Philosophy 125 — Day 23: Overview

- 2nd Papers/Study Questions Assigned Today (see email + website)

- Handout on "*De Re* Modality" Posted (covered in detail today)

- Vanessa's handout on Realism about propositions now posted

- Agenda: Modality Finale

  – Handout on The Problem of *De Re* Modality

    * The Problem: Reconciling the Indiscernibility of Identicals with the Naive possible world semantics of *de re* contingency
    * Five Realist Solutions: Some actualist, some possibilist
    * Along the way, some principles and problems of actualism
    * Brief Remarks on two Non-Realist Accounts
    * An Overview/Map of the Various Accounts of *De Re* Modality

  – Next Topic: Causation

Handout on *De Re* Modality I: The Problem 1

- The fundamental problem of *de re* modality is to reconcile the following two:

1. For all x and y, if $x = y$, then x and y have all the same properties (and x and y partake in all the same relations). This is the *indiscernibility of identicals* (*II*).

2. If a has *F contingently*, then (*i*) a has F in the actual world $w*$, and (*ii*) a lacks F in some other possible world $w' \neq w*$. (*ii*) is the tricky clause (nobody in this context is worried about providing an account of (*i*) – we discussed *that* in chapters 1 and 2). I will focus on the following *concrete instance of* (*ii*):

   (*N*) Socrates has 5 fingers on his right hand in the actual world $w*$, but Socrates does not have 5 fingers on his right hand in some possible world $w' \neq w*$.

- I call this statement (*N*), since it is a naive possible world semantics (PWS) rendering of "Socrates *contingently* has five fingers on his right hand."

- Note: there is no such problem in cases of *necessary* properties. In those cases, the naive PWS account can be read *literally*, without contradicting (*II*).

Handout on *De Re* Modality I: The Problem 2

- The *problem* is that (*II*) is *inconsistent* with (*N*), if (*N*) is given a *literal* reading. To see this, note that on a literal reading of (*N*), Socrates both *has* the property F = having five fingers on his right hand (in the actual world $w*$), and *lacks* F (in some other possible world $w' \neq w*$), which violates (*II*).

- Since everybody accepts (*II*)[a], the challenge is to provide a non-literal reading of (*N*) which restores its consistency with (*II*). There are many ways to do this. Mainly, I will focus on solutions presupposing *realist* accounts of possible worlds. Among the realists, there are actualists and non-actualists.

- Non-actualists (*e.g.*, David Lewis) believe that there exist non-actual, possible worlds. In particular, Lewis believes that there are many possible worlds *that are the very same kind of thing as our own, actual world* (*i.e.*, concrete, physical mereological wholes containing flesh and blood people like us).

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[a]There is also the "strategy" of rejecting (*II*). But, nobody in this literature does *that* (why might that be?), so I will focus my attention on strategies that "paraphrase" (*N*) to make it consistent with (*II*).

- Actualists believe that there aren't any *non-actual* worlds. They see "the actual world" as synonymous with "reality" or "all that is the case". For them, nothing can exist unless it *actually* exists (*i.e.*, unless it *exists in the actual world w∗*). This pushes them to hold that possible worlds are *abstract* entities.

- According to actualists, abstract entities *actually* exist. Presumably, this applies not only to possible worlds, but to universals, numbers, *etc.* The *actual* existence of abstract entities is supposed to be preferable to the non-actual existence of Lewis' possible worlds. Later, we'll ask *why*.

- There is another dimension of the problem which is orthogonal to the actualism/non-actualism dimension, and that is the particular/property dimension. In order to restore the consistency of (*N*) with (*II*), it seems clear that we must either postulate multiple particulars or multiple properties.

- It is interesting that nobody postulates *both* multiple particulars *and* multiple properties. I think this is because we want to get "as close to (*N*)" as we can, while ensuring consistency with (*II*). I will examine various possible *realist* strategies along these lines. We begin with Lewis' *Counterpart Theory*.

Handout on *De Re* Modality II: Lewisian *Counterpart Theory*

- Lewis is very sensitive to the lurking inconsistency involving (*II*) and a naive, literal reading of (*N*). Lewis proposes the following non-literal reading of (*N*):

(N_1) Socrates has five fingers on his right hand in the actual world $w*$, but a *counterpart* Socrates′ of Socrates (Socrates′ ≠ Socrates) does not have five fingers on his right hand in some non-actual, possible world w'.

