On the Humphrey objection to modal realism

Michael De

Abstract

An intuitive objection to modal realism is that merely possible worlds and their inhabitants seem to be irrelevant to an analysis of modality. Kripke originally phrased the objection in terms of being concerned about one's modal properties without being concerned about the properties one's other-worldly counterparts have. I assess this objection in a variety of forms, and then provide my own formulation that does not beg the question against the modal realist. Finally, I consider two potential answers to the objection so understood and conclude that only one of them has a chance of succeeding.

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1 Introduction

David Lewis weaves together several interesting but controversial theses in an effort to give reductive analyses of a number of philosophically central notions, including modality, conditionality, causation, intrinsicality, belief, and dispositionality.[1] One of, and perhaps the most controversial, of these theses includes modal realism (MR for short), the view that truths concerning whatever might have been the case are reducible to truths concerning what is the case in worlds that are spatiotemporally and causally isolated from our own. According to MR, the *de re* modal claim that I could have been a bit taller than I am (if only I had eaten healthier as a child) is true in virtue of the existence of a so-called counterpart of mine—some merely possible individual who sufficiently resembles me in relevant respects—who is taller than I am. My counterparts, though distinct from me, nonetheless represent concerning me that I have properties I don't actually have. In so doing, my modal properties are reduced to the non-modal relational properties (involving, e.g., similarities) I stand in to my counterparts.

The thesis, no doubt, sounds incredible. But Lewis ingeniously defends it in terms of an indispensability argument. The theory, he claims, is serviceable—indeed indispensable—so that we have good reason to believe it, provided that we can't get the paradise it offers for cheaper.[2] This argument rests on the presumption that modality and related notions are reducibly non-modal, lest they be left in a shroud of mystery. Without this reductivist presumption, Lewis's arguments are much less compelling and competing primitivist theories look more attractive as they do not come with the intuitive ontological cost incurred by modal realism. Moreover, the indispensability argument would at best establish that analyses must somehow go through mere possibilia, and not that these possibilia must be the sort of spatiotemporally located entities that modal realism posits.

Modal realism has been objected to on a number of grounds, from its allegedly intractable epistemology to its incredible ontology, but the objection I want to focus on here concerns what

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[1] See e.g. [Lewis, 1973b,a, 1979, 1986, 1997, Langton and Lewis, 1998, Lewis, 2001] for some of Lewis's attempts at reduction.

[2] In [Lewis, 1986], Lewis attempts to make his case by arguing that a number of important notions (modality, closeness (hence counterfactuals, causation, dispositionality, and versimilitude), content and properties) are best analyzed in terms of mere possiblia, and that competing theories, such as linguistic ersatzism, are less attractive.

has come to be known as the *Humphrey objection*. One form of it was famously put by Saul Kripke. Concerning the 1968 presidential election candidate Humbert Humphrey and his loss of that election, Kripke says:

> [According to MR,] 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. [Kripke, 1980, p. 45]

A different, but related, form of that objection is put more forcefully by Nathan Salmon:

> even if, miraculously, Lewis's principles of plenitude and moderation are correct [which yield the extensional equivalence of modal truths with non-modal ones], when we say that Humphrey might have won, what we say certainly has nothing to do with political goings-on in alternative universes. [...] Lewis's highly eccentric views concerning alternative universes, counterpart relations, and their alleged role in modal discourse have their ultimate source in a conceptual confusion between the modal proposition that x might have been such-and-such (where x is a possible individual) and the nonmodal proposition that x is in fact such-and-such (and is in some "world"). [Salmon, 1988, pp. 239–240]

Though the objection has clear intuitive pull, it can be—and often has been—interpreted in a way that begs the question against the modal realist, and as such it constitutes nothing more than a bare denial of MR. It is therefore crucial that the objection be formulated so as to constitute a fair, and to some extent, answerable objection. In what follows, I will tease out two separate desiderata from the objection intuitively put that constrain successful analyses of modality, and I will understand the objection to be the requirement that these desiderata be met. The objection so understood, I contend, is both forceful and yet it has not been hitherto adequately addressed by defenders of MR. I will consider two of the most plausible solutions to the objection and conclude that only one of them has a chance of succeeding.

2 The Humphrey objection

Kripke says that the property ascribed to Humphrey's counterpart is the *modal* property of being an x such that x *would have* won, but the relevant property should obviously be the *non*-modal property of *having won*. Like Gideon Rosen, I take this to be a minor infelicity in Kripke's phrasing.[3] There is also a minor infelicity in Salmon's remarks, as his charge of conceptual confusion should be restated as a confusion between the modal proposition concerning x and the non-modal proposition concerning, not x, but rather her counterparts. Otherwise, it needs to be made clear that "x is in fact such-and-such *according to some "world"* (and is *vicariously, not literally,* in some "world")".

