

# Everything Is Possible

§1 Starting from the idea of a human conceptual framework (be it in natural languages or cognition in general) human thought has its limits at the boundaries of this framework.

These borders are drawn contingently in the conventions of individual languages as to how to use words or to conceive of some entity (“a vixen is a female fox”). Some of these conventions (the ‘vixen’ and the ‘bachelor’) may change if that serves some purpose, others (supposedly the core rules of logic, broadly taken) are presupposed even in setting up an account of the framework and making changes concerning the ‘bachelor’-type conventions – so that we seem to meet conceptual bedrock here, a limit of thought and revisability. The limits of revision are the more obvious in case of the universal framework of a natural language as enforcing changes of logic cannot use the old form of the logic in some meta-theory. A universal framework has to contain its own meta-theory. If you need a certain concept of conditional to revise that very conditional (i.e. its conceptual basis and logic) the revision typically (except mere extensions of a concept) undermines itself: its success testifies to its failure. Even to ‘just adopt’ some new conventions for a fundamental logical concept presupposes a background of presuppositions of ‘adopting’ that will involve some of the core logic used in all this type of reasoning.

§2 So, we have reasons to believe that we cannot transcend the core of the human conceptual system – whatever may belong to that core. We also have reason to believe that mostly this should not bother us as our success in life (be it in individual coping or as a species) can best be explained as some sufficient fit between our conceptual system and our environment. These limits become relevant, though, when considering modal questions. Our conceptual system by its borders sets up limits of what we can think possibly to be the case.

§3 As our core logic is human core logic we can at least come up with the general idea that this core logic could be different for some other intelligent being – if not in the real universe, then maybe in some universe which is not possible given our conceptual system,

but which may be possible in an absolute sense, a sense of ‘possibility’ decoupled from modal statements of our natural languages. The involved concept of ‘possibility’ in this idea is vague and self-undermining in the sense that we cannot specify it further without collapsing it to our common conception of ‘possibility’.

One may best think of this idea as doubting – at least for the sake of the argument – that

$$“\Diamond\alpha \supset \Box\Diamond\alpha” \quad \text{or} \quad “\Box\alpha \supset \Box\Box\alpha”$$

hold, or similar modal reduction principles of trivial modality iteration.

Distinguishing an inner and outer perspective one may say that our modal concepts internally support trivial S5-type iteration, but trying to take an external perspective our languages and conceptual system might (in the external sense) have been different, so what is necessary for us is not absolutely necessary. Letting go of our limits of (modal) thought we might suppose: Everything is possible.

We cannot cash in anything as possible that we have not already taken as possible by the logic of limits of thoughts (otherwise they would not be limits), but the idea of such an external perspective seems to be available. We cannot assert of any state of affairs  $\alpha$  that  $\alpha$  is possible in the external sense only.

§4 This perspective – not by accident – resembles a ‘view from nowhere’, a God’s eye view. Assuming that God laid down the laws of core logic and Him being absolutely free in that crafting (i.e. not already being limited by some logic in force or some ‘nature’ or ‘essence’ pre-given even to Him) He could have (in that external sense) laid down different laws of core logic. [Descartes surmised as much in his letters.] Even if the universe God created is bound to the created logic – among other laws – He could supplant it by another universe following different core logical principles. For Him everything is possible. “With God all things are possible”, Jesus said, according to Matthew.

God committed Himself in this universe to a logic which prevents Him from creating a stone He cannot lift, but as He could have created another universe with other core logical laws this is just a regional limitation. [One may wonder why He created this very core logic, but this is certainly beyond not just our – and any Gnostic’s – ken but beyond our mind, as we cannot even comprehend the alternatives, thus the whole question is moot for us. A trusting Catholic

like Leibniz may just assume that this is the best world possible. In “best world possible”, however, the “possible” has to be taken in the external sense!]

§5 Even if we do not know the alternatives to our conceptual system the very (vague) idea of an external alternative has consequences for our modal reasoning. Modal arguments what is possible (beyond what is sensibly imaginable) inherit the limits of our core conceptual system. It might (in the external sense) be the case that we cannot imagine how some state of affairs  $\alpha$  might be possible, but (externally) possible it is. Given a strong enough commitment to almighty God He might accomplish what for us seems impossible.

Thus, all modal arguments are up for grabs. Especially, there are no modal knock down arguments anymore. [The repercussions in metaphysics and the philosophy of religion should be obvious, and are left as an exercise to the reader.]

§6 This whole line of reasoning depends on whether we can come up with this idea of an external perspective which is understandable enough. It seems we can. We do not cross the borders of our conceptual system, but given the concept of such borders we can conceptualize a realm beyond them. We can imagine such borders of our general conceptual system by extrapolating the idea of conceptual borders we encounter with simpler linguistic systems or older world views with their transcended conceptual resources.

§7 Our modal arguments go as far as they go. We have reason to deem something impossible, and it may be so, at least in this universe, and this is good enough for our knowledge and collective self-knowledge. It might (in the external sense) even be so, since God had enough reasons to never opt for an alternative core logic. That is close to absolute impossibility [ $\alpha$  never being the case in any universe], but not strictly absolute impossibility, as in God’s mind the option is live.

There are, therefore, no absolute metaphysical or modal truth for us to be justifiably certain of.

At least if we assume an almighty Creator who can change even core logic. In fact, the whole argument need not assume that God exists. It is undermined only if such a Creator cannot

exist (in both the internal and external sense), factual non-existence being not enough in modal contexts. There are corresponding external absolute modal truths about supernatural beings and their properties – alas, beyond our ken. We, therefore, cannot know whether the core laws of logic could not be changed.

Modal absolutism remains questionable. What reasons should we have to proclaim it? We might better accept the lesson that – finally/ultimately – we should not take any idea of what is impossible too seriously. Our modal arguments do not carry us so far. “You are welcome”, the Logical Empiricist says.

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