1. The Actualist Slogan

I could have been a cab driver. This table could have been painted blue. This table might not have existed at all. There could have been one more wombat than there in fact is. These sorts of modal claims are utterly familiar, as is, presumably, the ongoing attempt to make sense of them. One of the main dividing lines among modal metaphysicians is that between actualism and possibilism. As the well-brought up among us know, possibilism is an insane view held by lunatics like Lewis and Meinong, while actualism is the sober sensible view held by people who have the proper fondness for desert landscapes and low-fat ontologies. I’m exaggerating, of course. I don’t really take it to be obvious that all views that go by the name ‘actualism’ are any more arid or sensible than their possibilist competitors. More importantly, I don’t take it to be obvious what actualism is.

Actualists routinely characterize their view by means of the following slogan: ‘everything is actual’. They say that there aren’t any things that exist but do not actually exist—there aren’t any ‘mere possibilia’. If there are any things that deserve the label ‘possible world,’ they are just some kind of abstract entities that actually exist—maximally consistent sets of sentences, or maximal uninstantiated properties, or maximal possible states of affairs, or something along those lines. Possibilists, in contrast, do think that there are mere possibilia, that there are things that are not actual. They think that more exists than what actually exists.2

All I have done so far, though, is rephrase the slogan in various ways. To say that

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1 Many thanks to Dave Chalmers, Ant Eagle, Andy Egan, Dan Marshall, Jim Pryor, Laura Schroeter, Ted Sider, participants in my graduate seminar on actualism, and an anonymous referee for The Philosophical Review. Thanks also to audiences at MIT, the keynote session at the Princeton-Rutgers graduate conference, and (for an ancestor of this paper) Monash University.

2 Although possibilism is closely associated with David Lewis, many of the more salient aspects of his view—like counterpart theory and his way of individuating worlds—are not, strictly speaking, necessary components of possibilism. They are arguably the best way to fill possibilism out, but they are not in the first instance what makes Lewis count as a possibilist.
everything is actual is precisely to say that there are no things that do not actually exist, which is precisely to say that there are no mere *possibilia*, and which is also precisely to say that we cannot separately quantify over what exists and what is actual. These claims all amount to the same thing. But what *is* that, exactly? What on earth does it mean to say that everything is actual, that there are no mere *possibilia*, etc. etc.? What does the actualist slogan really come to?

I think the literature is *far* from clear on this point, and that people work themselves into unnecessary muddles because of it. Indeed, certain confusions that I shall discuss in the first half of the paper seem to be on the rise. It is high time to lay out the issues and the choice points as clearly as possible. There are two primary choices to be made; there are two axes along which versions of actualism can vary. One choice has to do with how to treat claims about things that merely *could* exist. The other choice has to do with the modal status of the view, and of how we should think about the ‘actual’ in actualism.

I make no claim that the position(s) I will eventually endorse is startlingly new. I think that most people will agree with the decisions I make at both choice points, and will in fact find some bits of this paper obvious. But not everyone agrees with my decisions, and it has been my experience that people differ remarkably about which bits they find obvious—a fact I find rather telling. My goal, then, is to show that the two axes are there, and to clarify the consequences of the choices.

2. An Important Preliminary

It is crucial to see from the beginning that when the actualist says that everything is actual, she really means *everything*. Otherwise, there is room for a possibilist caricature of her view. Suppose for a moment that the quantifier in the slogan were a Kripke-style world-restricted quantifier. Then all the slogan would say is that everything that exists in the actual world actually exists—not a particularly interesting claim by anyone’s standards.

Indeed, the slogan thus interpreted is not only true, but *fixedly* true. Let us call the actual world @. It is true that everything that exists in @ exists in @. But it is equally true that had a
different world \( w \) been actual, everything in \( w \) would exist in \( w \). That is, we don’t need to know which world is actual in order to know that every actual thing actually exists. When the slogan is understood with a world-restricted quantifier, its truth is just the straightforward result of the way that quantifier interacts with the ‘actually’ operator. The quantifier shifts its domain from world to world, and that is precisely what ‘actual’ does as well when we go down the diagonal of the two-dimensional matrix.\(^3\) As which world is actual shifts, so does the reach of the quantifier; the two shift in tandem. In Crossley and Humberstone’s terminology (1977), this version of the slogan is fixedly true; in Davies and Humberstone’s terminology (1981), it is deeply necessary. Stalnaker (1978) would say that the diagonal proposition it expresses is necessary, and Chalmers (1996) and Jackson (1998), respectively, would say that it has a necessary primary or A-intension.\(^4\)

