

Modal Essentialism, Possible Worlds and the Problem of *De Re* Representation

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Abstract: Modal essentialism holds that some x is essentially F if and only if at every possible world at which x exists, x is F . This view entails (ignoring the case of extreme essentialism) that distinct possible worlds can represent *de re* (singular) possibilities for the same individual. In the literature we find haecceitist and anti-haecceitist explanations of *de re* representation. The aim of this paper is to analyse which explanations of *de re* representation are consistent with genuine (nontrivial, objective) and plausible variants of modal essentialism. As I demonstrate, only moderate haecceitism meets this criterion. However, its weakness lies in its inability to account for intuitions about the variability of our modal judgments. In contrast, extreme haecceitism and moderate anti-haecceitism (modelled on qualitative counterpart theory) have the advantage of accommodating both essentialist and variability intuitions, provided both views are supplemented with a notion of quasi-essentiality.

Keywords: *de re* modality; essence and essentialism; modal representation; haecceitism; possible worlds; transworld identity.

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1. Introduction

The modal view of essence (Plantinga 1974; Kripke 1980; Forbes 1985) identifies essential properties with necessary properties:

Modal Essentialism: Some x is essentially F if and only if at every possible world at which x exists, x is F .

However, as Fine (1994) and others (Correia 2006; 2012; Oderberg 2007; Koslicki 2012; Hale 2013; Kment 2014) have argued, necessity alone is insufficient for essentiality, as individuals can possess many necessary properties that are not essential to them. In response to this issue, modal essentialists typically introduce additional conditions for properties to qualify as essential, such as sparsity (Cowling 2013; Wildman 2013), intrinsicity (Denby 2014, Bovey 2021), non-triviality (Della Rocca 1996), or non-triviality coupled with qualitateness (De 2020).

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between Modal Essentialism (in any of its various forms) and the representational nature of possible worlds, specifically their capacity to represent singular facts about individuals. My analysis begins from the observation that Modal Essentialism implies that distinct worlds can represent the same individual as existing in them. For this to be possible, there must be facts that determine when representations at distinct worlds concern one and the same individual, whether understood in terms of genuine transworld identity or counterpart relations. These facts, rightly understood (as explained below), determine facts about individuals' essential properties.¹ For example, Socrates is essentially human *because*, at every world at which he exists, he is human. Multiple worlds therefore represent Socrates as existing, and all such worlds

¹ As Kripke (1980, 42) has noted, "The question of essential properties is [...] equivalent to the question of 'identity across possible worlds.'" Kripke, however, worked with a narrow conception of transworld identity that is incompatible with counterpart theory and with modal realism without overlap – a controversial stance, since both counterpart theorists and modal realists can be essentialists. As I will show shortly, there is a more general, representational notion of transworld identity which is equivalent to the question of essential properties, and which remains compatible with both counterpart theory and modal realism.

represent him as human.² This shows that facts about essence depend on how worlds manage to represent individuals across worlds.

When addressing the problem of the representational nature of possible worlds, which is usually linked to the issue of transworld identity, the first step is to distinguish between the epistemic problem of transworld identification and the metaphysical problem of transworld identity.

The epistemic problem of transworld identification concerns how we are able to track a particular individual across various possible worlds. As recognized in the literature (Plantinga 1974, Chap. 4; Kripke 1980, Van Inwagen 1985), this is a pseudo-problem. We determine what we refer to in modal contexts simply by stipulation – though it is important to note that stipulation does not grant us epistemic access to what is possible or not. Instead, it merely allows us to specify the subjects of our modal investigations.

In contrast, the metaphysical problem of transworld identity is a genuine issue, which has controversial and uncontroversial variants (see Divers 2002, 258-260; Lewis 1986, 193-194). The controversial view can be interpreted in either an ontological sense, concerning the constituents of worlds, or a semantic sense, concerning the elements of the domains of quantification associated with each world:

Ontological Transworld Identity: There is an entity E and there are two worlds $w1$ and $w2$ such that E constitutes (is part of/is a member of) $w1$ and $w2$.

Semantic Transworld Identity: There is a semantic element e and there are two worlds $w1$ and $w2$, and two domains of quantification $D(w1)$ and $D(w2)$ associated with each of the worlds, such that $D(w1)$ and $D(w2)$ contain e .

Both of these views are controversial, as they are rejected by those who believe that possible worlds and/or their domains of quantification are

² Facts about the transworld identity of individuals would be irrelevant to facts about essence if individuals were assumed to be worldbound. But this would imply that, for any individual x , all of its properties are essential to it. I set aside this extreme form of essentialism, which lacks contemporary proponents, and focus instead on moderate versions of Modal Essentialism.

disjoint and never overlap (e.g., Lewis 1986). However, there is an uncontroversial transworld identity view, which simply asserts that:

Uncontroversial Transworld Identity: There is an entity *e* and there are worlds *w1* and *w2* such that *e* exists *according to* both *w1* and *w2*.

This view is consistent both with theories that keep worlds and/or their domains separate as well as with those that allow them to have common parts/members. Uncontroversial Transworld Identity merely requires two assumptions concerning the representational nature of possible worlds:

- (1) Worlds are representational beings; they represent certain facts as obtaining *according to* (in short, *at*) them.

and:

- (2) Distinct worlds are able to represent the same entity as existing according to them.

From this point onward, I will focus on individuals (such as humans, electrons, artifacts) and the facts about them. Modal statements about the modal properties of individuals are referred to as *de re* modalities. Although most scholars agree that worlds are representational in nature, as implied by the two assumptions (1) and (2), they provide the truth conditions for *de re* modalities in different ways: some rely on the counterpart theory, while others rely on the transworld identity theory (in the controversial sense), and associated with it standard Kripkean semantics of modal statements. These two approaches to *de re* modalities are independent of particular views about possible worlds and can thus be applied within both modal realist or actualist (ersatzist) frameworks. Consequently, a world *w* (whether genuine or ersatz) can represent a fact like *Socrates exists* either by containing his counterpart (genuine or ersatz), Socrates himself or his parts (as in the case of modal realism with overlap), or his abstract representative (as in the case of ersatzism).

However, beyond the challenge of providing truth conditions for *de re* modalities and explaining what makes a world represent an individual as existing at it, there is a deeper issue regarding the very representational nature of worlds. Once we accept that worlds represent singular facts about individuals (for example, facts like *Socrates is human* or *This ball is red*),

a further question arises about how those facts relate to general (qualitative) facts that hold at a world, such as *All humans are mortal* or *Someone is human*.

By *de re representation* of a world w , I mean the complete set of singular facts that are represented as holding at w , whereas by *qualitative representation* of w , I mean the complete set of general facts represented as holding at w . The problem of *de re* representation then becomes:

The Problem of De Re Representation: How is the *de re* representation of some world w related to its qualitative representation?

In the literature, two opposing answers to this question emerge. On the one hand, haecceitism (Adams 1979; Salmon 1996; Elshof 2000; Mackie 2006; Kment 2012, 2014; Stalnaker 2012; Russell 2015) holds that the *de re* representation of a world w is independent of its qualitative representation. On the other hand, anti-haecceitism maintains that the *de re* representation does depend on the qualitative representation.³

It is important to note that the problem of *de re* representation is general in the sense that it is independent of any particular theory of possible worlds or methods for analysing modalities *de re*. This means that both haecceitist and anti-haecceitist accounts of *de re* representation are available to modal realists and actualists alike, and can take either counterpart theoretic or (genuine) transworld identity forms.