Not all have addressed what we might call the felicitous reading of the objection, however. In response to Kripke, Lewis himself says:

> Insofar as the intuitive complaint is that someone else gets into the act, the point is rightly taken. But I do not see why that is any objection, any more than it would be an objection against ersatzism that some abstract whatnot gets into the act. What matters is that the someone else, or the abstract whatnot, should not crowd out Humphrey himself. And there all is well. Thanks to the victorious counterpart, Humphrey himself has the requisite modal property: we can truly say that

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[3] See [Rosen, 1990, p. 349].

he might have won. *There is no need to deny that the victorious counterpart also makes true a second statement describing the very same possibility: we can truly say that a Humphrey-like counterpart might have won. The two statements are not in competition. Therefore we need not suppress the second (say, by forbidding any mixture of ordinary modal language with talk of counterparts) in order to safeguard the first.* [Lewis, 1986, p. 196, my emphasis]

The emphasized part is clearly a response to the infelicitous reading of the objection, and while Lewis also addresses the felicitous reading, addressing the infelicitous one gives the false impression that the objection has at least in part been met. Of course, if one takes the objection to be nothing more than the infelicitous reading, then it is all too easy to answer. Joseph Melia, for instance, says

> If we say Humphrey might have won the election we *are* talking about something that *might* have happened to Humphrey, and we are not talking about what *might* have happened to someone else. Rather, it is in virtue of the fact that someone who resembled Humphrey *has* (not *might have had*) the property of winning, that our very own Humphrey *might* have won". [Melia, 2003, p. 107]

But there is clearly more to the objection than that. Many others have also—unhelpfully to my mind—addressed the infelicitous reading of the objection.[4]

Let us look, however, at how Lewis begins in the passage above since it applies to Salmon's remarks. Lewis claims that if the objection is that some whatnot gets into the act, then the objection applies equally to ersatzism according to which some abstract, rather than concrete, whatnot "gets into the act". Why does this make the Humphrey objection any less an objection to MR? Is Lewis suggesting that the objection has little to no force against ersatzism, and hence little to none against MR?[5] That certainly isn't the case. The Humphrey objection has absolutely no force against *non-reductive* ersatzism since it neither reduces nor grounds *de re* modal propositions concerning concrete individuals in (propositions involving) abstract whatnots in the same way that MR reduces such propositions to others involving concrete other-worldly whatnots. Non-reductive ersatzism takes modality as primitive and uses possible worlds talk instrumentally or heuristically. An ersatzism according to which modal properties are *reducible to*, and not just *representable by*, properties of sets, for instance, would be no better off than MR against the Humphrey objection, and it would face the charge that the truth of Humphrey's possibly having won the election has nothing to do with sets, and that Humphrey could care less whether some set having certain properties exists or not. Besides MR, I know of no other plausible reductive theory of modality that essentially employs mere possibilia in its analysis, where those entities are not taken to be derived but are in some sense primitive. Contrary to Lewis, then, ersatzism and MR are far from being in the same boat.[6]

That Humphrey himself is said to have the modal property in question is neither here nor there. The problem is that the analysis of Humphrey's modal properties goes via other-worldly whatnots in the first place. Even granting that Humphrey—he himself! (stamp the foot, bang the table)—has the property of having a victorious counterpart, one may rightfully ask: What does

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[4]See, e.g., Allen Hazen [Hazen, 1979, p. 321], Theodore Sider (e.g. [Sider, 2001, pp. 194–195]), Philip Bricker [Bricker, 2007, pp. 128–129] and Richard Woodward [Woodward, 2012, p. 66]).

[5]Bricker gives this defense of modal realism; see [Bricker, 2007, p. 129].

[6]Concerning fictionalism, Rosen suggests that one way it can avoid the problem about diverging attitudes toward modal properties intuitively and counterpart-theoretically conceived (i.e. Kripke's formulation of the Humphrey objection) is to hold that fictionalism offers "not a theory of possibility, but merely a theory linking the modal facts with facts about the story [MR. . .] [t]he theory licenses transitions from one idiom to the other, without purporting to shed light on the nature of modal truth [. . .] [i]f the modal facts are distinct from facts about the fictionalist's fiction, there is nothing wrong with displaying divergent attitudes towards them" [Rosen, 1990, p. 354]. Any ersatzist theory that intends only to furnish a truth conditional semantics for modal discourse will likewise be modest enough to avoid the Humphrey objection.

that have to do with Humphrey's possibly having won? Why are counterparts even mentioned at all in the analysis? Given the fact that it is really only MR according to which other-worldly whatnots *essentially* get into act, it is an enormous concession of Lewis to say that "[i]nsofar as the intuitive complaint is that someone else gets into the act, the point is rightly taken". That constitutes a barefaced concession to the Humphrey objection that no modal realist should make.

A modal realist could respond to Kripke by pointing out that, if the right sort of entities exist (i.e. enough mere possibilia), then for any sentence A of the language of MR to which a modal sentence A' of (idealized) ordinary language corresponds, A is true iff A' is. Call this the extensional adequacy of MR. Then what other-worldly whatnots have to do with modality is that they furnish an extensionally adequate theory. The problem is that an adequacy of this sort does not in any way speak to the Humphrey objection. Suppose an oracle knows, for any modal sentence, whether or not it is true. Then an analysis according to which a modal sentence is true just in case the oracle knows it would be extensionally adequate, but it would be a bad analysis for the simple fact that the oracle herself is not responsible for the making of modal truth. Besides extensional adequacy, there are clearly a host of other important adequacy conditions on analyses that we must evaluate a theory against in determining whether or not it prevails.