But whatever terminology we adopt, we are still a long way from actualism. Understood this way, the slogan is utterly trivial. It is a metaphysically uninteresting claim to the effect that the contents of the world one is standing in exhaust the contents of the world one is standing in. The possibilist cannot deny it, and nor need he. It is perfectly compatible with the existence of full-blown, concrete Lewis worlds, chock-full of unicorns, flying pigs, fictional characters, and whatever else you like. It’s still true that whichever of those worlds is actual, everything that exists there exists there. After all, what counts as everything to us, stuck as we are in @, is not the same as what counts as everything to someone in one of the more exotic worlds. Only there does the Kripke quantifier allow it to be said that the unicorns and whatnot exist—and there they

\(^3\) Ideas from two dimensional modal logic have recently been brought to the fore in controversial work by David Chalmers (1996), Frank Jackson (1998), and others. It is thus worth emphasizing that I am only using the two-dimensional apparatus for precisely the purpose for which it was invented. Nothing I say in this paper turns on whether its usefulness extends beyond the treatment of indexicals—or, indeed, beyond the definition of the ‘actually’ operator A. For an explanation of that operator, and of the motivations behind the introduction of such devices, see Segerberg 1973, Crossley and Humberstone 1977, Davies and Humberstone 1981, and other papers cited therein. See also Humberstone 2004 for a retrospective on the development of two dimensional logic.

\(^4\) Note that Stalnaker, Jackson, and Chalmers all claim that there are two propositions associated with English sentences like ‘everything is actual’. Davies and Humberstone instead claim that there is one proposition to which two different sorts of modal status might be accorded. This is an important distinction for other purposes, but it does not matter for mine.
are not possibilia at all.  

So this is not the right way to understand the actualist slogan. The ‘everything’ in ‘everything is actual’ is not supposed to be a world-restricted Kripke quantifier; that claim cannot constitute the point of disagreement between actualists and possibilists. Now, one might wonder whether attaching a necessity operator to the front of the Kripke-quantified slogan would rescue it from triviality. It certainly does, but only by going too far in the other direction. Set this aside for now, however; that claim turns out to be equivalent to one of the two I am about to discuss. Let us take it as read, then, that the quantifier in the actualist slogan is meant to be unrestricted—or at least as unrestricted as is consistent with avoiding paradox.6 (‘Non-world-restricted’ is probably the better term.) One lesson we have already learned, then, is that it is a mistake to speak, as people sometimes do, of ‘actualist’ and ‘possibilist’ quantification rather than of world-restricted and non-world-restricted quantification. The formulation of actualism itself crucially turns upon allegedly ‘possibilist’ quantification. Let us now see just what this is supposed to mean.

3. The First Axis

We have made it through the preliminaries and reached the first real choice point. Hold fixed that ‘everything is actual’ means that everything actually exists, not merely that every actual thing actually exists. The question we now face is, what about things that only could exist? What about green swans, pink elephants, talking donkeys? What about things that exist in other possible worlds, but not in this one? Here is one answer—if such things are possible, they

5 It is tempting to put the point here by saying that read with a world-restricted quantifier, the slogan is compatible with the existence of possibilia, but that is not helpful. The problem is that ‘possibilia’ is a technical term used to refer to things that do not actually exist—to things whose existence is incompatible with the actualist slogan. Consequently, ‘possibilia’ can be interpreted and misinterpreted in just as many ways as the slogan itself. Here is the bad understanding that matches the bad understanding of the slogan currently on the table—possibilia are things that do not exist in the worlds in which they exist. But obviously nobody believes in those! So saying that the world-restricted understanding of the slogan is compatible with the existence of possibilia requires interpreting ‘possibilia’ in a way that does not match the slogan. This does not clarify anything.

6 Utterly unrestricted quantification threatens to collapse under Russell’s paradox. For more discussion, see Williamson 2003, Glanzberg forthcoming, Uzquiano and Rayo forthcoming.
too must actually exist. Here is another answer—no. Actualism as characterized by the slogan is perfectly compatible with the possibility of things that do not actually exist in any sense whatsoever.

Please refrain, just for a moment, from scowling in protest. Laid out like that, the right choice might look obvious. It might even look a bit hyperbolic to claim that there is some sort of **axis** or **choice point** here. But give me time to let the story unfold; let me lay out the two opposing pictures in some detail, and argue that actualists really do divide on this point. The fact that they do so provides an important explanation of various disagreements that have arisen in the literature of late.