- Since Socrates′ ≠ Socrates, there's no problem with them having different properties – they're *different people*. So, Lewis restores consistency with (*II*).

- Objection: We're talking about *Socrates* here, right? What do properties of Socrates′ have to do with properties of *Socrates*? Answer: it is *in virtue of* Socrates′ lacking F in w' that *Socrates* is *contingently F*. Socrates′ has nothing to do with *Socrates'* *actual* properties – just his *de re modal* ones.

- Fact: A literal reading of the naive (*N*) is *not* an *account*. If our worry here is just a longing for (*N*), tough luck. *All* accounts must give up *some* aspect of (*N*). So, we need to look at alternative *accounts* and see how they compare.

- Ultimately, Lewis owes us some account of the *counterpart relation*. Usually, this is defined in terms of *similarity*. Counterparts must be sufficiently similar, but not identical to each other. If Socrates′ isn't sufficiently similar to *Socrates*, then he'll have nothing to do with *any* of *Socrates*' properties.

- So, it isn't just any old guy in any old non-actual possible world that is a guide to Socrates' (or anyone else's) modal properties. It's certain special guys in certain special worlds that are salient to the determination of *de re* properties.

- Lewis is led toward his version of counterpart theory because (*i*) he wants (*II*) to come out true, (*ii*) he wants it to be the *very same intrinsic property F* that is had by *Socrates*, and lacked by his counterpart Socrates′, and (*iii*) he wants non-actual, possible worlds to be *the same kind of thing as* the actual world.

- These three things push Lewis to the view that there is a different, non-actual, *flesh and blood person* Socrates′ who inhabits a non-actual, concrete, physical world w', and who lacks F – the very same property Socrates has in $w*$. It is *in virtue of* this flesh and blood counterpart that Socrates has *F contingently*.

Handout on *De Re* Modality III: *Overlap Theory*

- Overlap theory is Lewisian in the sense that it takes possible worlds to be concrete mereological wholes (like our own), which can exist even if they are non-actual. But, Overlap Theory is *non*-Lewisian in the way it reads (N):

(N_2) Socrates has F in $w*$, and Socrates lacks a F' in w', where $F' \neq F$.

- Since $F' \neq F$, there is no problem with *one and the same person* having F and lacking F' – they are *different properties*. This restores consistency with (*II*).

- Objection: We're talking about Socrates *being F* here, right? What does $F' \neq F$ have to do with the property F that Socrates *actually has*? Answer: it is *in virtue of* Socrates' lacking F' that *Socrates is contingently F*. F'-ness has nothing to do with *Socrates' actual* properties – only with his *contingent* ones.

- Fact: A literal reading of the naive (N) is *not* an *account*. If our worry here is just a longing for (N), tough luck. *All* accounts must give up *some* aspect of (N). So, we need to look at alternative *accounts* and see how they compare.

- On Overlap Theory, it is *Socrates himself* that "lacks F" in the non-actual, possible world w'. But, then, "lacks F" cannot be read literally as lacking *one and the same property F* that Socrates has in $w*$, since *that* would violate (*II*). So, it must be some *other* property $F' \neq F$ that Socrates lacks in world w'.

- The usual story the overlap theorist tells at this point is that there are really *no intrinsic properties* of particulars. What we think is an intrinsic property of Socrates – that he has five fingers on his right hand – is really a *relation* he bears to the actual world $w*$: *having five fingers on his right hand* **in $w*$**.

- In other words, it is really the *relational property F-in-$w*$* that Socrates has, and the *relational property F-in-w'* that he lacks. And, it is *in virtue of* Socrates *lacking F-in-w'* that he *has F-in-$w*$ contingently*. That's the story.

- More of the story: F-in-$w*$ is just like having F-in-w' – it's only *the location at which F is exemplified* that's different. Worlds are *concrete* for the overlapper, and people *inhabit* them. So this "location" talk makes sense.

- But, Overlap Theory has Socrates leading *multiple lives* in many completely disconnected, concrete possible worlds "simultaneously." This seems odd.