The aim of this paper is to explore how various haecceitist and anti-haecceitist accounts of *de re* representation relate to the issue of Modal Essentialism. This issue has not been comprehensively analysed in the literature. One of the few exceptions is John Divers, who writes:

On the neutral [possible world] account, essential properties of an individual are all of those features that it has at every world at which it exists, and an essence of an individual is an essential feature of that individual such that, at any world, anything that has that feature is

³ Those modal variants of haecceitism and anti-haecceitism should be distinguished from their metaphysical counterparts that concern structure of reality or nature of individuation. For more details on this distinction see Fine (2005), Scarpato (2023), Lenart (2023).

identical to that individual. So via the neutral account, facts about representation (i.e. facts about what is the case at a world) and how these are fixed, have an obvious bearing on questions of essential properties and essences. (Divers 2002, 265)

Divers, however, has not provided a systematic analysis of this problem. In this paper, I aim to address this gap. I will distinguish between moderate and extreme variants of haecceitism and anti-haecceitism, arguing that only moderate haecceitism is compatible with genuine and plausible forms of Modal Essentialism. A key reason for this is that the most promising alternative accounts of *de re* representation – extreme haecceitism and moderate anti-haecceitism modeled on qualitative counterpart theory – render *de re* modalities systematically inconstant, which is incoherent with (genuine) Modal Essentialism.

However, as I will show, introducing the notion of quasi-essentiality allows both views to align with essentialist intuitions while at the same time still being able to account for the inconstancy – something moderate haecceitism fails to do. A modal essentialist, however, might find the notion of quasi-essentiality unsatisfactory. In that case, she would be left without a plausible account of *de re* representation, which Modal Essentialism requires.

Consequently, such an essentialist may be compelled to abandon the possible worlds framework altogether and instead either take the modal character of essences as primitive, analyse it in terms of dispositions or potentialities, or define essences in a non-modal, Finean manner. My analysis may thus provide indirect support for these alternative approaches to essence.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 outlines the desiderata for genuine forms of essentialism. Section 3 provides a brief overview of how haecceitist and anti-haecceitist doctrines will be understood throughout the article. Sections 4, 5, 6, and 7 explore how various anti-haecceitist and haecceitist accounts of *de re* representation interact with the essentialist framework. Section 8 compares most promising views that align with genuine Modal Essentialism with those that oppose it, advancing an argument in favour of the latter. However, a strategy for reconciling those anti-essentialist views with genuine Modal Essentialism is provided. Finally, Section 9 concludes the paper.

2. Desiderata for Genuine Essentialism

In order to proceed, we need to settle what are the desiderata for a genuine variant of Modal Essentialism. From now on, by *Genuine Essentialism*, I will understand a combination of three theses:

Genuine Essentialism: (1) essences are context independent, (2) essences are not trivial and non-minimal, (3) essentialist truths about individuals are factual.

These assumptions appear moderate and are widely shared by proponents of essentialism (both modal and non-modal) who treat it as a substantive metaphysical position. In what follows, I will assume that any essentialist view that fails to meet at least one of these desiderata turns into a *Shallow Essentialism* (strong or weak, depending on how many components of Genuine Essentialism are denied). Therefore, researchers who describe themselves as *true* essentialists should endorse some form of Genuine Essentialism. Relatedly, genuine modal essentialists should endorse *Genuine Modal Essentialism*.

The intuitive support for (1) is that individuals have essential properties or essences (by an essence I mean a collection of all essential properties of an individual) independently from how we think or talk about individuals. (2) is supported by the intuition that essential properties and essences are informative, that is, they discriminate individuals from other individuals, ground their identity and persistence conditions, and facts about exemplification of other properties, which metaphysically follow from essential properties or essences. Finally, (3) is supported by a strong intuitive belief that *individuals* (besides natural kinds or abstract entities) have essential properties or essences.

Final note: genuine essentialist accounts can vary in terms of how many essential properties are attributed to individuals and whether individuals possess individual essences (collections of essential properties that are both necessary and sufficient for the existence of an individual). Generally, variants of essentialism that ascribe fewer essential properties to individuals and avoid commitment to individual essences tend to be more plausible due to their lower ontological and ideological costs (e.g., as discussed below, some variants of individual essences entail certain rather implausible modal theses), as well

as reduced epistemic demands (the more essential properties we attribute to individuals, the more we must say about how they can be discovered).

3. Characterising Haecceitism and Anti-Haecceitism

The second task before proceeding with the actual analyses is to briefly outline how the doctrines of haecceitism and anti-haecceitism will be understood throughout this paper.

Recently, researchers have increasingly identified haecceitism with the view that there exist possibilities which differ non-qualitatively without differing qualitatively (Cowling 2012; De 2022). Anti-haecceitism, on the other hand, holds that no such possibilities exist. For example, consider the possibility that tomorrow the universe undergoes a complete reset, and everything that occurred before tomorrow will replay exactly the same way. Suppose the universe has undergone such resets many times before. Each epoch of the universe resulting from these resets might be treated as a distinct possibility that tells the same qualitative story but differ non-qualitatively in terms of which individuals they involve (this example is adapted from Russell 2015, 389). Other examples of haecceitist possibilities include Kripke's dice (Kripke 1980), individuals swapping their qualitative roles (Chisholm 1967; Lewis 1986, Chap. 4.4), or possibilities involving indiscernible individuals (Adams 1979; Lewis 1986, Chap. 4.4; Stalnaker 2012, Chap. 3).

In my view (though I cannot fully defend it here), if we endorse the theory of possible worlds, these formulations are not fundamental enough. Whether haecceitistic possibilities are permitted depends on one's stance on *de re* representation. I thus take haecceitism and anti-haecceitism to be, first and foremost, answers to The Problem of De Re Representation. In this respect, I follow Lewis (1986, Chap. 4.4). However, the key difference between my approach and Lewis's is that I distinguish between moderate and extreme variants of these views, while Lewis did not (at least not explicitly).

For Lewis (1986, 221 – 22), haecceitism asserts that *de re* representation does not supervene on (i.e., is not necessitated by) qualitative representation, while anti-haecceitism claims that it does. Consequently, if *de re* representation does not supervene on qualitative representation, haecceitistic

possibilities are genuine. If it does, such possibilities do not exist. Nevertheless, Lewis's formulation of anti-haecceitism still allows for the legitimacy of the notion of *de re* representation: it remains meaningful to ask whether Socrates (or his counterpart) exists at a given world. However, whether a world *w* represents Socrates as existing depends on whether *w* represents certain qualitative facts, which are both sufficient and necessary conditions for Socrates' existence (or the existence of his counterpart).

Supervenience, however, is not an explanatory notion but merely a concept of necessary covariance. Thus, (Lewisian) haecceitism simply states that *de re* representation is not always (necessarily) determined by qualitative representation, while (Lewisian) anti-haecceitism asserts that, if *de re* representation is determined, it is always (necessarily) determined by qualitative representation. Anti-haecceitism is however consistent with the possibility that some singular facts may be indeterminate. In my view, these are the characterizations of *Moderate Haecceitism* and *Moderate Anti-Haecceitism*.