The first picture, then, is that of the actualist who takes the claim that ‘everything is actual’ to require that every *possible* thing actually exist as well. This actualist says that whatever exists in any possible world also exists here in the actual world; he says that for all $w$, everything that exists in $w$ also exists in $\mathcal{O}$. This clearly does capture a central actualist intuition, namely that *this*—insert expansive arm-waving gesture here—is really, truly, all there is. And it certainly allows for meaningful disagreement with possibilists. After all, possibilists think that other worlds are full of things that do not exist in the actual world, and that is precisely what this actualist denies. This actualist says that there are no expanded worlds. He says that for every world $w$, the domain of $w$ is a (possibly improper) subset of the domain of the actual world $\mathcal{O}$. Slightly less formally, he says that the domain of $\mathcal{O}$ includes the domain of every other possible world. I consequently call the resulting view **domain inclusion actualism**.

Domain inclusion actualism is a very strong view. Note right away that it entails the Barcan formula:

$$\Diamond \exists x \alpha \rightarrow \exists x \Diamond \alpha$$

The Barcan Formula is true at any world that can only access worlds whose domains are a (possibly improper) subsets of its—at any world that can only access ‘equal sized or smaller’ worlds. That is not a new or controversial claim (see, for example, Hughes and Cresswell 1996). The interesting claim is rather that one perfectly reasonable way of interpreting the actualist
slogan entails that that requirement is met (c.f. Divers 2002, 213). As its name suggests, domain inclusion actualism precisely states the constraint on accessibility that suffices for the truth of the Barcan formula at @. (To foreshadow the second axis… Note that if the domain inclusion reading of the slogan is claimed to be not merely true, but fixedly true—that is, if it is claimed that the domain of every world is included within the domain of the actual world, whichever world is actual—the Barcan formula will come out necessary rather than merely true at @.)

This is pretty ironic. Actualists have always been troubled by the Barcan formula, and with good reason. It says that de dicto possibility claims entail de re ones; it says that if it is possible for there to be a Jabberwock, then there is a possible Jabberwock. And that has looked to many like a direct commitment to mere possibilia—hardly something that should follow from the characterization of actualism itself!

However, that is a bit overstated. The Barcan formula does not really entail the existence of possibilia. It only entails the existence of a thing that has the modal property possibly being a Jabberwock—a commitment fully compatible with actualism as long as the potential Jabberwock actually exists (c.f. Marcus 1986; Linksy and Zalta 1994). The problem is that few of us believe that that is the case; few of us believe that any actually existing object could be a Jabberwock. And even those who think that one could be will have serious trouble accounting for the truth of claims like ‘there could have been one more thing that there actually is’. The real problem with the Barcan formula, then, is not that it entails the existence of possibilia. It is rather that it does not allow for the possibility of so-called ‘alien’ individuals. That is, it is straightforwardly

7 Importantly, the fixed truth of the slogan is not trivial, once we have abandoned the idea that the slogan uses a world-restricted quantifier. The question of whether actualism requires the fixed truth of the slogan is the second axis of actualism; I will take it up in sections 6-8.

In S5, the fixed truth of domain inclusion also suffices for the necessary truth of the converse Barcan formula, as well as the claim that everything necessarily exists (\( \forall x \exists y x = y \)). After all, in S5, the necessary truth of the Barcan formula, its converse, and the necessity of existence stand or fall together. If every world can access every other (as required by S5), and if either it is the case that worlds can only access worlds whose domains are a subset of theirs (as entailed by the Barcan formula), or it is the case that worlds can only access worlds whose domains are a superset of theirs (as entailed by the converse Barcan formula), it quickly follows that every world has the same domain. Note, though, that the mere actual truth of the domain inclusion requirement does not even suffice for the truth of the converse Barcan formula, let alone its validity. It is perfectly compatible with the claim that @ is the biggest world.
incompatible with the claim that there could have been something that does not actually exist.\footnote{Feeding that claim—namely, $\Diamond \exists x (A \land  \forall y x \neq y)$—into the Barcan formula yields the incoherent $\exists x \Diamond A \land  \forall y x \neq y$, which says that there is (here in @) a thing that is possibly not identical with anything in @.}