Handout on *De Re* Modality IV: Three *Ersatz* Theories

- The actualist prefers to think of possible worlds as *abstract entities*. Following Lewis, I will call these abstract entities *ersatz* worlds. These are not concrete wholes that *contain* things like us as *parts*. Rather, they are abstract entities that (somehow!) *represent ways the world is* or *ways the world might be.*

- On this view, the *actual* world $w*$ is a complete and total representation of *the way things are*. Since worlds are *complete and total* representations of ways things might be, there can be *only one* actual world, which veridically (*i.e.,* faithfully, accurately, truly) represents all aspects of the world as we know it.

- All *other* possible worlds $w' \neq w*$ fail to veridically represent the way the world *is* (in some respect). That is, they *mis*represent $w*$ in some way.

- By making possible worlds *abstract*, the *ersatzer* remains *actualist*, since – on their view – asbtract entities *actually exist* (they exist in *all* possible worlds). Digression: Why favor actually existing things over non-actually existing things? Is it for *epistemic* reasons? If so, isn't going *abstract* cold comfort?

(N_3) The actual world $w*$ represents Socrates as having F, and some possible world $w' \neq w*$ *mis*represents Socrates as lacking F.

- This is an unsatisfying reading of our original (N). The whole idea behind (N) is that there is some sense in which it is *possibly true* that "Socrates lacks F".

- For the counterpart theorist, "Socrates lacks F" is possibly true in that *a counterpart of Socrates truly* lacks F (in w'); and, for the overlap theorist, "Socrates lacks F" is possibly true in the that *Socrates truly* lacks F-in-w'.

- But, on this *naive ersatz* theory, the sense in which "Socrates lacks F" is *possibly true* is that – according to some abstract *mis*representation of Socrates – Socrates lacks F. Or so the *naive ersatzist* would have us believe.

- But, this is just a fancy way of saying that Socrates *falsely* lacks F! It's hard to see how *that* could be the reason that "Socrates lacks F" is possibly *true*.

- *Naive ersatzism* is analogous to overlap theory, in the sense that it takes the abstract *mis*representation w' to be a representation *of Socrates* (not a *veridical* representation of some "abstract counterpart" of Socrates – see below).

- But, *naive ersatzism* is importantly *dis*analogous with (and significantly *inferior to*) overlap theory, in that it does not involve a *veridical* representation of Socrates, which seems *essential* to capturing the meaning of (N). Moreover, on this view, *every property Socrates has will be contingent*!

- So much for *naive ersatzism*. But, there is another version of *ersatzism* that is much more analogous to the overlap theory of the non-actualist. I call this theory *O-ersatzism*, and it reads (N) in the following non-literal way:

(N$_4$) The actual world $w*$ represents Socrates as having F-in-$w*$, and a possible world $w' \neq w*$ represents Socrates as lacking F-in-w' (F-in-$w' \neq F$-in-$w*$).

- (N$_4$) is much closer to overlap theory, since it (*i*) involves a *veridical* representation of *Socrates* by w', and (*ii*) it has w' representing *Socrates* as lacking a *different* property than the property Socrates *actually has*.

- If w' is going to *veridically* represent Socrates, it *can't* represent Socrates as lacking *the very same F we know and love in $w*$ – that* would contradict (*II*).

- *O-ersatzism* inherits a problem from overlap theory: *O-ersatzism* implies that all attributes we call "intrinsic properties" are really *relations* that particulars

bear to various possible worlds (in this case, F-in-w' *versus* F-in-$w*$).

- But, here, it *can't be* the "location at which Socrates exemplifies F" that differs between F-in-w' and F-in-$w*$. Talk of "location" *makes no sense for the ersatzer*, since possible worlds are *abstract entities* – w' *has no location*!

- There is a third and final version of *ersatzism* that is analogous to counterpart theory. I call it *C-ersatzism*, and it reads (N) in the following non-literal way:

(N_5) The actual world $w*$ represents Socrates as having F, and some possible world $w' \neq w*$ represents an *ersatz counterpart of Socrates* (Socrates$' \neq$ Socrates) as lacking (the very same property) F.