One way of reading the Humphrey objection is as the claim that the modal realist confuses the way in which modal propositions are grounded with a way in which they may come to be known. We may, for instance, gain *de re* modal knowledge concerning Tim from knowledge of similarities that hold between him and Jim, and certain facts concerning Jim. If we know the two to have very similar physiologies and that Jim is stronger than Tim, then we can come to know that Tim can lift a certain stone by watching Jim lift it. It would be absurd, however, to say that Jim's possibly lifting the stone is somehow grounded in Tim's actually lifting it. Similarly, even if the ontological claims of MR were true, that would secure nothing more than the mere extensional adequacy of the theory. It would not show us that modal truths are grounded in or reducible to truths about mere possibilia.

Given all that has been said concerning the Humphrey objection, we have still not singled out an objection that does not simply beg the question against MR. Given the evidence in favor of MR, partly constituted by the range of applicability of possibilia to analyses of variety of notions, it is not enough to simply claim, without further justification, that mere possibilia have nothing to do with an analysis of modality. There must be some deeper explanation of why this is so. I will now state two desiderata that I take to underlie the intuitive complaints that Kripke, Salmon and others have put to MR. I have formulated these constraints so that they are not question-begging and at the same time as faithful as possible to the intuitive objection. I call these desiderata *Respectfulness* and *Relevance*.

Respectfulness: An analysis of *de re* modality must respect certain attitudes we have toward modal properties: if a modal property P is analyzed in terms of property Q, then one should e.g. care about having P iff they care about having Q;

Relevance: An analysis of *de re* modality must explain a modal attribution of the form 'a has P' (where P is a modal predicate of ordinary language of the required grammatical form) in terms of what is referred to by 'a' and by 'P' and by no more.

The Humphrey objection may be understood as the demand that an analysis of *de re* modality satisfy either one or both of the desiderata (which gives us three possible interpretations of the objection).

It should be clear why MR flouts both of the desiderata, but I will briefly remark on Relevance since it makes use of an unexplained notion of reference. I cannot spell out in any detail what reference amounts to, but we make things clear given the following considerations. Surely the sentence 'Harry met Sally' refers to both Harry and Sally (assuming they exist and that the context makes clear who 'Harry' and 'Sally' refers to). It is less clear that the sentence 'Everyone

met Sally' refers to Harry, even if we assume that Harry falls under the domain of the quantifier. It is even less clear that 'Someone met Sally' refers to Harry, even if we assume that Harry is the only one to have met Sally within the relevant period of time. It is clear, however, that given an intuitive reading of the Humphrey objection, the existential statement must refer to someone other than Sally if the objection is to constitute any criticism of MR. For it must be that 'Humphrey has a winning counterpart' similarly refers to someone other than Humphrey, and that that someone is not also referred to by the sentence 'Humphrey could have won the election'. It is precisely this discrepancy in reference that makes the realist's analysis allegedly take a detour through irrelevant whatnots.

Stephen Yablo, in his recent book on aboutness, provides the following reading of Kripke's remarks:

> The Humphrey objection has been called unconvincing on the ground that it is *Humphrey himself*, not his counterpart, who is a possible president on the counterpart-theoretic account. But I hear the objection differently. Kripke is complaining, not that *Humphrey could have won* winds up *not* being about the guy it intuitively *does* concern (Humphrey), but that it winds up *also* being about a guy it intuitively *doesn't* concern (a guy only resembling Humphrey). [Yablo, 2014, p. 17, fn. 17]

We see here again that the constrasted version of the objection that Yablo mentions is the infelicitous, and indeed unconvincing, reading according to which the counterpart, rather than Humphrey himself, is attributed the modal property. However, I see two main problems with Yablo's improved formulation, one that is specific to his account of aboutness, and the other being more general. First, and less importantly, a counterpart-theoretic reading of 'Humphrey could have won' does not involve any *one* particular counterpart of Humphrey, so the sentence is not about "*a* guy" only resembling Humphrey. What, then, is an existentially quantified statement about? It is difficult to say what it is (exactly or wholly) about on Yablo's account since the statement is necessary and never true or false in virtue of what goes on at any *one* world. Moreover, Yablo cannot appeal to truth conditions as a reason for thinking that 'Humphrey could have won' is about someone other than Humphrey since he thinks that truth conditions underdetermine aboutness facts. The fact that the counterpart-theoretic truth conditions for 'Humphrey could have won' quantify over Humphrey's counterparts isn't enough to show that the sentence is about those counterparts. It therefore remains unclear why we should think that MR is committed to certain *de re* modal claims being *about* the wrong things. At any rate, if the statement that Humphrey has a winning counterpart is intuitively about counterparthood, then the objection may be reformulated as the claim that the analysans is intuitively about the wrong property. But then the objection is question-begging, and expresses nothing more than the intuition that counterparthood has nothing to do with modality.