Nonetheless, a couple of people have recently claimed that neither the Barcan Formula nor the impossibility of aliens is particularly problematic (Linsky and Zalta 1994, 1996; Williamson 1998, 2000, 2001).\footnote{I have elsewhere argued (forthcoming) that Plantinga makes basically the same move, but I will leave him out of the picture here. It is also worth noting that Williamson does not claim to be an actualist.} They try to duck the apparently untoward consequences by postulating the actual existence of what I elsewhere call ‘proxies’ (forthcoming). The basic idea of these ‘proxy actualists’ is to claim that the actual world is full of extra individuals that, in one way or another, have a lesser status than things like Bill Gates, the Hope Diamond, and the chair you are sitting on. Linsky and Zalta, for example, say that they are nonconcrete objects, though only contingently so; they are concrete in other worlds (1994, 1996).\footnote{In 2000, Williamson says that they L-exist rather than S-existing; in 2001, he too says that they are not concrete.} But however the details get fleshed out, the key claim is that the extra individuals have a different ontological status than the things we normally countenance.

This allows proxy actualists to do two important things. First, it allows them to say that the actual world contains—among very many other things—something that could be a Jabberwock without violating our intuitions about the modal profiles of everyday objects. That is, they need not claim that it is, say, my left shoe that could be a Jabberwock; the thing that could be a Jabberwock exists \textit{in addition to} all the everyday riffraff. Second, it allows them to claim that even though the aliens intuition is \textit{strictly speaking} false, something close enough is true. The possible Jabberwock does actually exist, as domain inclusion actualism requires. But it does not have the same ontological status as everyday objects, and thus in that sense counts as a sort of quasi-alien. Thus although it is not in fact possible for there to be anything that does not actually exist, it \textit{is} possible that some lesser-status thing have the higher ontological status—and that is all our intuition about the possibility of aliens requires.

It is only by positing these proxies for \textit{possibilia} that the defender of the domain
inclusion reading of the slogan can even come close to salvaging the intuition that there could be things distinct from all actual things. That is, domain inclusion actualism requires either flat-out rejecting the possibility of aliens, or else adopting some version of the proxy strategy. The former is highly counterintuitive, but at least it is indisputably actualist. The latter preserves our modal intuitions—both about what things possibly exist, and about the modal properties of things that actually exist—but only by undermining the view’s actualist credentials. After all, postulating proxies requires claiming that there genuinely exist all sorts of particular individuals that lie outside the range of our standard quantifier—a claim that carries more than a whiff of Lewis about it. I discuss the proxy approach in more detail elsewhere (forthcoming), however, and I am not going to mount a full-fledged argument against it here. I am simply going to assume that most actualists will want to both accommodate the possibility of aliens and resist the move to proxies, and consequently will insist that the domain inclusion interpretation of the slogan is much stronger than anything they had in mind.11

So what is the alternative? The second way—the right way—to interpret the slogan ‘everything is actual’ is to insist that although things like Jabberwocks and plaid kangaroos are indeed possible, they needn’t be contained within the domain of the actual world. Such things do not count within the scope of the ‘everything’—not, heaven forbid, because the scope of that quantifier is restricted to only a subset of things that really exist, but rather because things that merely possibly exist do not exist at all. I shall call the resulting view non-domain-inclusion actualism.

It is tempting to characterize this dispute over the first axis by saying that the two parties agree about what the slogan says, but disagree about how much stuff there is. Everything is indeed actual; it’s just up for grabs how many things there are! This is not actually quite right, because if the domain inclusion actualist refuses to postulate proxies, he winds up believing in

11 Compare Jubien, who says that if ‘everything is actual’ is interpreted so that ‘actual’ means ‘of this world’, understood rigidly, then “although actualism would be trivially true, it wouldn’t be necessary” (1996, 108). Note, though, that he lays the blame on the operator ‘actual’ rather the quantifier ‘everything’.
exactly the same stuff as the non-domain-inclusioner—he just cannot believe even a fraction of the same modal claims. But it will do to get us started.

The non-domain-inclusion actualist thinks that her domain inclusion counterpart has made a mistake. One way to characterize or diagnose that mistake—I shall try to do a more careful job later—is to say that the domain inclusioner has taken the possible world semantics for modal claims too much at face value. He reads ‘possibly, there is a plaid kangaroo’ as ‘there is a world in which there is a plaid kangaroo’, and then reads that claim as analogous to ‘there is a country in which there is a black swan’. After all, that last claim straightforwardly entails the existence of a black swan. We ‘slide through’ the quantifiers, as it were. But the non-domain-inclusioner will insist that this is a completely misguided analogy. We cannot similarly ‘slide through’ to the existence of a plaid kangaroo, because modal claims do not similarly involve two extensional quantifiers. Either modal operators or quantifiers within their scope fail to be straightforward, extensional, existentially committing quantifiers.