There are, however, more extreme variants of these views, which involve a more substantial notion of a dependence relation linking *de re* and qualitative representation of worlds. By *Extreme Haecceitism*, I refer to a view in which *de re* representation is explanatorily independent of (or ungrounded in) qualitative representation. This means that any world can represent any singular facts, independently of the qualitative truths it represents. In contrast, *Extreme Anti-Haecceitism* asserts that the notion of *de re* representation is illegitimate; worlds represent only qualitative facts.

Both views have significant modal consequences: Extreme Haecceitism implies that any individual could be the subject of haecceitistic possibilities and could be represented as having any qualitative character, while Extreme Anti-Haecceitism implies that all possibilities are general in nature; there are no singular possibilities about individuals at all. As a result, all *de re* modalities – statements about singular possibilities and necessities – become non-factual.

Now, let's examine how these four views connect to the issue of Genuine Modal Essentialism. I will start with anti-haecceitism.

4. Moderate Anti-Haecceitism

Moderate Anti-Haecceitism says that *de re* representation is necessitated by qualitative representation: every change in *de re* representation of some world *w* has to be accompanied by a change in its qualitative representation. Such a view can take either a form of *Qualitative Counterpart Theory*, or *Qualitative Genuine Transworld Identity Theory*. Let's consider them in that order and identify how they relate to Genuine Modal Essentialism.

4.1. Qualitative Counterpart Theory

According to the counterpart-theoretic variant of anti-haecceitism, a world *w* (genuine or ersatz) represents that some individual *x* exists at it, if *w* contains its qualitative counterpart (genuine or ersatz).⁴ In effect, the counterpart theorist can provide purely qualitative truth conditions for modalities *de re*, including essentialist truths: "Some *x* is essentially *F*" is true if and only if all counterparts of *x* are *F*. However, due to the fact that what is similar to what is context sensitive, what is essential to what will vary from context to context as well. A certain context may seem more natural to us than another, but this does not indicate its metaphysical privilege. In consequence, Qualitative Counterpart Theory is incompatible with any form of Genuine Modal Essentialism, which requires essences to be context independent (objective).⁵

Furthermore, given the appropriate context, anything (or almost anything) can serve as a counterpart of anything else (or almost anything). However, if counterpart relations are this loose, then individuals have little to no essential properties. I mention the possible restriction on similarity ("almost anything"), because there may be objects that share no qualitative features and lack any meaningful resemblance – perhaps Socrates and the number 2 are such objects. In that case, the number 2 would not be a counterpart of Socrates (and vice versa). However, the vast majority of

⁴ For more details on counterpart theory see (Lewis 1968, 1986; Hazen 1979; Forbes 1982; Divers 2002, Chap. 8; Varzi 2020). For its actualist applications see: (Heller 1998; Wang 2015; Woodward 2017).

⁵ This observation is widespread. See (Lewis 1986, Chap. 4.5; Heller 2005; Mackie 2006, Chap. 1 and 9; Paul 2004, 2006; Beebe and MacBride 2015).

individuals are not like that, and share at least some qualitative properties, meaning that they can be linked through counterpart relations.

One way to address the problem of excessively loose counterpart relations is to restrict the number of counterpart relations. From the perspective of a qualitative metaphysics of possible worlds in the style of Lewis, the most natural approach would be to ground counterpart relations in perfectly natural (fundamental, sparse) properties, allowing only these to serve as the basis for qualitative similarity. This restriction would help preserve genuine essentialist claims, as individuals would retain essential properties in the form of fundamental qualitative properties.⁶

A problem with this view is that it restricts the analysis of modal properties to individuals that exemplify only fundamental properties, making essentialism true only in the context of fundamental individuals. However, if essentialism is to be a meaningful doctrine, it should also apply to non-fundamental individuals that possess less-than-perfectly-natural essential properties. After all, many of the most well-known and intuitively plausible examples of essential properties – such as *being human*, *being composed of a particular lump of matter m*, or *being born from specific gametes a and b* – are not perfectly natural properties.

One way around this problem could be to reduce non-fundamental properties to fundamental ones. This would allow one to consistently maintain that only fundamental properties are relevant for counterparthood since counterpart relations among non-fundamental individuals would metaphysically follow from those among fundamental individuals. However, this approach requires providing reductive analyses of all non-fundamental properties – such as biological, modal, moral, psychological, or social properties – in terms of fundamental, presumably physicalist, properties. Given the challenges of such reductions (it is difficult to find non-controversial examples) and their frequent incompleteness (see Merricks 1998; Sider 2013, sections 7.4, 7.6 and 12.9; Chalmers 2012, sections 1.2, 1.3, and 8.2, Glazier 2022), many non-fundamental properties would be deemed irrelevant for counterparthood, leaving the modal properties of many non-fundamental individuals unexplained. For these reasons, I believe that restricting

⁶ This kind of strategy of reconciling the Qualitative Counterpart Theory with Genuine (Modal) Essentialism has been proposed by Buras (2006).

similarity relations to a narrow set of qualitative properties is not a promising strategy for reconciling Qualitative Counterpart Theory with Genuine Modal Essentialism.

Let us now turn to the issue of the inconstancy of *de re* modalities, which would occur even when similarity relations were restricted to a narrow set of qualitative properties.

The most promising way to address this problem – and to reconcile Qualitative Counterpart Theory with Genuine Modal Essentialism – has been proposed by Laurie Paul (Paul 2004, 2006). According to Paul, individuals are bundles of core properties (which are non-modal and purely qualitative) and *de re* representational properties (which are analysed in terms of counterpart theory). The *de re* modal properties of individuals, including their essential properties, are explained by the combination of core and *de re* representational properties. For example, Socrates is essentially human because humanity is among his core properties, which in turn prevents him from being *de re* represented as non-human (i.e., none of his counterparts are non-human).

Paul acknowledges (2006, 351) that counterparthood is highly permissive – we can, in principle, treat almost anything as similar to anything else. Consequently, counterpart relations are not restricted to a special range of qualitative relations. She also recognizes that our modal judgments are context-dependent, meaning that which individuals we consider similar may change depending on the context. Yet, she maintains that the multiplicity and variability of counterpart relations can be reconciled with Genuine Modal Essentialism.

As Pauls suggests, this can be done if we endorse unrestricted mereological composition: any combination of core and *de re* representational properties constitutes a distinct individual. This entails the existence of a plenitude of objects, many of which extensively overlap. For instance, at the location of your table, there exist countless tables that differ merely modally, as well as table-like objects that vary in both core and modal properties.

The plenitude of objects provides the resources to explain the phenomenon of inconstancy. If one considers a context in which Socrates has no non-human counterparts and another in which he does, these contexts do not involve a

single individual with shifting essential properties. Rather, they involve two distinct individuals – each sharing the same core properties but differing in their *de re* representational properties. Since *de re* modal properties are determined by both core and *de re* representational properties, these individuals will have different essential properties. Thus, instead of an inconstant attribution of essential properties to one individual, we have a constant attribution of essential properties to multiple, distinct individuals. Let's call this the *plenitude solution* to the problem of inconstancy of *de re* modalities.⁷

Subsequently, Paul views inconstancy as a feature of our language, more precisely, it concerns reference of terms involved in modal statements, rather than of modal facts expressed by those statements. For example, statements like “There is an x such that x is essentially F ” are referentially indeterminate – there are multiple this-worldly candidates for the referent of x . However, while the referent of x may shift from context to context, the truth-value of the statement itself remains constant.