Second, and more importantly, it is one thing to say that the analysans 'Humphrey has a winning counterpart' is about people other than Humphrey or properties other than *possibly having won*. It is another to say that the ordinary language sentence 'Humphrey could have won' is about such irrelevant people or properties. After all, 'The burner is hot' may be analyzed in terms of complicated facts concerning properties of energy transfer between atoms and molecules, but it would be strange to object to such an analysis by saying that the sentence 'The burner is hot' is not about atoms, energy, or certain complicated properties involving them. It is no objection to an analysis that the analysandum and its analysans be about different things or properties. It is clear that any desideratum that can be extracted from Yablo's passage will be significantly different from Relevance; for instance, a candidate desideratum might be: An analysis of *de re* modality must not explain a modal attribution of the form 'a has P' in terms of things that the sentence is not about. But this just strikes me as obviously false. Again, an analysis that explains my possibly sitting in the arrangement of my fundamental constituents and some physical laws doesn't seem bad merely on account of being about things that the proposi-

tion that I might be sitting is not about.[7] In the end, I don't see that any precise and plausible formulation can be extracted from Yablo's admittedly brief formulation of the objection.

On the other hand, Relevance allows that the analysans and analysandum be about different things. For instance, an analysis according to which 'a possibly has P' is true just in case there is a possible world at which a is P and $2+2=4$ (arguably) meets Relevance, even if the analysans is partly about numbers. The reason for this is that the analysans is strictly equivalent to the claim that there is a possible world at which a is P, which itself is the weakest proposition implying the analysans, and hence arguably the one doing the grounding. (This doesn't imply that the notion of grounding employed can't be hyperintensional.) One could put Yablo's notion of aboutness to work in a reformulation of Relevance, so that what is required of an analysis of modality is that modal propositions and the propositions that ground them have the same subject matter, or that one subject matter be included in the other. But, again, this does not strike me as a plausible constraint.

Steffen Borge gives the following interpretation of Kripke's remarks:

Kripke's intuition: First, if it is true that X is possibly not G, then our modal intuitions tell us that this statement is about that very same X and not about some counterpart of X. Secondly, our modal concerns are about ourselves and not our counterparts—things that merely resemble us—and any semantics for modal logic must be able to take this feature of modality into account. [Borge, 2006, p. 272]

First, as I have already stressed, a counterpart-theoretic analysis of the ordinary language sentence 'X is possibly not G' is in no way committed to the claim that the sentence is intuitively about some particular counterpart of X for two reasons. First, an existential quantification $\exists x P x$ is not obviously about any a such that Pa. Second, the analysandum and analysans must, in some sense, be about different things if the one is to count as a non-circular and illuminating explanation of the other. We would not want to say that an analysis of modality in terms of norms or rules gets it wrong because the analysans concerns not just Humphrey but also something that the ordinary language sentence is not about, viz., rules or norms. It is for these reasons that I think a non-begging formulation of Kripke's intuition is better captured by Respectfulness and Relevance.

2.1 Respectfulness

I leave it intentionally vague which "certain attitudes" should figure in Respectfulness, and which are to be weighted more heavily than others. However, since Kripke phrases the objection in terms of caring, let us focus on this attitude. Caring about or for some person is different from caring about a property or proposition involving that person. If John is a better pianist than I am, I can care about being similar to him piano-playing-wise without caring much about him. Similarly, Humphrey could care about being similar enough to someone who wins the election without caring about that person, and so he can care about whether he has a property counterpart-theoretically conceived without caring about or for any of his counterparts. Is that enough to diffuse Kripke's objection? Kripke does phrase the objection in terms of Humphrey's

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[7]Hazen makes a similar point when he says "Kripke's argument confuses sentences of the technical language of Lewis's semantic theory, which are outside our natural language or at least constitute an extension of it, with sentences of our ordinary language, and so misapplies intuitive judgments about sentences of ordinary language to the technical ones" [Hazen, 1979, p. 321], which he claims we are not entitled to have intuitions about. But this surely can't be right. First, what does it mean to say that a sentence such as 'Humphrey has a winning counterpart' is not one of ordinary language, or that it is one of an extension of ordinary language? We should keep in mind that the notion of counterparthood is to be understood, not as a primitive of some technical language, but in terms of familiar notions like similarity expressible in ordinary language. Second, MR is providing more than a mere truth conditional semantics for modal discourse—it aims to *explain* modal facts in terms of facts about other worlds and their inhabitants. In that respect, we are surely entitled to intuitions concerning whether the analysis gets the explanatory facts straight.

caring about whether someone else wins the election, i.e. in terms of caring about a property, not a person, so the objection is not diffused simply by making a distinction between two types of caring (or two different objects of caring). It is important to note, however, that it would be in some sense *irrational* for Humphrey to not care about whether someone else "*no matter how much resembling him*" wins the election while at the same time caring about whether he could have won. After all, the relevant counterparts will resemble him so much that, up to a certain time, they will be qualitatively *indistinguishable* from Humphrey himself and that is why even Kripke can agree that Humphrey's counterparts thereby *represent of him* that he wins the election.[8] It would be like caring about whether *this* car can drive 200 kilometers per hour without caring about whether this other car of the exact same model can do it. Sure, one can in some sense care about whatever one likes, but the objection only has force when caring is an attitude constrained by reason. Otherwise, who cares if Humphrey can care about P and not about Q, for he can do that even if he identifies the two!