This is not a surprising point. The non-domain-inclusioner can block the slide in either of two ways, but the choice she faces is a familiar one. It is between, on the one hand, altogether rejecting the idea that modal operators are quantifiers over worlds, and, on the other, saying that quantifiers do not work quite the same way within their scope as they do outside it. That is, the non-domain-inclusioner’s choice is between saying that there aren’t really any other possible worlds, and saying that although other possible worlds do exist, not all of the things that ‘exist in’ them do. These two options clearly map onto the main standard actualist positions. If she chooses to claim that there are no other possible worlds, she will join with the modalist or fictionalist in claiming that the modal operators should not exactly be understood as quantifiers over them. Alternatively, she can join with the ersatzist and claim that although the modal operators really are quantifiers over actually existing worlds, not everything that those worlds represent as existing in fact exists.

12 That is, the domain inclusion/non-domain-inclusion distinction crosscuts the proxy/nonproxy distinction, even though there are obvious natural pairings.
The ersatzist line is particularly familiar. The ersatzist will insist that there is a crucial distinction between existing in or according to a world, and being a literal constituent of a world. That is, the ersatzist will distinguish between worlds as actually existing representational devices, and as the possibilities thus represented (c.f. Stalnaker 1986, 129). Thus his method of denying domain inclusion basically amounts to the claim that while actualism requires that everything that is a literal constituent of any world—everything that does the representing—actually exist, it does not require that everything that exists according to any world actually exist. So this presumably sounds fairly familiar. Indeed, if all you have read on this topic is Lewis, you could be forgiven for thinking that actualists themselves have always been perfectly clear that they reject the domain inclusion interpretation of the slogan. Not so, as I shall argue in a moment.

It is important to see that the non-domain-inclusion actualist’s central claim is the same regardless of whether she goes ersatzist or rejects the idea that the modal operators are quantifiers over worlds. Her central claim is that the (nonactual members of the) domains of other possible worlds do not exist. They only could exist. And possibly existing is not like happily existing—nor like existing in a liquid form, nor like existing in the Brazilian rainforest. Possibly existing is not a way of existing. Things that only possibly exist do not exist at all. That is how the non-domain-inclusion actualist simultaneously makes room for the slogan and gets to claim that there could be talking donkeys and plaid kangaroos. Properly understood, the slogan does not entail the Barcan formula, and there is no conflict between it and the aliens intuition. There could be something distinct from all actual things, even though everything, really everything, that exists is actual.

Of course, we cannot directly refer to or speak de re about anything that does not actually exist. We can talk about the fact that plaid kangaroos might have existed, and we can provide

13 Compare Divers: “It is crucial to emphasize that the generic AR [‘actualist realist’, or ersatzist] representation operator ‘At x’ is to be understood, in general, as a nonfactive operator. This point is crucial to the distinction between realism about possible worlds and realism about possible individuals. That distinction, in turn, is crucial since AR is committed to the former, but not the latter” (2002, 170).
qualitative descriptions of plaid kangaroos that could be satisfied, but we cannot single out any particular possible plaid kangaroo nonqualitatively. There is no individual plaid kangaroo literally contained within the domain of another world. There are no genuinely singular propositions about particular possible plaid kangaroos, and no actually true de re modal claims about them. But it is true de dicto that there could be plaid kangaroos, and that is possibility enough.

I would like to be able to precisify this first axis of actualism by providing formal characterizations of both interpretations of the slogan. I would like to be able to lay out the contrast between domain inclusion and non-domain-inclusion actualism in nice, clean, logical notation. Unfortunately, life is not that easy; it cannot quite be done. But the very fact that I cannot just write down two clear strings of symbols is crucially important; more on this in section 5.

4. That Domain Inclusion is Widely Assumed

So does anyone really characterize actualism in terms of domain inclusion? Yes. My attempt to work out how to capture the slogan has not been a mere intellectual exercise. One apparently easy target here is Alvin Plantinga, who simply says as much: “the domain of any possible world W, from the actualist perspective, is a subset of [the domain of] α” (1976, 155). But it is unfair to take this quote out of context; it oversimplifies his view. David Armstrong

14 It might look as though anyone who accepts the sort of proxies I described above must ipso facto believe in domain inclusion. But that is not really true; there are other motivations for postulating proxies that muddy the waters here. The main one is an argument based on the truth-conditions of negative existentials at other worlds. Both Plantinga (1983) and Williamson (2001) rely heavily on this argument. See note 21 and my forthcoming for a bit more discussion.

