterfactuals; of causation (and of the causal accounts of various phenomena); of properties (classes of possibilia); and of content (classes of possible worlds). And he thinks that non-possible paraphrases will work.

So, we should believe in possible worlds: concrete existences, like this world only non-actual. More precisely, worlds are defined as the mereological sums of all the things that are parts of them. Two things are in the same world iff they are worldmates; and they are worldmates iff they are spatio-temporally related. There is a possible world for every way that the world might have been (actually that is trivial on Lewis's account, but he gets what is intuitively wanted by other means); and any two exactly similar worlds are the same. No individual can exist at more than one world; but individuals have counterparts at other worlds: the things that resemble them most closely.

Lewis thinks that there accepting possible worlds on these grounds is no odder than accepting the existence of sub-atomic particles on the basis of experiments that are best explained by positing them. (But there is one big difference, that Stalnaker makes much of: if possible worlds are really causally isolated from each other then it cannot be that we come to believe in them because they cause us to do so.)

## Stalnaker: Actualism

Possible world talk introduces an ambiguity. We want to say that there is a plurality of possible worlds, but that only one is actual. The modal realist interprets this second claim indexically; it is like saying that there is only one person who is me. Stalnaker wants to say that on the contrary, there is absolutely only one world. The equivocation is between possible worlds understood as states that the world might be in, and possible worlds understood as things that might be in those states (= 'I and all my surroundings'). There are many of the former, but only one of the latter. Compare Augustine's account of time. Stalnaker thinks that Lewis is driven to his modal realism by his rejection of an account of properties as classes of possibilia. Stalnaker wants to stick with a robust account of properties, not reducible to possibilia. Moreover, Stalnaker does not try to give a reductive account of possibility; he takes it to be a primitive notion.