There is something peculiar about caring about one's modal properties. For whether one stands in a counterpart relation to something with a certain property is a matter of necessity, so why would one care whether one stands in that relation? (It is also true on a standard (i.e. **S5**) view about modality that if one has a modal property, one has it necessarily.)[9]A counterpart theorist's caring about whether she stands in certain relations of similarity to certain counterparts seems to make as much sense as her caring about whether two and two is four; she has simply no say in the matter. And if one shouldn't care about modal properties intuitively conceived, then the fact that one doesn't care about modal properties counterpart-theoretically conceived will be a point in favor of the modal realist, at least if we read Respectfulness as a constraint concerning which attitudes we *should* have toward our modal properties.[10]

The fact that Respectfulness relies on subjective attitudes of a certain sort of agent should make us question the desideratum as a serious constraint. Moreover, many *successful* theories have flouted the desideratum. For instance, the property of having a certain shape, which are paradigmatic intrinsic properties, turn out extrinsic on well-received physical theories.[11] Respectfulness may have a lot of intuitive pull, but Relevance is the theoretically more important desideratum. Nevertheless, I don't think Respectfulness can be dismissed as easily as some have suggested. For instance, Theodore Sider says:

> [violating Respectfulness is] just the paradox of analysis. A reasonable person can care about a property under one description ("possibly winning") while not caring about the same property under another description ("having a counterpart who wins"), provided it is not obvious that the descriptions pick out the same property. Correct analyses need not be obvious to competent language users. [Sider, 2006, p.

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[8]Of course, if that other person doesn't exist, nothing is representing anything, and so Humphrey might not care about counterpart-theoretic properties simply because he doesn't believe in the existence of the relata. But since the objection becomes much stronger by granting the modal realist at least their ontological claims concerning the existence of mere possibilia, let us grant them this much.

[9]Given the non-transitivity of the counterpart relation, modal properties can sometimes be contingently had, contrary to an **S5** modality. For example, one can be possibly ϕ (i.e. have a ϕ-counterpart) without being necessarily possibly ϕ (i.e. have only possibly-ϕ-counterparts). This is despite its being necessary—*in another sense*—that if one has (hasn't) a ϕ-counterpart, one necessarily has (hasn't) a ϕ-counterpart. Then why does it not makes sense to care about whether you have certain modal properties, provided those properties are contingently had by you? It may, but only for a very limited class of modal properties, and not properties like possibly having won the election which are necessarily had if had (under typical determinations of the counterpart relation). Of course it is possible that one not know that they have a winning counterpart, and thereby not know whether they could have won, so they might still care about whether they have winning counterparts even if it is necessary that they have them or not, simply because they lack the requisite information.

[10]One can have influence over one's own modal properties in the following sense. In order for Humphrey to have possibly won the election, he had to actually set certain things in motion. But once they were set in motion, that was it. Thus, once one acquires a modal property one shouldn't care about having it; one should only care about how one can acquire it in the first place.

[11]See [Skow, 2007] for discussion.

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It would be premature, however, to conclude that respecting pretheoretical intuitions and attitudes plays no role in analysis of modality just because one can have conflicting attitudes toward one and the same property under different descriptions. Drawing such a conclusion would save any analysis, no matter how ridiculous, from an analog of the Humphrey objection, and yet we can safely say, for instance, that an analysis of happiness in terms of dancing fairies is a bad analysis solely on the grounds that dancing fairies seem to have nothing to do with happiness. So while we are sometimes warranted in dismissing analyses due to flouting (an an analog of) Respectfulness, we are not always and unrestrictedly warranted in doing so. I doubt there are any general rules for telling us when we are in possession of such a warrant.

As Sider notes, it is true that a reasonable person can have conflicting attitudes to one and the same property under two different descriptions provided that they fail to realize that the descriptions pick out one and the same property. But no reasonable person can have conflicting attitudes under the realization that the descriptions are coextensive. This is what makes Richard Miller's following remarks, a believer in MR, especially peculiar:

> *Lewis or I could say that the differences in our feelings about counterpart truths and counterfactual truths do not prove their non-identity*. And that would be correct. Suppose many people are not overly concerned with the fact that their brains are not immortal because they are quite sure that their minds will live eternally. This would not prove that minds are different from brains. It would prove only that many people think they are different. [Miller, 1992, p. 135, my emphasis]

This is a perplexing thing to say given the fact that both Miller and Lewis believe counterpart-theoretic and counterfactual truths coincide. How could a believer in MR, such as Miller, have differences in their feelings about what by their own lights is one and the same property? That would certainly count as a strike against the theory—even a believer in MR can't fully commit to a belief in the theory!