15 Parsing Plantinga’s position on domain inclusion actualism is tricky, because his terminology is not standard. He uses ‘domain of a world w’ to refer to the set of essences that exist in w (that would exist if w were actual), and uses ‘essential domain of w’ to refer to the set of essences exemplified there (…). While he thinks that what he calls the domain of every world is a subset of the domain of @, he does not think that the essential domain of each world is a subset of the essential domain of @. That is, he thinks that which essences are exemplified varies from world to world, but which essences exist do not. And he does not think that nonactual possible objects themselves actually exist; only their essences do.

So Plantinga is a domain inclusion actualist, when ‘domain’ is understood his way. But it is really his notion of the essential domain that plays the role of what other philosophers mean by ‘domain’, and what the word
more clearly accepts domain inclusion actualism, at least for universals. He devotes an entire chapter of *A Combinatorial Theory of Possibility* (1989) to issues arising from “expanding and contracting the world,” defending the view that alien universals are not possible. He takes this to be straightforwardly required by his actualism (see esp. 54-55). I shall have more to say about this in the second half of the paper.

Timothy Williamson, too, takes actualism to require domain inclusion, though he does not himself claim to accept it. This is particularly clear in his discussion (2002) of the form of actualism that Christopher Peacocke presents in *Being Known* (1999). Williamson claims that the fact that Peacocke thinks that every admissible assignment—basically, every ersatz possible world—actually exists requires that Peacocke also think that “the objects in its constituent domain actually exist too (what would his actualism amount to otherwise?)” (2002, 651). This is a clear statement that Williamson takes actualism to require domain inclusion. Indeed, he says that “it is much harder than *Being Known* suggests for anything like its approach to avoid commitment to the Barcan formula and its contentious implications” (652), and suggests that the only way for an actualist to avoid that commitment is to reject possible worlds semantics altogether. Unfortunately, Peacocke seems to have been convinced by Williamson on this point (2002a, b), despite having initially said explicitly that actualism does not entail domain inclusion (1999, 153).

So why does anyone think this? There is one by-no-means-crazy reason for thinking that actualism is domain inclusion, which presumably lies in the background of Williamson’s

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16 His view about individuals is different; he permits alien individuals because they can be reached ‘by analogy’ (1989, 57-61).
criticism of Peacocke, and Peacocke’s apparent conversion. The reason is this: domain inclusion is simply what you get when you take actualism to be characterized by the slogan, and take the slogan to be interpreted by means of Kripke’s varying domain modal semantics. ‘Everything is actual,’ given a standard Kripke semantic interpretation, does entail domain inclusion.

No one else puts the point quite that way, and the fact that that is indeed the right way to put it will not become fully clear until the next section. But the general idea does motivate others, as can be seen in an increasingly widespread complaint about Kripke semantics—namely, that it is possibilist. Plantinga (1976, 154; see also Jager 1982), Linsky and Zalta (1994, 439-440), Williamson (1998, 263) and Peacocke (2002a, 487-488) all levy this charge.

Recall that Kripke-models are sextuples of the form <W, @, R, D, V, Q>, where w is a set of worlds, @ the actual world of the model, R the accessibility relation between worlds (optional in S5), D a set of individuals, Q a function that assigns subsets of D to members of W—yielding, for each world w, its domain D(w)—and V a function that assigns members of D to the extensions of predicates at worlds. Kripke’s innovation was the addition of the function Q. That is what allows different subsets of D to be assigned to different worlds, and therefore enabled him to produce countermodels to the Barcan formula and its converse. That, of course, is the advantage of varying domain semantics over its fixed domain predecessors (which Linsky and Zalta are hoping to revive (1994, 1996)). It can accommodate the possibility of aliens, because it allows the domains of other worlds to contain things that are not in the domain of the actual world—barring, of course, the additional stipulation that D=D(@).

And that, according to its critics, is precisely the problem. Because the domain of each possible world is a subset of the domain of D, the possibility of aliens means that D contains things that are not in D(@). And that, they claim, means that there are things that do not actually exist—it means that there are mere possibilia. Thus Kripke semantics is taken to directly contradict actualism unless it is further stipulated—as Plantinga does (1976)—that D=D(@).