There are several issues with the plenitude solution to the inconstancy of *de re* modalities.

First, this view misrepresents how names function. It implies that all names of ordinary individuals that do not have all of their properties are essentially indeterminate with regard to their referents. This holds even if we restrict our quantifiers to very narrow domains of objects. Suppose I restrict the quantifiers to what happens in my room. Even then, when I say, “The table in my room is wooden,” the name “Table” would refer to many overlapping tables. I could narrow the quantifier even further to range over just one table among the plurality of overlapping tables, but it seems absurd to suggest that our names operate this way. We do not typically

⁷ Many essentialists (Yablo 1987; Leslie 2011; Dorr, Hawthorne, and Yli-Vakkuri 2021) appeal to the plenitude of individuals to address the so-called problem of tolerant essences – the idea that an individual's essence allows for some minimal variation. Tolerant essences underlie Ship of Theseus-style arguments (see also the Adam-Noah scenario; Chisholm 1967), which suggest that if essences permit even slight variation, then individuals possess few, if any, essential properties. While the plenitude of individuals has been used to resolve both the problem of tolerant essences and the issue of inconstant *de re* modalities, these are distinct problems. In this article, I focus solely on the problem of inconstancy.

restrict our quantifiers to such an extreme degree. When I say, “The table in my room is wooden,” I have already imposed a certain restriction on the quantifier’s range. Why should I impose a further restriction on the quantifier if I am not even aware of other tables beyond my own?

Second, restricting quantifiers appears to function in much the same way as restricting counterpart relations. A qualitative counterpart theorist can account for essentialist intuitions by restricting the quantifiers to range over a narrow domain of highly similar individuals. This, in turn, limits the counterpart relations relevant to evaluating a given essentialist claim and makes it true relative to the restricted domain. However, when we speak without such restrictions, almost anything is similar to anything else, and almost no essentialist claim comes out true. Paul’s view does not exclude the possibility of this unrestricted way of speaking, nor does it show that it is illegitimate. If so, there are contexts of discourse – no less natural than others – that, when taken into account in philosophical analysis, undermine Genuine Modal Essentialism.

Third, even if we allow for quantifier restrictions so that, semantically, we can behave as if there were no plenitude of referents for our terms, we are still ontologically committed to a plenitude of overlapping individuals due to the assumption of unrestricted mereological composition.

Of course, such plenitude will provoke many incredulous stares. It seems absurd to assume that at the spatiotemporal location of your table there are countless other tables and table-like objects. Such a belief lacks any intuitive support.

Paul attempts to mitigate this issue by arguing that (2004, 183) differences between overlapping individuals are usually unimportant for evaluating modal statements: regardless of which of the overlapping individuals we consider, the same modal statements will hold true. As a result, semantic indeterminacy does not affect the objective status of *de re* modalities, which remain constant.

However, this does little to resolve the issue. There are still numerous individuals that largely overlap, yet the differences among them affect the truth values of modal statements. Consider Socrates, who has no non-human counterparts, and Socrates*, who does. These individuals share the same core properties and differ only in certain *de re* representational

properties – perhaps just one. Despite this minimal difference, the truth value of the statement “Socrates is essentially human” differs on whether “Socrates” refers to Socrates or to Socrates.*

Paul’s other suggestion (2004, 183) is that, because the plenitude of individuals consists of largely overlapping individuals, they might be treated as “almost” one. She contends that the plenitude of largely overlapping individuals is far less controversial than that of wholly distinct ones.

Yet this overlooks the fact that individuals can overlap in only a minimal way. Suppose x and y each possess 100 core properties but share only one, which need not even be related to their spatiotemporal location. This means Paul’s view introduces a vast number of almost wholly distinct individuals, in addition to the plurality of largely overlapping ones.

Fourth, plenitude implies no individual can stand in conflicting counterpart relations: each distinct way of *de re* representing an individual effectively introduces new individuals that possess the represented features. In other words, no individual can be represented as having different properties than those it has in the initial possible world in which that individual exists. This position thus undermines a fundamental intuition in the metaphysics of modality: that the things we know could have been different from how they actually are.

Fifth, Paul’s view shifts the explanatory role of Qualitative Counterpart Theory in explaining *de re* modality. Instead of explaining an individual’s modal properties through qualitative counterpart relations, it grounds them in the individual’s non-modal core properties. As a result, the Qualitative Counterpart Theory ceases to provide a metaphysical explanation for *de re* modalities, but becomes merely a semantic tool for describing *de re* representational properties. Because of that, even if this view avoided the previously mentioned issues (which I believe it does not), it would render the problem of *de re* representation irrelevant to the question of Genuine Modal Essentialism. Essential properties would no longer be explained in terms of how worlds *de re* represent individuals. Instead, Paul reverses the explanatory order: individuals possess certain *de re* modal properties, and worlds represent them in specific ways because of their non-modal core properties. Thus, ultimately, Paul’s view abandons Genuine Modal Essentialism in

favour of some form of non-modal (Finean) essentialism, according to which an individual's core non-modal properties – those constitutive of its identity – serve as the basis for its modal properties.

As we have seen, the most promising strategy in the literature for reconciling Qualitative Counterpart Theory with Genuine Modal Essentialism is highly problematic. I therefore conclude that, at the present stage of the debate, Qualitative Counterpart Theory cannot be made consistent with Genuine Modal Essentialism. Let us now consider whether Moderate Anti-Haecceitism, modelled on genuine transworld identity, fares any better in this respect.

4.2. Qualitative Genuine Transworld Identity Theory

Another way to adopt a moderate anti-haecceitist stance is to explain *de re* representation in terms of purely qualitative facts about an individual's transworld identity conditions. According to this view, a world *w* (whether genuine or ersatz) represents *de re* that some individual *x* (genuine or ersatz) exists at it if certain purely qualitative conditions are satisfied at *w*. I will assume these conditions involve the exemplification of properties, though they could concern any qualitative building blocks of worlds posited by a given theory of possible worlds.

Taken together, these conditions form a qualitative, necessary, unique (unshareable), and sufficient condition for the existence of *x*, which amounts to *x*'s qualitative individual essence *IE*. Consequently, *x* exists at a world *w* if and only if its *IE* is exemplified at *w*. Likewise, *x* is essentially *F* if and only if *F* is exemplified at *w* and is included in *x*'s individual essence *IE*. Under modal realism, *x* itself exemplifies *IE*, whereas according to ersatzism, it is the ersatz representative of *x* that satisfies *IE*. The specifics of what it means for an ersatz individual to satisfy *IE* will depend on the particular ersatzist theory of possible worlds in question.

This account of *de re* representation is clearly compatible with Genuine Modal Essentialism: (1) the exemplification of qualitative individual essences remains constant, (2) essences are non-trivial, and (3) objectual essentialist statements are factual. However, despite its compatibility with Genuine Modal Essentialism, this account relies on the controversial notion

of qualitative individual essence, which lacks any proponents in contemporary literature. Let me briefly outline some reasons why.