Lewis is also guilty of making perplexing concessions and remarks concerning the Humphrey objection, as we already noted earlier when he says, regarding the objection, that "the point is rightly taken". Here is another such remark:

> [f]or the counterpart theorist, the trick is to say that 'Humphrey' names not the Humphrey of our world, and not the Humphrey of another, but rather the trans-world individual who is the mereological sum of all these local Humphreys. If that is what Humphrey is (but I shall argue in section 4.3 that it isn't), then indeed he himself is partly in this world and partly in that and not wholly in any. Part of him loses and part of him wins. But presumably the losing part cares what might have happened to it; it could not care less what happens to some other slice off the same great salami—unless, of course, the world containing that other-worldly slice of Humphrey can be taken as a world that represents the this-worldly slice as winning. [Lewis, 1986, p. 197]

Reading only up to the last part that starts "until, of course. . . " (last sentence), it looks as if Lewis is presenting the Humphrey objection to a variant of his own view, the view that individuals are sums of their counterparts. But the objection so phrased is equally an objection to his own view, for it just is the Humphrey objection. What is puzzling about this passage, however, is how it ends. Lewis qualifies the objection as holding only if the theory doesn't, which of course is no objection at all to the theory. For the world containing that other-worldly slice of Humphrey *is,* according to MR, a world that represents the this-worldly slice as winning. Does Lewis himself have conflicting attitudes toward modal properties intuitively conceived and counterpart-theoretically conceived (as Miller suggests, recall) even though he believes them to be identical? Or is he merely raising the objection only to dismiss it in the very same breath,

even though he appears to be using the objection against a variant of his own view? In either case, we are left confounded.

Melia gives the following defense of MR:

> Perhaps the crucial point is really that Humphrey is *interested* or *concerned* or *cares* only with what might happen to him, and is not concerned with what does happen to someone who resembles him in certain respects. But if such arguments cut any philosophical ice, then just about every substantive philosophical theory would be refuted by considerations such as these. Such considerations would refute [. . .] Turing's analysis of computability, for Humphrey is interested in (concerned, cares) whether or not *f* is *computable*, and not whether there is a Turing machine that computes it. [Melia, 2003, pp. 107–108]

I have two concerns with these remarks. First, one might be interested in whether a function is computable in the intuitive sense, let us say calculable, without being interested in whether a Turing machine computes it because one is unaware that Turing computability implies calculability (and conversely, assuming Church's thesis). Thus one way of finding out whether a function is calculable is by finding a Turing machine that computes it, and so surely one that is interested in whether a function is calculable should be interested in whether a Turing machine computes it. There is, however, no such robust evidence for an implication from a modal proposition to its counterpart-theoretic translation, or conversely, and so it remains unclear why one's attitudes towards the two propositions should coincide. Second, of the various definitions of computability that are provably equivalent in *extension*, there may be disagreement over which provides a better *analysis* of our intuitive concept, i.e. of the *intension*. Indeed, Alonzo Church and Kurt Gödel, two forefathers of computability, thought that only Turing provided an *analysis* of calculability (or "mechanical procedure") despite the fact that both Church and Gödel gave extensionally equivalent definitions. So, even if one could be convinced that MR is extensionally adequate, that would not in itself be sufficient to convince one that MR provides an *analysis* of modality.

Given that the sort of counterpart-theoretic properties in question are either necessarily had or necessarily lacked, it seems to me that modal realists should not care that they have or lack certain counterpart-theoretic properties. And if she cares not about her counterpart-theoretic properties, she should also care not about her modal properties. This might seem a puzzling predicament for her to be in, since it seems we should care about the modal properties that concern us. Rosen, however, suggests something of the contrary, but I find it psychologically harder to swallow. He says:

> In taking counterpart theory to heart one might aim to revise, not one's interest in modality, but rather one's concern for certain distant strangers. Humphrey thinks he has no special reason to care about his counterparts. But when he accepts Lewis's analysis he will believe that the modal facts about him just are facts about his counterparts; and since he cares about the former, he will come to care about the latter. [Rosen, 1990, p. 350]

First, and as mentioned earlier, one can be concerned about one's modal properties counterpart-theoretically construed without being concerned *for* one's counterparts. Similarly, I can be concerned as to whether I eat something without being concerned about the thing I eat. Second, given that one has one's counterpart-theoretic properties necessarily, and given that prior to taking MR to heart, one probably has no concern for their counterparts, it strikes me as more plausible that a belief in MR comes with a more solemn outlook toward one's modal properties rather than a more concerned outlook toward one's counterparts (or facts concerning them).

Flouting Respectfulness is clearly no knock-down refutation of MR, but it does give us some reason for preferring other reductionisms about modality that do not flout the desideratum so

admirably. Of course, one will have to evaluate these theories along a variety of weighted dimensions, and even though I have defended Respectfulness from certain criticisms, I do not think that Respectfulness deserves much weight.

2.2 Relevance

John Divers provides a reading of the Humphrey objection (which he calls the 'irrelevance objection') that appeals to a desideratum similar to Relevance:

> It is the very idea that all *de re* possibility is misconstrued as having gratuitous relational structure—that an n-adic property is misconstrued as an $(n+1)$-adic relation—that is ultimately the most plausible target for the irrelevance objection. [Divers, 2002, p. 131]