17 Williamson’s argument is a bit more complicated than the others; see also 270n10.
But this is not quite right, and seeing that it is not quite right is crucial to understanding non-domain-inclusion actualism. The fact that Kripke semantics allows the domains of other worlds to contain things not in the domain of the actual world does not make it possibilist. There is room for actualism, the possibility of aliens, and—mostly—Kripke semantics. We just need to be a bit more creative in thinking about how to accommodate the slogan. Let me explain.

5. Interlude: Actualism and Kripke Semantics

Those who accuse Kripke semantics of possibilism are unquestionably on to something. No actualist can take their Kripke semantics straight up; any actualist who wants to make room for the genuine possibility of aliens will need to issue some sort of modification or caveat. To see this, look again at the slogan “everything is actual” understood with a non-world-restricted quantifier. The prima facie problem is that no one who accepts the slogan can say all three of the following:

a) some D(w) contains things that are not contained in D(@),

b) each D(w) is a subset of D,\(^{18}\) and

c) the universal quantifier in the slogan ranges over D.

Crucially, though, the non-domain-inclusioner has options here that the domain inclusioner does not seem to see. After all, we already know that the non-domain-inclusioner has to say that the ‘everything’ invoked in the slogan isn’t the totality of what exists in all the possible worlds. It is much less than that; things that merely exist in other possible worlds do not exist at all. What follows, then, just repeats in different terms the moves that need to be made to distinguish the two forms of actualism in the first place.

The non-domain-inclusioner’s first option is to deny b). On this line, she would interpret D as a set of actually existing things (objects, properties, representational devices like sentences, \(\ldots\))

\(^{18}\) Note that this leaves open whether D is the union of the D(w)s—that is, whether D has members that are not contained in any D(w). For my purposes, nothing turns on whether floaters (things that exist but do not exist in any world) or straddlers (things that partly exist in several worlds, but wholly in none) are possible.
etc), and take her unrestricted quantifier ‘everything’ to range over it—but deny that the various D(w)s are subsets of it. The things that ‘exist in’ the various possible worlds are the things that exist according to those worlds. They are therefore not subsets of the set of devices that do the representing. They are related to D by some relation more complicated than the subset relation. Taking this approach requires complicating the formal semantics by adding some sort of representation function from D onto D(w). It also requires being comfortable with the thought that all the various D(w)s are sets of nonexistent things. It does, however, preserve the idea that the ‘everything’ in the slogan has the standard semantics of the so-called ‘possibilist’ quantifier (see Hughes and Cresswell 1996, 303).

Second, the non-domain-inclusioner could deny c). On this line, she would interpret D as the set of things that any world represents as existing, claim that the various D(w)s are indeed straightforward subsets of it—and instead deny that the ‘everything’ in the slogan ranges over it. The ‘everything’ in the slogan ranges over the set of actually existing representational devices rather than D. (Note that a universal quantifier that does range over D as this approach interprets it would be a possibilist quantifier indeed! Here D itself is a set of nonexistent things.) At this point, she faces a further choice. If she wants, she can complicate the semantics by adding an additional set D’, over which the unrestricted universal quantifier is defined. However, denying c) that way is really just a notational variant of denying b). After all, this new set D’ is related to the various D(w)s just as D was on the previous option—by some sort of representational function.

The alternative way for the non-domain-inclusioner to deny c)—which strikes me as the most promising option—is to simply say that the slogan ‘everything is actual’ arises in some sense before the formal semantics. It is not stated in the same language as claims like ‘there is a world in which there is a plaid kangaroo’; indeed, the formal semantics assign it no truth conditions unless enriched with D’. It is instead some sort of presemantic constraint. The idea is that the non-domain-inclusion actualist says ‘everything is actual’ and only afterwards gets down to the business of sorting out her modal semantics. This of course requires saying that the slogan
requires special treatment. But that should not worry us; it is not in any way surprising or strange. After all, a modal realist needs to give similarly special treatment to claims about the existence of possible worlds (Divers 1999; 2002, 47-50). Arguably, any view about modality will have to say that claims about the very machinery of the view need to be treated differently from ordinary modal claims.

So there are several ways the non-domain-inclusion actualist can tweak the standard Kripke semantics to suit her purposes. Where exactly she chooses to fiddle is, I think, largely a matter of bookkeeping. What matters for my purposes are the following two closely related points.