First, accepting qualitative individual essences, entails that individuals obey (qualitative) principle of the identity of indiscernibles (*PII*): For any two individuals x and y , if x and y have the same qualitative individual essence *IE*, then $x = y$. There is however a consensus among contemporary metaphysicians that purely qualitative *PII* is implausible. Arguments against it stem from the field of modal metaphysics (Black 1952; Adams 1979; Stalnaker 2012; Kment 2014; Russell 2015) as well as philosophy of physics (Dasgupta 2009; French 1989; French and Redhead 1988; French and Krause 2006). They show that qualitative duplicates are either possible, actual, or both. If *PII* is defensible at all, it needs to be an impure principle, ranging over partially non-qualitative properties on top of the qualitative ones.⁸ It is safe to say that any plausible essentialist view or an account of *de re* representation should not entail qualitative *PII* and make room for the possibility of qualitative duplicates.

Relatedly, modal arguments suggest that the very nature of qualitative properties – whether understood realistically or nominalistically – makes them inherently shareable among distinct individuals. This is evident in Ship of Theseus-style arguments (Salmon 1986), the Adam-Noah argument (Chisholm 1967), and similar arguments from reduplication and recycling (see Mackie 2006, Chap. 2 and 3).

As a consequence, qualitative properties alone cannot provide sufficient conditions for the existence of individuals. To make essences sufficient, they must be defined at least partially in non-qualitative terms, that refer to specific individuals. This ensures that the possessors of such essences are uniquely tied to particular individuals mentioned by the at partially non-qualitative essences. The most plausible candidates for such essences are origin essences that involve reference to specific gametes or chunks of matter (Kripke 1980, Hawthorne and Gandler 2000).⁹ Another candidate for an unshareable individual essence is *thisness* – a purely non-qualitative

⁸ See (Rodríguez-Pereyra 2022) for a defence of such a variant of *PII*.

⁹ For a critical discussion of origin essentialism see (Robertson 1998; Damjanovic 2010; Janssen-Lauret 2021)

property, such as the property of *being Socrates* (Adams 1979). Clearly, only Socrates can have the property of *being Socrates*.

One possible way to defend qualitative individual essences against these arguments is to construct them from tropes (which are inherently unshareable) rather than from properties. However, this move faces a methodological challenge: such an account of individual essences would be unavailable to those who endorse properties, and the majority of essentialists seem to do so.

A related issue arises concerning modal realism and ersatzism. While a trope-based account of essences would be available to modal realists – McDaniel (2006), for instance, defends a tropistic transworld identity view – it would not be available to ersatzists. Qualitative individual essences are supposed to ground facts about *de re* representation, yet ersatzists hold that it is ersatz representatives (such as names, predicates, properties, or propositions) that persist across possible worlds. Consequently, an ersatzist would need to posit tropistic individual essences for these *ersatz* representatives.

It is however difficult to make sense of such constructs. Suppose, for example, that qualitative properties serve as *ersatz* representatives. What would it mean for a property to have a tropistic individual essence? Perhaps it would involve a trope of necessity or qualitateness (among other tropes) unique to that property. However, such posits seem to be incomprehensible.

Finally, accepting qualitative individual essences means denying all cases of haecceitist possibilities: if individuals have qualitative individual essences, singular possibilities involving individuals cannot differ with regard to what they say *de re* without differing qualitatively. While this is consistent with the spirit of anti-haecceitism, due to the fact anti-haecceitism based on Qualitative Counterpart Theory is able to account for some of the haecceitist possibilities while maintaining the anti-haecceitist tenet that *de re* representation supervenes on qualitative representation (Lewis 1986; Chap. 4.4; Russell 2015), the Qualitative Genuine Transworld Identity Theory is at a dialectical disadvantage.¹⁰ The proponent of this theory

¹⁰ Qualitative counterpart theorists can achieve that by endorsing a position called *cheap haecceitism*. Briefly put, cheap haecceitism holds that there are more possibilities than worlds: a single world can represent multiple possibilities for a given

should provide very good reasons for the falsity of *all* haecceitist possibilities. However, qualitative individual essences do not constitute such a reason because of their controversial nature.

In light of these remarks, I conclude that although Qualitative Genuine Transworld Identity Theory is congenial to Genuine Modal Essentialism, it entails its highly implausible variant due to the commitment to the notion of qualitative individual essence.

5. Extreme Anti-Haecceitism

According to Extreme Anti-Haecceitism, worlds represent only purely qualitative facts.¹¹ This makes it impossible to make sense of the fact that distinct worlds can represent the same individual x as existing at them – a prerequisite for providing truth conditions for objectual essentialist statements, which is one of the core assumptions of Genuine Modal Essentialism. Extreme Anti-Haecceitism, by contrast, can only account for generic essentialist claims involving the qualitative constituents of possible worlds

individual – Socrates, for example. This occurs when Socrates has multiple counterparts at some world w . Suppose that at w , two indiscernible twins serve as Socrates' counterparts (such a world is guaranteed by the standard characterisation of the principle of recombination). In that case, w represents two distinct possibilities for Socrates – one in which he is one twin and another in which he is the other. These possibilities differ *haecceistically* without differing qualitatively. Thus, even though *de re* representation is necessitated by qualitative counterpart theory, haecceitist possibilities remain genuine. This is why the view is called *cheap haecceitism*. Some (Fara 2009) have argued that cheap haecceitists face difficulties in incorporating the actuality operator into their theory, which is needed to account for the modal character of the actual world. However, see (Stalnaker 2012, Chap. 3 and De 2022) for replies.

¹¹ Such an account of representation of worlds seems highly implausible: the majority of possible worlds theorists after Kripke agree that worlds represent both singular and qualitative facts, not merely qualitative ones. Nevertheless, Extreme Anti-Haecceitism might be the only account of *de re* representation available to metaphysicians who believe that the actual world (reality) is purely qualitative such as generalists (Dasgupta 2009) or ontological nihilist (O'Leary-Hawthorne and Cortens 1995; Diehl 2018).

(whether genuine or *ersatz*). Examples of such claims include “Water is H_2O ” (assuming H_2O is shorthand for a purely qualitative description of hydrogen and oxygen atoms) or “To be human is to be rational.”

An extreme anti-haecceitist can account for such generic essentialist claims either through counterpart theory or by positing genuine transworld identity for the qualitative constituents of worlds. For instance, suppose that the fundamental qualitative elements of worlds (whether genuine or *ersatz*) are properties. In that case, a property P exists at a world w if it has a property counterpart P^* at w , or if something at w satisfies a purely qualitative transworld identity condition C , where C specifies a qualitative individual essence IE of P .¹²

On this basis, one could account for generic essentialist statements about properties as follows: a property P is essentially F if and only if all of its property counterparts are F , or if F is part of its individual essence IE , which is exemplified at w (analogous remarks apply to other potential purely qualitative building blocks of worlds).

The extreme anti-haecceitist might attempt to account for objectual essentialist statements indirectly by paraphrasing them into generic ones. On this approach, both objectual and generic essentialist statements would be factual. Correia (2006) outlines how such paraphrases could work, though he focuses on definitional essentialism rather than Modal Essentialism. But the extreme anti-haecceitist could adapt his method to the modal case.

First, we first paraphrase “Necessarily, Socrates is human” into the partially generic statement “Necessarily, to be Socrates is to be human.” Next, to eliminate the objectual reference to Socrates (and, by extension, any other individual), we replace “Socrates” with a predicate that describes his unique nature – his individual essence, *Socrateity*. This yields the statement: “Necessarily, an exemplification of *Socrateity* entails an exemplification of humanity.” This procedure can then be generalized to all objectual essentialist statements, systematically translating them into generic ones.