One can read this as the objection that MR analyzes intuitively intrinsic properties as being extrinsic, but there is an important difference between these these two related objections. For even if a property is had intrinsically by some individual, one can still argue that the property has gratuitous relational structure. In particular, an analysis might satisfy Relevance while failing to meet the irrelevance objection. Consider for the moment perdurantist worm theory, according to which a thing persists in virtue of being a sum of momentary stages, each of which is related to the other by some genidentity relation, such as *being the same person as*. While the tensed property of having been red is intrinsic to the temporal worm, it may still be objected by the endurantist that the property still involves gratuitous relation structure; the property of having been red is just not relational, and certainly not intrinsic. (You can look at something (now) and not know that it was ever red, so how could its having been red be intrinsic to it (now)?) In analogy to perdurantist worm theory, a modal realist could hold that a thing is a sum of its counterparts, and hence that certain of its modal properties are intrinsic to it, e.g., I could be standing in virtue of having a standing modal stage as part. However, this is not necessarily enough to meet the irrelevance objection, depending on how the objection is read. Indeed, that objection can be interpreted in a way that makes it impossible for the modal realist to answer, since it may be claimed that any analysis that takes a detour through counterparts involves gratuitous relational structure. The objection could therefore be dismissed as question begging. Moreover, there is the further problem in elucidating what it means to have gratuitous relational structure, whereas for Lewis there is no problem in elucidating intrinsicality.[12]

We could read Relevance as the demand that an analysis of modality be such that it analyze a modal property that is intuitively intrinsic to the sum of some things as intrinsic to that sum. For instance, the property of possibly being in a certain (e.g. sitting) position is intuitively intrinsic, and yet MR analyzes it as a wildly extrinsic transworld relation. Likewise, the property of possibly having won an election is intuitively intrinsically had by the sum of Humphrey and a certain actual population, and yet MR analyzes it as an extrinsic transworld relation. If an analysis of modality is to satisfy the intuitions underlying the Humphrey objection, then it must (within reason) analyze the intuitively intrinsic properties as genuinely intrinsic.[13] I think we can do no better than this in formulating a version of the Humphrey objection that does not beg

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[12]See see [Lewis, 1986, Langton and Lewis, 1998, Lewis, 2001] for several takes on Lewis's account of intrinsicality.

[13]There are, of course, reasons for thinking that some intuitively intrinsic properties are actually extrinsic, such as shape. See e.g. [Skow, 2007] for discussion. On certain occasions when we want to ascribe to a thing a its possibly having a certain mass, the relevant counterpart relation won't be internal (i.e. won't supervene on the intrinsic natures of its relata) when restricted to a and its counterparts, because extrinsic factors matter, such as match of origins. In such cases, possibly being shaped a certain way will turn out *extrinsic* according to three separate accounts of intrinsicality put forward in various places by Lewis; see [Lewis, 1986], [Langton and Lewis, 1998], [Lewis, 2001]. So on certain precise formulations of intrinsicality, such as all of those defended by Lewis at some time, MR does violate Relevance. For detailed discussion of this issue concerning counterpart theory and Lewis's account of intrinsicality, see [De, 2016].

the question against the modal realist, and that does not involve primitive modal notions that a realist such as Lewis would find questionable.

There are two potential ways that a proponent of MR can meet Relevance. It will become very clear why only one of them succeeds, leaving MR with but a single way out, and a way that Lewis himself goes to great length to reject.

3   Answering the Humphrey objection

The most natural way of satisfying Relevance is to drop Lewis's assumption that individuals are worldbound, and to say that a world represents of an individual that it exists there just in case the individual herself, and not some mere counterpart, is part of the world.[14] The counterpart relation then becomes identity and representation works as it did on the original account: a world w represents of x that x is P iff x is part of w and x is P.[15]

According to MR, worlds never share a part, and lifting this restriction doesn't afford MR any additional *de re* representational power, at least on the assumption that representation works in its usual, actual way. The problem with overlap, as Lewis conceives of it, arises from what he calls *the problem of accidental intrinsics*.[16] Suppose I am intrinsically in a sitting position. That means in every world of which I am part, I am sitting according to that world. So if I am possibly standing iff I am part of a world according to which I am standing, then I am essentially not standing. There is therefore no way to account for the possibility of having accidental intrinsics on modal realism cum overlap. And the situation concerning accidental extrinsics is not much better. Suppose I am part of two worlds, w and w'. Then for any intrinsic property, I have it at w if, and only if, I have it w'. Suppose in w I am sitting on my sofa and in w' I am sitting (in intrinsically exactly the same way) on an elephant. Then w' represents me—in virtue of *me* and not some distinct counterpart—as sitting on an elephant. Overlap therefore allows for the possibility that I am sitting on an elephant while grounding that possibility in me and not some distinct counterpart. The problem is that the possibility can only be realized in a highly specific way: I am possibly sitting on an elephant in virtue of sitting on an elephant in precisely the way I am actually sitting on a chair with a backrest—what a strange way to sit on an elephant!—and it is not possible for me to be sitting on an elephant in any other way. So overlap is of no help to the modal realist in overcoming the Humphrey objection.[17]

There is one last answer to the Humphrey objection. Analogies between time and space have been a driving motivation of perdurantist worm theory. Supposing the analogy holds good, one might expect that a belief in worm theory should—for a modal realist—come with a belief in its modal analog, the view that things are extended across modal space in virtue of being sums of worldbound modal stages. Let us call this view *five-dimensionalism* (*5D* for short). While Lewis is a worm theorist, he goes to great lengths to deny its modal analog, 5D. I do not think his arguments are persuasive and that there are independent reasons for maintaining 5D, but as this is not the place to be defending such claims, I will consider 5D only as it concerns the

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[14]There is a complication for a perdurantist worm theorist like Lewis. I am a four-dimensional object extended in time. So if worlds overlap with respect to me, does that mean they overlap with respect to the whole worm that is me? That seems like the wrong thing to say, since it entails that certain aspects of my history and future are essential to me (e.g. I could not have been younger than I am). I suppose perdurantist stage theory is, somewhat counterintuitively, more naturally paired with overlap, so that two worlds overlapping with respect to me just means overlapping with respect to one momentary stage. This is how I shall view matters for the moment.

