

## Question 2) Are possible worlds really 'real'?

As I write this sentence by physically tapping on a keyboard, converting my thoughts into a text, I realise I am in a world. To debate whether *this* world is real is not really the question. Accepting this world's form of reality as a really 'real' norm will allow us to examine whether possible worlds are really 'real' also.

That I can quite easily imagine I am not writing this essay makes another possible world seem almost tangible and definitely possible. Perhaps most 'real' to us though, may be our dream world, where we experience another realm most fully leading us to wonder whether our 'reality' is ought but a dream. Other possible worlds exist in fiction, and in particular science fiction, where possible worlds can be imagined in great detail and with remarkable lucidity.

The idea that we are currently living in a computer generated possible world, as in the Matrix movie, is an actualised world not just students of philosophy are willing to consider to be a distinct possibility. New worlds, or versions of this world, may be so powerfully constructed by computer technology one day that an artificial reality so 'real' we think we are actually living in it, *will be* created; losing artifice - which seems to make such a possible world real by definition.

The worlds that we might wish to inhabit one day: utopian worlds, egalitarian worlds, peaceful worlds are possible and as such 'real'. If people can think a world that is possible, it can happen, and possibly will happen, and maybe must happen, as striving for possible worlds is the only way that a new/different world 'can' happen.

That this 'real' world we experience today is socially constructed anyhow, suggests reality is but a story that we are told – even science is a narrative. All realities are socially constructed – anything is possible.

That god made this world, and may well have created other worlds from which he chose this one as 'the best of all possible worlds', is a modern starting point of possible world theory as accredited to Leibnitz (1646-1716); himself influenced by the idealism and rationalism of Descartes (1596-1650), who stated: "I am certain that I can have no knowledge of what is outside me except by means of the ideas I have within me."

More recently, it is with the work of David Lewis (1941-2001), returning to modal realism with a logical rather than rational argument, that regards possible worlds to be as literally real as this one. The possible world he looks at here is different from those imagined or perceived; it is those worlds where things may have turned out differently due to circumstances or choices made. It is possible that Japan had chosen not to bomb Pearl Harbour or that I might have become a novelist. Possible worlds very close to this one in content not kind, and others further away.

And so to the proof: 'A proposition is *necessary* if it is true in all possible worlds and *possible* if it is true in at least one. To say x is possible is to say there is a possible world where x is true. To say x is necessary is to say that in all possible worlds x is true.' (Wikipedia). Possible worlds are necessary for things to be true in this world. Scientific thinking requires that if an unobservable entity is theoretically useful then it is reasonable to think that it exists.

Moreover, that the idea of existence is meaningless anyway supports real possible world theory. Possible worlds are just as real as our actual world, whether anything exists or not is what philosophers have spent centuries concerning themselves with without making any progress at all - because the idea itself is nonsense. Such reasoning is expounded by Marvin Minsky, the American cognitive scientist and co-founder of MIT's Artificial Intelligence laboratory.

It's almost as if imagination is what makes the world real. If we couldn't imagine possible worlds then our world would have nothing around it to make it real. Things can only be defined in comparison to something else. If there is a totally real world it can only happen alongside all other possible worlds. Possibilities provide dimensions.

The 'possible worlds' model is extremely useful for science to progress in its analysis of the natural physical world; and in the same way useful for philosophy to examine ontological reasoning or ethical real life choices is undoubted. Whether they are really 'real' remains debatable. Even David Lewis himself, but also Saul Kripke (1940-) have critiqued the 'outlandish' claims of modal realism. Kripke suggests that the metaphysical realm is separate from an epistemological one when using 'necessity', undermining the very idea that modal realism can justify claims to prove the actuality of possible worlds.

Returning to the real world so to speak, the realness of possible worlds seems to be in direct contrast to what I experience in my common sense, actual world: a world that my fellow beings all know, and that we can all agree exists, even if we might differ in our perceptions of it. That we experience our daily lives on this planet of substance is real to us and it is the sophistry of philosophers that spoils that most blindingly, obvious, objective reality.

We can all perceive falsely and be enticed by stories and very realistic illusions and there is something in us that desperately wants to escape reality, but we all know that there is something really 'real' about our world. None of the logical arguments that convince my intellect I am living in one of endless possible worlds, convinces me of the truth that my experience tells me not to trust the possibility that a world where someone in history decided to scratch their head rather than not (let alone all the possible worlds where every person in history decided they would scratch their head in every moment of each second rather than not) really exists.

That something is possible and real is a contradiction in terms, as possibility is not real by definition. It may be real in the future, but until it is realised, it cannot be real. You might say this world was possible once, however this world is so complex to define and difficult to quantify in its entirety that it was never a possible world, it could not be fully imagined. Real worlds are not possible worlds. Saying possible worlds are real is as meaningful as saying impossible worlds are real.

Moreover, it is the 'really 'real'' part of the question that is problematic. We might accept that possible worlds are 'real', as the parentheses around real suggest it might seem real but it's not really real (we commonly put our fingers in the air signifying apostrophe parentheses as we express a word to mean: not really). If we then take really to mean 'truly' rather than 'very' it does not cancel out the parentheses. Which leaves us with the statement: Are possible worlds really not real?

That the questioner did not simply ask: 'Are possible worlds real?' leads me to analyse the grammar or semantics in the question, and that we might come to the conclusion that the wording allows us to conclude all possible worlds can be both real or unreal at the same time. Wave/particle theory conveniently allows us to logically hold two apparently contradictory ideas in our heads at the same time.

Disregarding all allusions to double negatives and whether quantum particles have relevance here, the question can only ever really mean: Are possible worlds real or not real? And since the possibility of a common sense approach to the question has revealed itself, I may as well end with the common sense view of reality I started with in the concrete, temporal space I inhabit while writing this essay.

As I tap this keyboard, while a dustbin lorry outside on the street noisily collects my wheelie bin full of rubbish to put in landfill, I declare that possible worlds are not real and that I need to 'do' something more or less so that a human world is possible at all.