However, as we can see, such paraphrases require the introduction of individual essences that serve as proxies for individuals. These individual individuals could be: purely non-qualitative (thisnesses), impure (origin essences), or purely qualitative (qualitative individual essences)

¹² For a development of property counterpart theory see (Heller 2005).

In this case, individual natures cannot be non-qualitative or impure, as their modal representation would require non-qualitative resources – something Extreme Anti-Haecceitism does not permit. Consequently, individual natures must be purely qualitative. However, as we have seen, there are strong reasons to reject purely qualitative individual essences.

The main takeaway from this section is that no form of anti-haecceitism is compatible with a plausible form of Genuine Modal Essentialism:

- (1) Qualitative Counterpart Theory, as I have argued, entails Shallow Modal Essentialism.
- (2) Qualitative Genuine Transworld Identity Theory leads to an implausible version of Genuine Modal Essentialism based on the controversial notion of qualitative individual essences.
- (3) Extreme Anti-Haecceitism either renders objectual essentialist statements non-factual (which implies Shallow Modal Essentialism) or is forced to accept qualitative individual essences, which are highly controversial posits.

Let's now examine whether haecceitist accounts of *de re* representation are more friendly to Genuine Modal Essentialism. As we will see, while Moderate Haecceitism aligns with certain plausible forms of Genuine Modal Essentialism, Extreme Haecceitism leads to Shallow Modal Essentialism. However, I present a way Extreme Haecceitism (which also applies to Qualitative Counterpart Theory) can account for essentialist intuitions, while also accommodating the intuitions underlying the inconsistency of *de re* modalities – something Moderate Haecceitism fails to do convincingly. I will therefore conclude that Extreme Haecceitism (and Qualitative Counterpart Theory) offers a more plausible account of the nature of *de re* representation than Moderate Haecceitism.

6. Moderate Haecceitism

According to moderate haecceitists (Adams 1979; Kripke 1980; Elshof 2000), *de re* representation does not supervene on qualitative representation, meaning that haecceitistic possibilities are genuine. However, not all such possibilities are admissible. While *de re* representation is not strictly

determined by qualitative representation, certain qualitative constraints still limit the range of haecceitistic possibilities.

For instance, although Socrates could swap his qualitative role with some individuals – say, Plato – he could not exchange his qualitative role with just any individual, such as a poached egg or an alligator. This is because he exemplifies certain properties, like *being human*, which, while not sufficient for his existence, are nonetheless necessary. In other words, any possible world that *de re* represents Socrates as existing must also represent him as human.

As before, this view can be formulated either within the framework of counterpart theory or in terms of transworld identity. I will examine each approach in turn and explain how they relate to Genuine Modal Essentialism.

6.1. *Non-Qualitative Counterpart Theory*

According to *Non-Qualitative Counterpart Theory*, counterpart relations linking individuals (whether genuine or ersatz) are non-qualitative rather than qualitative. However, since *de re* representation must be qualitatively constrained, there must also be qualitative limitations on when two individuals count as non-qualitative counterparts.

The central challenge for this view is to explain what grounds the claim that two individuals (genuine or ersatz) qualify as non-qualitative counterparts. Lewis (1986, 229–230) argued that it is difficult to make sense of non-qualitative determinants of counterpart relations. In his view, counterpart relations are only intelligible if they are understood as purely qualitative relations.

This challenge has recently been addressed by Sam Cowling (2012). According to his view, for any individuals x and y , x and y are non-qualitative counterparts if and only some bare particular b overlaps both x and y .

Cowling builds on bare particular theory, which holds that individuals are composed of two entities: *thin particulars* (bare particulars), which are propertyless substrata that individuate objects, and *thick particulars*, which are ordinary individuals identified with the collection of all properties borne by a given bare particular.

With this distinction in place, Cowling argues that although the thick particulars associated with x and y are worldbound, they share a single bare

particular that overlaps both of them in different worlds. This allows him to explain *de re* representation: an individual exists at a world w if and only if w contains its non-qualitative counterpart. From this, we can derive essentialist truths: “Socrates is essentially F ” is true if and only if all of his non-qualitative counterparts are F .

Unfortunately, Cowling’s view is inconsistent with Genuine Modal Essentialism. While it preserves a constant notion of non-qualitative counterparthood (based on the overlap of bare particulars) and treats objectual essentialist statements as factual, it deprives individuals of any informative essential properties. This is because bare particulars, though necessarily bearing *some* properties, are not necessarily tied to any specific properties. Without necessary links between bare particulars and specific qualitative properties, Cowling’s view fails to impose specific qualitative constraints on *de re* representation. Consequently, individuals lack substantive qualitative essential properties, and the view collapses into a form of extreme haecceitism.

Moreover, as with the issue of tropistic qualitative individual essences discussed earlier, Cowling’s approach seems to lack broad applicability: applying his framework to the ersatzist ontology would require positing that singular abstract representatives (such as names or singular propositions) possess bare particulars, an idea that is difficult to make sense of.

On top of that, my general problem with defining non-qualitative counterpart relations through overlap of non-qualitative elements of worlds (genuine or representational), is that it seems to transform counterpart relations into relations of transworld identity. But counterpart relations cannot be identity relations, as they have distinct logical properties: whereas identity is transitive and symmetric, counterpart relations are intransitive and asymmetric. These differences are crucial, as counterpart theory is often used to solve problems that transworld identity cannot. For instance, counterpart theory can help us explain the conditional nature of modal thoughts (Mackie 2006, Chap. 9; Lewis 1986, Chap. 4.5), contingent identity and puzzles of material constitution (Gibbard 1975) or issues associated with the problem of personal identity (Lewis 1971).

Despite these concerns, some philosophers *do* treat counterpart relations as identity relations (Hazen 1979; Stalnaker 2003; Varzi 2020). On this view,

two individuals x and y (genuine or ersatz) are non-qualitative counterparts if and only if they are identical. Identity is just a particularly strict form of counterpart relation.

As suggested by Stalnaker (2003, Section 4), even if the counterpart relations are identity relations, they retain the applications of counterpart theory mentioned above if the notion of absolute identity is replaced by the notion of conditional identity. Conditional identity holds only under certain conditions, meaning that an individual can be identical to another under one condition (a given set of worlds) but distinct under another (a different set of worlds). This however is consistent with some individuals being unconditionally identical, or more precisely, identical across all worlds (perhaps necessary beings, like numbers, are identical in this sense).

While this explanation of the nature of non-qualitative counterpart relations is coherent, it is unfortunately inconsistent with Genuine Modal Essentialism. This is because the use of the notion of conditional (contingent) identity reintroduces inconstancy: if identity is conditional, it might be true that Socrates is identical to some human (himself or someone else) under certain conditions, but under others, he could be identical to an alligator or a poached egg.

A possible response is to impose constraints on conditional identity to ensure that, under no conditions, Socrates is identical to an alligator. This would require Socrates to necessarily exemplify certain qualitative or impure properties that prevent such identity claims.

