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Question 1, - are possible worlds really "real?"

To explore the use of possible worlds in philosophy we first need to lexically determine exactly what a world is. The Collins Dictionary describes a world thus: the earth as a planet; any planet or moon especially one that is inhabited; an area, sphere or realm considered a complete environment.

So there are already many known worlds in our solar system and the galaxy containing our solar system (and there may be other galaxies). We know that these exist (as far as our senses inform us) because we can see the stars at night and we have pictures of them from multiple media sources. It is for scientists to study them. They are real whereas the purpose of this paper is to examine the use of possible worlds for philosophical debate. Philosophers need to consider the notion of other possible worlds; like what our world, or a world exactly like ours, would be like if the history were different for possible other worlds and our own.

How would you perceive these other worlds? Each of us would have a different 'world' even if we changed history in the same manner as a lot of events that happened are due to a prior chance event that is unlikely to repeat itself.

Possible worlds could exist anyway - we might imagine them, or not, but they would still be there as an empty vessel for our imagination to find. My 'other world' would be different from others imagined worlds. And changes that other people might make to these other worlds would certainly affect my worlds.

But these other worlds, how would we know that they are there? And be able to prove it?

I might imagine a world like the one I now inhabit and leave well alone and the result should be where we are now with me writing this essay. I could also change things; in my other world I might stop the Norman invasion; then there would be no Battle of Hastings, a town called Battle, or the Bayeux Tapestry. And in this world I may also change other things like were the Wright Brothers to fail at making the first controlled powered flight. The outcome of my tampering is that I may have not been born, or now be in a different place doing different things and probably not be sitting here writing my essay. These notions of other worlds then can only be in our imagination.

These other possible worlds would produce alternative realities, a common theme for science-fiction movies. Another common theme is that these alternative realities already exist, and whereas in the one that we are aware of and exist in we are (hopefully) a good guy. In an alternative reality we are opposite to this, a bad guy (a common scene in the TV series Red Dwarf et al). As most people in this our current

reality are good guys then an alternative world and reality may mean that most people are bad and such a reality does not bear thinking about.

So other worlds can only exist in our imagination as otherwise I may not be here to write this - unless there are multiple 'me's', and in other worlds and realities I am a bad guy, or an insurance salesman instead of a philosopher or... Even if they did exist these other worlds may be so alike to ours that we could not distinguish them. Just one grain of sand need to be out of place to be another different world. If other worlds exist in another space time continuum, as is popularly expressed in science fiction then how would they exist in relation to our world and time? And how would we know that these worlds exist and are real, for our senses deceive us all the time.

Other possible worlds then cannot exist, only in the imagination, there would otherwise just be too many of them. And who would create them?

The notion of other worlds, and their attendant realities, is an excellent philosophical tool. We probably imagine other worlds without realising it. Have you ever wished you could turn the clock back when something bad has happened and avoided this event, and imagined the probable positive outcome. Or imagined what things may have been like if only you had got that promotion, excelled at university or had stayed in a relationship that you had ended and now regret. These are your other worlds.

Universal other worlds could be proposed for rational argument and debate, and rhetoric, leaving the participants with an elevated knowledge and wisdom. Pressing issues of the day could be discussed along the lines of 'in a perfect world what could be the answer'.

We can experience being in a different world when we are engrossed in a book. All books of fiction are another world, or seek to be so otherwise the reader would lose interest and stop reading it. Each story has a world, populated by the authors characters and in a world; either a world that is ours, or another world entirely that is invented by the author so that in essence we then have a world within a world. Or the story is in a world that intended to be the one we are in now but events and history have been changed. If it were not so then the story would be a documentary of what has happened and would probably be uninteresting and would no longer be fiction. So in the imaginative sense these other worlds (should) appear real to the reader. So then every novel has the potential to be another world. They may actually exist somewhere but this is unlikely as their existence would have to be proven. For an example of this line of thought Bertrand Russell, in a debate about religion, posited that there is teapot orbiting the Sun that is too small to be detected from Earth. Nobody could prove him wrong but, he argues, that does not mean there actually is a teapot orbiting the Sun. Other worlds are in a similar orbit as the proposed teapot. We cannot prove they do not exist but who could prove that they do exist in such a way that our senses could acknowledge their existence. And would our senses be up to the

task of accepting their presence, and how would we be sure that our senses are not being betrayed. Our senses are often betrayed; magical tricks (illusions) could not be possible otherwise.

The above theme of real worlds in novels would also apply to movies.

Conclusion - at the moment other worlds are just in our imagination, and other peoples imaginations as expressed in novels, films and other non factual media but, like the teapot, we cannot prove they are not out there somewhere.

## References

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