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Review of Mr Karol Lenart's Dissertation

Title: *Metaphysics of Ersatzism about Possible Worlds*

Dissertation Supervisor: Sebastian T. Kołodziejczyk

I read Mr Lenart's dissertation with great interest and pleasure. His main goal is to develop and defend what he calls *Aristotelian actualism*, the thesis that (i) everything that exists is actual (actualism), and (ii) actual and possible individuals are treated differently as regards representation by (ersatz) possible worlds. The dissertation is clearly written, thorough, original, and convincing in its argumentation.

Since the thesis covers considerable ground, I will only focus on critical discussion of some of the main topics covered therein. The thesis gives a thorough defense of its central claims, so much of the discussion below is intended to suggest different strategies for dealing with a variety of problems that arise for Aristotelian ersatzism. I hope that they are found helpful in this respect.

Discussion

In §1, a number of objections are leveled against modal realism, one of the main contenders to actualism. However, I am not convinced they are the most persuasive. For instance, taking individuals to be worldbound does not lead to extreme haecceitism since that depends entirely on what determines counterparthood, the realist claim that quantifiers are typically taken to be restricted to the world of utterance is plausible on the assumption that quantifiers are context-sensitive. Lewis's strongest argument for modal realism is an indispensability-style argument, so a convincing attack on realism must somehow argue against the idea that "paradise can't be gotten on the cheap". Can Aristotelian ersatzism provide the sort of paradise that Lewis envisages?

In §2, Mr Lenart argues against an alternative account of actualism, viz. Platinga's haecceitistic version. While I agree with the objections put forth there, I think more could be said about the option that takes merely possible thisnesses as primitive. It is objected that if such things existed, then why can't a Plantingian give examples? Can't they? Take two *particular* gametes from my parents. They could have formed a zygote. Consider all the ways that zygote could have developed into a person. All of those possible developments could have been my sibling. Is it absurd to think that each of those developments corresponds to a property, a thisness of a merely possible individual? Moreover, once you have all the *qualitative* information from the two zygotes, you get a qualitative description of the possible children that could have originated from them! So perhaps some thisnesses, e.g. of mere possibilia, can be specified qualitatively. Alternatively, consider a pile of actually numbered bricks. It seems we can refer to the possible

house I could have built from them by following a very specific plan describing where each brick goes in the construction. Can I not refer to such a possible house by referring to the actual bricks and their possible arrangement, and if not, why not? (Arguably, small deviations in the placement of bricks need not yield distinct houses.)

§3 discusses an interesting distinction between two types of haecceitism, viz. a metaphysical and a modal variant. It is argued that any view that conflates these doctrines is problematic. Lewis did not, for instance, since he believed in haecceities (i.e. properties as singleton sets) without believing in (modal) haecceitism (i.e. non-qualitative determinants of counterparthood). However, unlike Kaplan's formulation of the doctrine, Mr Lenart argues that whether haecceitism holds depends on whether we are talking about actual or non-actual individuals: for actual individuals, it does, but for non-actual individuals it does not. The reason for this asymmetry is that actual individuals exist, so the property of being such an individual also exists and is instantiated. However, mere possibilities do not exist and so there can be no such property of being such and such a possible individual. This seems to me to be a more serious version of actualism than Platinga's and it grounds the Aristotelian thesis of representational difference. E.g., consider the Max Black world consisting of indiscernibles Castor and Pollox. If one has the intuition that of two actuals, a and b , one could have been the other, shouldn't one also have the intuition that Castor could have been Pollox? What is to explain away this intuition that Aristotelianism rejects at the theoretic level?

There is a possibility of getting haecceitistic possibilities on the cheap, a strategy employed by Lewis. Say that the determinants of counterparthood are purely qualitative and drop the postulate (of his original presentation of counterpart theory) that nothing is a counterpart of anything else in its world (P5). Then Lewis could be our actual world Fred, for on some determinations of the counterpart relation, Fred is Lewis's counterpart. What cost is incurred? Lewis says it is the cost of breaking from established theory according to which possibilities are possible worlds. Since Fred and Lewis have different properties and the actual world represents of Lewis both that he is Fred and that he is himself, the cheap substitute for haecceitism must reject

Modal Correspondence: If it is true according to some possible world w that an individual x has property F , then it cannot be true that x has not- F instead according to w .

Mr Lenart takes this to be a main objection against the cheap substitute. However, Lewis must already make the break from established theory whether or not P5 holds as long as counterparthood is non-functional. If x has two worldmate counterparts y and z with different properties, then for some property F , that world represents of x that it has F and also represents of x that it doesn't. Solution: note that truth according to a world for Lewis is relative to a choice of unique counterparts for individuals. Then Modal Correspondence should say that if it is true according to w *relative to a choice of a unique representer/counterpart y of x* that x has F , then it cannot be true that x has not- F according to w *relative to that choice of representer of x* . Nonetheless, I think Mr Lenart provides a number of other good objections against theories that rejects Modal Correspondence, but I question whether a little finessing of the principle would give the realist, say, a plausible substitute for Modal Correspondence.

§4 discusses the relation between the identity of indiscernibles and (modal) antihaecceitism. Many, including Lewis, are in agreement with Mr Lenart on taking them to be independent of each other. Indeed, the Aristotelian holds II and antihaecceitism for mere possibilities but haecceitism and the possibility of II for actual individuals. While I think this is a plausible position, I do have reservations about the anti-symmetry over II for mere possibilities. As I remarked earlier, if one has a strong intuition that, for all we know, there may be intrinsically indiscernible actuals (e.g. fundamental particles), one should have an equally strong intuition that it is possible that there be merely possible indiscernibles, e.g. two non-actual fundamental particles in

a symmetric world. Given a strong intuition that one actual particle could have been the other, there should be an equally strong intuition that of two merely possible indiscernible particles, one could have been the other. Holding a view according to which there is some difference between actual and possible individuals as regards haecceitism needs to explain away one of these intuitions.