The problem with this solution is that it relies on the notion of unconditional identity, which was initially set aside. Socrates is unconditionally identical (relative to the set of all possible worlds) to some human because he necessarily (essentially) possesses some property F – rationality, for instance – that precludes his identity with non-humans (assuming only humans are rational beings). To systematically avoid inconsistency, a similar procedure must be applied to every other individual. Consequently, a non-qualitative counterpart theorist who interprets counterpart relations as identity relations cannot successfully reconcile her view with Genuine Modal Essentialism without reintroducing unconditional identity – thereby transforming her position into the Genuine Transworld Identity Theory.

Let us, then, consider a variant of Moderate Haecceitism that explicitly adopts the framework of Genuine Transworld Identity Theory.

6.2. Non-Qualitative Genuine Transworld Identity Theory

Another way to adopt Moderate Haecceitism is to explain *de re* representation in terms of impure (partially non-qualitative and partially qualitative) transworld identity facts, which describe impure individual essences of individuals. I will call this view *Non-Qualitative Genuine Transworld Identity Theory*. According to this view, a world w (whether genuine or ersatz) represents *de re* that some individual x (genuine or ersatz) exists at w if and only if an impure individual essence IE is exemplified at w . In the case of modal realism, x itself exemplifies IE at w , whereas in the case of ersatzism, it is x 's non-qualitative representative that satisfies IE (what it means for a non-qualitative representative to satisfy IE will depend on the specific ersatzist theory of representatives).

The non-qualitative part of IE can involve reference to a genuine individual (in the case of modal realism) or its non-qualitative surrogate, such as thisnesses or names (in the case of actualism). The qualitative part of IE involves reference to properties that are necessarily exemplified by x itself or by its non-qualitative representative. An example of an impure individual essence might be an origin property, such as originating from gametes a and b (where origination is a qualitative relational property, while " a " and " b " refer to particular individuals or their non-qualitative representatives).

Subsequently, the moderate haecceitist can explain essentialist attributions: x is essentially F if and only if, at every world where a certain impure individual essence IE is exemplified, F is also exemplified.

Of all the explanations of *de re* representation discussed so far, this one seems the most promising from the perspective of the genuine modal essentialist. It (1) avoids the inconstancy of *de re* modalities, (2) ensures that essences are informative, and (3) keeps objectual essentialist statements factual. Moreover, it does not require purely qualitative individual essences, avoids commitment to qualitative *PII*, and allows for some haecceitist possibilities – those that are consistent with the qualitative or impure constraints imposed on *de re* representation.

Since I plan to compare this view with Extreme Haecceitism, I will first present its extreme counterpart and then offer a comparison.

7. Extreme Haecceitism

According to Extreme Haecceitism (Salmon 1996; Mackie 2006, Chap. 9), *de re* representation is metaphysically independent of qualitative representation. As a result, *de re* representation is not constrained by qualitative factors, or these constraints are minimal. Therefore, any individual can be *de re* represented as having any, or almost any, qualitative character.

As mentioned earlier, Extreme Haecceitism can take either a counterpart-theoretic or a transworld identity form. In what follows, I do not discuss them separately because, as noted above, Non-Qualitative Counterpart Theory ultimately requires counterpart relations to be understood as identity relations. Thus, both counterpart-theoretic and transworld identity variants of Extreme Haecceitism will tell the same story, though within different semantic frameworks.

Extreme Haecceitism asserts that *de re* representation is explained by purely non-qualitative facts about the transworld identity of genuine individuals or their ersatz representatives. Specifically, an individual x exists at world w if and only if it is x itself or its non-qualitative representative that exists or is satisfied at w . Since there are no necessary links between individuals (or their non-qualitative representatives) and qualitative properties (or qualitative representatives of qualitative elements of worlds), individuals lack any essential properties. This leads to Shallow Modal Essentialism.

However, this view seems absurd. It implies that any individual can be *de re* represented with any qualitative character – Socrates, for example, could be a number 2 or a musical performance. This seems highly counter-intuitive.

Extreme haecceitists (Mackie 2006, Chap. 9) acknowledge this problem and agree that *de re* possibilities must be somehow restricted to avoid such absurdities and make their view more reasonable. A solution is to introduce minimal essentialist constraints on *de re* representation.

The minimal constraints are different in two ways from the usual necessary qualitative constraints of Moderate Haecceitism:

- (1) They are generic rather than objectual: The constraints apply to kinds of individuals rather than specific individuals. For example, Socrates cannot be the number 2 because it is true of a natural kind *human being* that human beings are essentially mammals.
- (2) They are conceptual rather than substantial: At least some of the minimal constraints can be identified through the conceptual analysis of general concepts such as *concrete individual*, *event*, or *abstract entity*. For instance, Socrates cannot be number 2 due to the conceptual truth that every concrete individual is essentially concrete, spatiotemporal, or something along these lines.

Because of these features, minimal constraints appear less epistemically demanding than the more substantial constraints of the moderate haecceitist, as they do not require a sophisticated epistemology of essence.

Overall, Extreme Haecceitism allows for numerous haecceitist possibilities (except those ruled out by the minimal constraints) while avoiding commitment to qualitative *PII* and to qualitative or impure individual essences. However, since its essentialist constraints are minimal rather than informative and generic rather than objectual, it fails to satisfy two of the three tenets of Genuine Modal Essentialism. Consequently, Extreme Haecceitism entails Shallow Modal Essentialism.

8. Genuine Essentialism or Inconstancy?

As we can see, anyone who wishes to maintain a convincing version of Genuine Modal Essentialism – one that avoids commitment to qualitative individual essences and related controversial theses – must adopt a moderate haecceitist account of *de re* representation modelled on a Non-Qualitative Genuine Transworld Identity Theory (with qualitative constraints).

The main difficulty facing Moderate Haecceitism, however, is its inability to explain the phenomenon of the inconstancy of *de re* modalities. In Section 4.1, I argued that Qualitative Counterpart Theory gives rise to such inconstancy. Yet this inconstancy is not merely a feature of Qualitative Counterpart Theory; it is an independent phenomenon with strong intuitive foundations. If so, any satisfactory theory of *de re* modality should be able

to account for it. Let me briefly indicate some aspects of our modal reasoning that reveal this variability in our modal judgments.

First, when considering singular possibilities for an individual, we often focus on how they could *become* different rather than how they *could have been* different (Mackie 2006, 156). For example, asking whether Socrates could be an alligator typically means considering whether he could transform into one during his actual existence. In this context, we keep certain properties fixed, ensuring his persistence in the actual world. In such a case, he obviously could not become an alligator. However, the ways in which Socrates *could have been* far exceed the ways in which he *could become* in a world where he already exists: there are plenty of conceivable worlds at which Socrates is non-human, e.g., a world at which he is transformed into an alligator by a wizard.

Second, we often think about modality conditionally – what would happen if certain properties were different. For instance, “If that player had won this match, he could have had a great career.” In Lewisian counterfactual semantics, such statements are true if, in the closest possible worlds where the antecedent holds, the consequent also holds. This shows that the antecedent determines the relevant range of worlds for evaluating the counterfactual.

Third, modality comes in degrees (Kment 2014). We commonly say things like “That team almost won” (indicating a near possibility) or “It’s practically impossible for me to live forever” (suggesting extreme unlikelihood).

Fourth, many possibilities assume fixed causal powers or dispositions. Could Socrates be the fastest runner on Earth? If his actual abilities remain unchanged, then no. But in a more distant world where his dispositions are different, he could be. Similarly, when considering physical possibilities, we often hold natural laws fixed. With such constraints, anything with mass cannot exceed the speed of light. However, in worlds with appropriately different or changed laws, objects with mass could move faster than the speed of light.