- On the one hand, *C-ersatzism* is *like* counterpart theory in that (*i*) it has a *counterpart* of Socrates being veridically represented by $w' \neq w*$, and (*ii*) it has Socrates$'$ lacking *the very same intrinsic property* in w' that *Socrates has*.

- On the other hand, *C-ersatzism differs from* counterpart theory in that the counterpart of Socrates is *not* a *flesh and blood human being* like Socrates is. This *ersatz counterpart* is merely a *fictional character* which (in the "fictional story of his life" w') lacks the property F that the real person Socrates has.

- On this view, it is *in virtue of* the *ersatz counterpart* (perhaps a fictional character named "Socrates" in some story – if ersatz worlds represent *via* linguistic means) in w' lacking F that *Socrates contingently* has F in $w*$.

- It's hard to see how this *ersatz* version of counterpart theory is an improvement on the Lewisian, non-actualist counterpart theory. Most ersatzists (*e.g.*, Plantinga) defend a version of *O-ersatzism*, not *C-ersatzism*.

- Nobody seems to defend Overlap Theory or *C-ersatzism*, and *naive ersatzism* seems to be a non-starter (here for logical completeness). The two main contenders in the literature seem to be Lewis' Counterpart Theory, and Plantinga's *O-erstazism* [is *O-ersatzism* better than Overlap Theory? Why?].

- Both presuppose *realism* about possible worlds. Their main differences are on: (*i*) whether anything non-actual exists, and (*ii*) whether a 2-property or a 2-person reading of (*N*) is a better way to restore its consistency with (*II*).

- The accounts discussed above are *realist* about possible worlds. I'll now make a few brief remarks about *nominalism* concerning possible worlds *&* modality.

Nominalism About Possible Worlds & Modality: A Few Brief Remarks

- *Linguistic nominalists* about modality would say that there is no such thing as *metaphysical* modality (*i.e.*, modality in the world) – all modalities are verbal in nature, having to do only with the import and use of linguistic expressions.

- John Stuart Mill was an advocate of this view. On his account, claims like "Bachelors are unmarried" are "necessary" only in the sense that they are true *simply by virtue of our verbal conventions*. And, *all* "necessities" are like that.

- Mill's linguistic theory and philosophy of language were somewhat primitive. This opened the door to troublesome cases that he could not adequately cope with. Modern linguistic modal nominalists (*e.g.*, van Fraassen) developed more sophisticated versions of the theory that are not so easily refuted.

- *Modal fictionalists* (*e.g.*, Rosen) take Lewis' theory of possible worlds as a *fictional story* about "worlds just like ours". Rosen takes Lewis' theory and prefixes it with a *fiction operator* ("According to the fiction of possible worlds …"). This allows us to talk about PW *as if* it were true, without commitment.

- This leads to *fictionalized versions* of PWS translation schemas. For instance:

  - "Necessarily, p" $\mapsto$ "According to the fiction of PW, p is true in all poss. worlds."

  - "Possibly, p" $\mapsto$ "According to the fiction of PW, p is true in some possible world."

- In this way, Rosen can accept everything Lewis' says about possible worlds (and their applications) as true, but only in the sense that it is true that Sherlock Holmes is a detective or that Santa Claus has a beard, etc.

- The stories of possible world theory are literally false, but they are still "true in fiction". And, if the fictions of possible world theory are useful enough, that alone warrants its use even if we eschew its ontological commitments.

- Rosen thinks that in this way he can get all the benefits of the theory's application, without its ontological commitments. But, modal fictionalism has many problems (see Nolan's SEP entry). I won't discuss them here.

- Some fictions are better than others. Rosen thinks Lewis' version of possible world theory is the most useful. But, couldn't we fictionalize *any* discourse and remain neutral on its ontological commitments? This is non-Quinean.

Map of Positions on Possible Worlds and *De Re* Modality

	Do *w*'s *exist*?	Do *w*'s *actually* exist?	Are *w*'s *concrete*?	2 particulars in (*N*)?	2 properties in (*N*)?
Counterpart Theory	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Overlap Theory	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Naive *ersatzism*	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
O-ersatzism	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
C-ersatzism	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Verbal Nominalism	No	No	No	[convention]	[convention]
Fictional Nominalism	No	No	No	[fictionalized theory]	[fictionalized theory]