In §5, Plantinga's argument against existentialism, the view that singular propositions contingently exist and depend on the existence of their "subjects", is spelled out in detail. One option not discussed is that the existentialist could hold all of the assumptions used in the anti-existentialist proof but hold that singular terms are disguised descriptions so the statement that Socrates doesn't exist just says that there is nothing satisfying a certain description. This is something a presentist might do who holds a Russellian account of propositions. Similar strategies exist for avoiding "reference" to non-existents. A similar strategy which in many respects resembles Plantinga's, which takes the subjects not to be concrete individuals such as Socrates but rather individual essences, is to take the subject of a proposition like 'Socrates doesn't exist' to be some ersatz proxy for Socrates, e.g. a set of predicates, and to read the statement as saying that the ersatz individual is not jointly satisfied. Alternatively, an existentialist could be Meinongian (e.g. a noneist who does not believe in modes of being), though I suppose this view is less attractive. The Aristotelian is better off being faithful to syntax, but there is a cost.

Mr Lenart's solution is, following Adams, to distinguish two senses of truth relative to a world, viz. *truth-in* and *truth-at*, and to say that the proposition that Socrates doesn't exist is true at our world but not true *in* our world, since he doesn't exist. One problem with this strategy is that since Socrates doesn't exist, the proposition that Socrates doesn't exist, doesn't exist and so it can be neither true-*in* nor true-*at* our world. Rather, truth-*at* must concern statements, not propositions, so the original problem still remains concerning propositions. Second, there is a difference between the proposition that Socrates doesn't exist and the proposition that some mere possibilia doesn't exist. Intuitively there can't be singular propositions of the second sort, but unless one is a presentist, since Socrates did exist, we do want to say that singular propositions of the first sort do exist. So unless one is a presentist, I don't think Plantinga's argument is very compelling; to be compelling it would need to involve a mere possibilium of whom we would intuitively want to say that it does not exist, but it is arguable that such compelling examples exist. Third and finally, now that we have two notions of world-relative truth, is one more important than the other? E.g. why should we care about truth-*in* if it is truth-*at* that solves Plantinga's argument: exactly what role does truth-*in* play?

The modal logic of truth-*at* is fairly intuitive but very non-standard for an alethic modal logic; e.g. it doesn't validate the duality schemas, and if it did, it would have to give up $\Box\phi \rightarrow \phi$ which is characteristic of alethic modal logics. This might be seen as a sizable objection, so I'm curious as to how wedded Mr Lenart is to certain claims that affect the logic, such as that any singular modal proposition concerning a non-existent is false (p. 267) rather than, say, indeterminate ("gappy"). This is discussed in the literature on variable domain modal logic.

In §6, some competitors to generalism are discussed. One is to say that it's possible that donkeys talk just in case there is a role—a maximal consistent collection of predicates—that could be satisfied. One benefit of this analysis of modality in terms of roles is that it does not involve quantification and reference to individuals. However, one could get away with just reference to predicates possibly taken nominalistically. But in any case, isn't generalism guilty of the same by employing predicates in the purely qualitative descriptions that represent generalist structures?

Saying that "donkeyhood, talking-hood, pighood, flight, and nonidentity obtains" is not to say that there is a talking donkey that is distinct from a flying pig since it does not tell us that

donkeyhood and talking-hood are coinstantiated. So what seems to be a clear and distinct possibility is, according to the generalist, rather indeterminate. Indeed many intuitive possibilities seem not be determinately expressible in the generalist framework, especially those involving iterated modalities: e.g. I could have had a son that had a daughter that could have been a pianist. It would be nice to see what options are available to the generalist for avoiding these consequences, even if ultimately they are not the most attractive.

Concerning Representational Difference, one might find it intuitively false. For if one has the intuition that Obama could be Biden, then it is equally intuitive that a possible son of Obama could be a possible twin son of Biden. The latter intuition doesn't even seem to refer to possibilia—all quantification is guarded by a modal operator and no singular terms are used that purportedly refer to possibilia.

On the topic of reference to mere possibilia, I would like to hear more about the notion of reference, its semantic role, and metaphysical (e.g. ontological) consequences in order to assess why and in what sense there can't be reference to mere possibilia. Again, consider this pile of numbered bricks that could be built into a house according to *this plan*. Can I not refer to this possible house when I say that, if constructed, it would have a certain height? In what exactly does reference consist?

I wish to discuss one final topic in §7 that I alluded to earlier, viz. iterated modality. It is intuitively true that Obama could have had a lawyer for a daughter that could have been a philosopher. The problem, it is claimed, is that a Leibnizian analysis of this possibility requires quantifying over mere possibilia or making sense of transworld identity. However, whatever the case may be, a correct analysis of modality had should make sense of what are pretheoretically clear and intuitive possibilities. I would therefore very much welcome an alternative attempt to save iterated modality in full generality, e.g. by saying that there are two generalist structures, one according to which Obama has a lawyer for a daughter, and another according to which he has a philosopher for a daughter, and that some relation holds between these structures in a such a way that it allows us to say that the lawyer "is the same person as" the philosopher.

Evaluation

Mr Lenart has written a fine dissertation on an important and current topic in metaphysics. It is clearly written, comprehensive, well-structured, and well-argued for. **My final evaluation of the dissertation is that it receive a pass with distinction.**



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