[15]For a defense of a significantly different form of MR cum overlap, see [McDaniel, 2004]. McDaniel's presents an interesting way of making overlap work, but it deviates too far from Lewis's view that I won't consider it here.

[16]See [Lewis, 1986, pp. 202–204] for discussion of the problem.

[17]A final problem with overlap is that a worldmate relation (or something from which we can define it) must be taken as primitive, for we can no longer say that a world is a maximal sum of spatiotemporally related individuals, since an individual may be related to things from different worlds. Since this relation looks modal, the resulting analysis via overlap won't be reductive.

Humphrey objection.[18]

Let us follow Lewis in terminology. Call anything with parts from various worlds a *transworld individual*. Call a *-*individual* any transworld individual that is such that (i) its maximal world-bound parts, its *stages*, are counterparts of each other, and (ii) it is maximal in the sense that it is not a proper part of any other transworld thing all of whose parts are pairwise counterpart-related stages. It is assumed that the counterpart relation is symmetric and functional. We can then spell out the truth conditions for five-dimensionalist speak in the following way.

> [g]iven any predicate that applies to possible individuals, we can define a corresponding starred predicate that applies to *-possible individuals relative to worlds. A *-possible individual is a *-man at W iff it has a stage at W that is a man; it *-wins the presidency at W iff it has a stage at W that wins the presidency [...] [a] *-possible individual *-is *Humphrey* at W iff it has a stage at W that is Humphrey [...] 'might have won' and 'is essentially a man' are predicates that apply to possible individuals. So we can star them: a *-possible individual *-*might have won* at world W iff it has a stage at W that might have won. [Lewis, 1986, pp. 214–215]

5D is then taken as the combination of the following claims: (i) that ordinary things are *-individuals, and (ii) that ordinary modal talk is equivalent (for example, truth-conditionally) to its corresponding *-talk.[19]

It follows from 5D that the expression 'Humphrey' refers not to our worldbound Humphrey, but instead to a *-individual that has our worldbound Humphrey as part, and the sentence 'Humphrey could have won the election' is true just in case Humphrey has a part who wins the election. All of this is truth conditionally equivalent, of course, to what original counterpart theory gives us since *-Humphrey has a part who wins the election just in case worldbound-Humphrey has a counterpart who wins the election. The difference is that 5D treats intensional entities as first-rate citizens, and analyzes their modal properties, such as possibly having a certain mass, as genuinely intrinsic features of their bearers.[20] Going back to Humphrey, the 5D analysis of his possibly winning the election involves only Humphrey-the-*-individual and the property of winning the election. Of course, that analysis ultimately goes through counterparts of our worldbound Humphrey stage, but that is neither here nor there.

To reemphasize, 5D is not a solution to the Humphrey objection on any way of reading it. For one may hold that modal properties on this view are still given gratuitous relational structure even if their analysis involves only the entities it intuitively should. One could object on similar grounds that perdurantism fails as an analysis of tensed properties (gratuitously appealing to momentary stages), or that relativity theory fails as an analysis of certain spatiotemporal properties (gratuitously appealing to frames of reference), and so on. Obviously objections such as these fail to cut any philosophical ice.

Even if one accepts 5D as an answer to Relevance, one might still object to MR on the grounds that counterparts have nothing to do with modality! As I stressed earlier, however, if that is what the Humphrey objection amounts to, then it fails to present a compelling objection to modal realism. If the objection is to constitute more than a mere denial of MR, it must present a challenge that a consistent and well-argued for theory such as MR (or a suitable variant) has at least some hope of answering. This is why I have taken care to formulate the objection in terms of two desiderata that are, at least to some degree, jointly answerable by a modal realist.

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[18]See e.g. [Yagisawa, 2010], Wallace [2014], Graham [2015] for different defenses of 5D.

[19]It is unclear why Lewis stars the predicate rather than the individual, since the most natural way to view the change in theory is as a change in what the referents of singular terms are—they are no longer worldbound individuals but *-ones. We could then say that a possible *-individual is a man at W iff it has a stage at W that is a man; *-it wins the presidency at W iff it has a stage at W that wins the presidency, *-it might have won at a world W iff it has a stage at W that might have won, and so on. Despite the fact that the starring of singular terms is more natural, I will stick to Lewis's formulation for consistency.

[20]This is a primary motivation of case intensional logic; see Belnap and Müller [2014]. James Garson defends a similar intensional semantics for modal logic on similar philosophical grounds; see [Garson, 2006, pp. 290–293].

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