We are thus confronted with two opposing yet equally compelling intuitions: the essentialist intuition, which asserts that individuals have objective, non-trivial essences that determine their identity and persistence conditions, and the intuition of inconstancy, which holds that an individual’s

modal properties depend on context. This presents a choice – should we prioritize the essentialist intuitions underlying Genuine Modal Essentialism, or those supporting the inconstancy of *de re* modalities?

I believe that we do not have to give up either of these intuitions, but can satisfy both.

The key advantage of Extreme Haecceitism (and Qualitative Counterpart Theory) over Moderate Haecceitism is its ability to account for inconstancy while still accommodating essentialist intuitions in a theoretically parsimonious way. By contrast, Moderate Haecceitism either ignores our intuitions about the inconstancy of *de re* modalities or explains them only at significant theoretical cost. To account for them, a moderate haecceitist might adopt Paul's plenitude-based explanation of inconstancy and adapt it to a transworld-identity account of *de re* representation. As noted in Section 4.1, however, the plenitude strategy appears to be the only currently available way for genuine modal essentialists to reconcile their position with the phenomenon of inconstancy. Yet this approach faces several serious difficulties, including: (1) commitment to an enormous number of overlapping individuals, (2) a misrepresentation of how names refer, (3) failure to account for the modal variability of individuals, and, ultimately, (4) the abandonment of Modal Essentialism.

By contrast, the extreme haecceitist (as well as the qualitative counterpart theorist) can readily accommodate inconstancy while still accounting for essentialist intuitions in a parsimonious way. As Mackie (2006, 154–156) argues, this can be achieved by introducing the notion of quasi-essentiality: a property *F* is quasi-essential to *x* if considering *x* as non-*F* requires shifting to a very remote possible world relative to the world at which *x* exists. (The counterpart theorist can adopt this notion as well.)

A key feature of quasi-essentiality is that it admits of degrees. Suppose *x* exists at world *w*. If, at a very close world *w'*, *x* lacks *F*, then *F* is quasi-essential to *x* only in a minimal sense. Conversely, if *x* lacks *F* only at very remote worlds relative to *w*, then *F* is strongly quasi-essential to *x*. Intuitively, in such a case it is difficult to conceive of *x* as non-*F*. Whether *F* is minimally or strongly quasi-essential thus depends on the range of worlds under consideration. This flexibility allows quasi-essentiality to account for the inconstancy described earlier.

At the same time, it preserves the core applications of Genuine Modal Essentialism. Like genuine essential properties, quasi-essential properties can ground an individual's identity and persistence conditions. They are also informative (non-minimal) and non-trivial. In effect, objectual essentialist statements remain factual. The notion of quasi-essentialism can also support standard modal arguments for identity and non-identity often proposed by genuine essentialists (see Mackie 2006, 161). For example, pain is strongly quasi-essentially experienced by us, whereas a certain neural activity *A* that is supposed to be a biological foundation of pain is not. In other words, imagining a world where *A* is experienced introspectively by us requires considering a very remote world from the actual world *w@* (or any other world that we stipulate to be the centre of our modal evaluations). Due to this modal difference, pain is not identical to *A*.

To fully grasp the concept of quasi-essentiality, we need to define the notions of *closeness* and *remoteness* between possible worlds. Intuitively, the more elements two worlds share (or, in the semantic setting, their domains of quantification), the *closer* they are to each other; the fewer they share, the *more remote* they are. For instance, a world *w* at which Socrates is a talking donkey is remote from *w@* because many facts about Socrates, his history, properties, and relations are absent at *w*. Also, certain laws of nature (e.g., biological ones) would differ at *w* (as they would allow donkeys to talk). In contrast, a world at which Socrates is a tax collector is close to *w@*, because it shares with *w@* all the laws and the majority of facts about Socrates and remaining individuals.

These notions are not *ad hoc*. Closeness and remoteness between worlds are widely employed in modal metaphysics and beyond, for instance in analyses of counterfactuals, causation, probability, and epistemic notions such as knowledge and justification.

The distinction between closer and more remote worlds implies that modal claims are always relative. Whether a modal statement (including objectual essentialist claims) is true depends on which worlds are taken into account. For example, [Socrates is essentially human] is true if we restrict our evaluation to worlds close to *w@*, but false if we consider more remote worlds with different biological laws. In this sense, it is quasi-essentially

true that Socrates is human: imagining him as non-human requires considering a very distant world relative to $w@$.

This relativity does not make *de re* modalities non-factual. They remain factual, and thus one of the desiderata of Genuine Modal Essentialism is preserved. What varies is which worlds – and thus which facts – are relevant to a given evaluation. Within a given context, the truth of a modal claim is objective: it is fixed not by us, but by the structure of the worlds themselves. Moreover, we do not create these contexts; the closeness or remoteness of worlds is determined by metaphysical facts about their constituents.

Theories that appeal to relative modalities are sometimes criticized on the grounds that they force a weakening of modal logic. This concern typically arises when the accessibility relation between worlds is restricted so that not every world is accessible from every other world. Since the notions of closeness and remoteness between worlds may appear to impose precisely such restrictions, the present view might seem to have this consequence.

However, the metaphysics of possible worlds developed here is independent of the semantic interpretation of modal logic, including questions concerning the nature of the accessibility relation and which system of modal logic is correct. Closeness and remoteness are metaphysical features of worlds, whereas accessibility is a component of the semantic framework used to interpret modal operators. As a result, one may accept a metaphysics in which worlds differ in proximity while still maintaining that every world is accessible from every other world. Nothing in this view therefore requires any weakening of modal logic, and even S5 remains compatible with it.¹³

¹³ For instance, as noted by Lewis (1968), Qualitative Counterpart Theory (*qua* metaphysical theory of *de re* representation) can be made consistent with whatever modal logic one prefers, depending on what constraints are imposed on the qualitative counterpart relations. Genuine Transworld Identity view seems to be equally flexible.

9. Conclusion

As we can see, the choice between Moderate Haecceitism, on the one hand, and Extreme Haecceitism or Qualitative Counterpart Theory, on the other, ultimately depends on whether one finds the quasi-essentialist or the plenitude position more persuasive. In light of the problems identified above for Paul's plenitudist solution, the quasi-essentialist view appears more promising (though a separate paper developing it in more detail may be required). Admittedly, endorsing this view requires the modal essentialist to make some concessions to Shallow Modal Essentialism. However, so long as most of our essentialist intuitions are preserved, this approach is more compelling than trying to save Genuine Modal Essentialism by invoking a plenitude of overlapping individuals.

This conclusion may not satisfy all genuine modal essentialists. One possible path for those unconvinced by the notion of quasi-essentiality is to reject the possible-worlds framework altogether. In doing so, the problem of *de re* representation would no longer arise for Modal Essentialism. They might instead treat the modal character of essential properties as primitive, or analyse it in terms of potentialities, dispositions, or causal powers inherent in individuals. Alternatively, essence could be understood in entirely non-modal terms. Given the current state of the literature, however, it remains unclear whether such approaches can adequately address the problem posed by the inconstancy of our modal intuitions. One advantage of the possible-worlds framework is that it provides a simple and systematic explanation of the relativity of our modal judgments.

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