First, if the actualist slogan ‘everything, really everything, is actual’ is interpreted by means of straightforward, unmodified Kripke semantics, it comes out as domain inclusion. It comes out, that is, as $D=D(\@)$. That is the only understanding that unmodified Kripke semantics permits. To put the very same point is a different way, Kripke semantics interprets the slogan as equivalent to ‘necessarily, everything is actual’. It leaves no room to distinguish between ‘absolutely everything exists in $\@$’ and ‘in every world $w$, everything that exists in $w$ also exists in the actual world $\@$’. That, however, is precisely the difference between domain and non-domain inclusion actualism. This is why the two forms of actualism cannot be given distinct formalizations within unmodified Kripke semantics.

Second, the conflict I have been discussing is not, as suggested by Plantinga, Linsky and Zalta, Williamson, and Peacocke (see cites p. xx) directly between Kripke semantics, the possibility of aliens, and actualism. Rather, it is between the possibility of aliens and the way the actualist slogan comes out when interpreted within unmodified Kripke semantics. The fact that people take these to be the same, and indeed characterize the conflict the first way, shows that they take the way the actualist slogan comes out when interpreted within unmodified Kripke

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19 The truth of ‘there are lots of possible worlds’ requires that the existential quantifier not be world-restricted, because there is no world in which there are lots of possible worlds! But then ‘it is necessary that there are lots of possible worlds’ has to be given a nonstandard interpretation. Thanks to Dan Marshall for discussion of related issues here.
semantics to just be actualism. That is, it shows that they take actualism to require domain inclusion.

But of course it does not require domain inclusion. The right response to the conflict is to recognize that actualism should not be identified with the Kripke semantic interpretation of the slogan. It should instead be understood in non-domain-inclusion terms. The actualist slogan should not be taken as equivalent to ‘necessarily, everything is actual’, but should be taken to be compatible with the falsity of that claim—and hence with the possibility of genuine aliens. This non-domain-inclusion understanding, however, cannot be stated within Kripke semantics. Either the semantics must be modified by the addition of a representation function, or else we must accept that the slogan is a piece of presemantic stage direction. In short, the very existence of non-domain-inclusion actualism turns on making one of the moves that the alleged conflict between actualism and Kripke semantics turns on ignoring. Indeed, I suspect that the fact that people do not see these moves helps account for the increasingly popular thought that actualism requires domain inclusion.

So actualism is a delicate matter; actualists need to be careful with their sloganeering. But as long as the semantics is finessed in one of the relevant ways, it becomes possible to characterize actualism without levying the domain inclusion requirement. The non-domain-inclusion actualist does think that genuine aliens are possible. She just thinks that it is a mistake to think of them as particular things that literally are part of other worlds, and does not think that any de re claims about them can be made. Nonactual things must be represented as existing in other worlds by other things that do actually exist. The natural candidates to do the representing are qualitative descriptive sentences or propositions of the sort familiar from discussions of linguistic ersatzism and the like. On her view, then, there is no deep worry about the possibility of aliens, about the fact that different worlds have different domains.

I owe the phrase to Laura Schroeter.
6. The Second Axis

I have thus far focused on questions about the status of possible existents, and about whether they are to somehow be counted in the ‘everything’ that all actualists insist actually exists. But there is a further question; there is a further choice point along which actualists can divide. Is actualism merely true, or is it fixedly true? That is, should we say that the slogan is true regardless of which world is actual? Or should we only say that it is true given that this world @ is the actual world? To only endorse the weaker claim is to say that although as matters actually stand, everything actually exists, that would not be the case had some other world been actual. Had some other world been actual, not everything would have actually existed; there would be things that do not exist in what would then be the actual world.

It is important to see that the choice here is orthogonal to the first axis of actualism; it is completely neutral on the domain inclusion question. The same issue arises for both the domain and the non-domain-inclusion actualist. The domain inclusioner needs to decide whether he just wants to say that the domain of each world is included within the domain of @, or whether he wants to endorse the stronger claim that, for any choice of actual world, the domain of each world is included within the domain of the actual world. The non-domain-inclusioner needs to similarly decide whether she just wants to say that everything that really exists—not, of course, everything that is merely represented as existing by some world—exists in @, or whether she wants to endorse the stronger claim that, for any choice of actual world, everything that really exists exists in the actual world.

Indeed, the very same question arises even for the nonstarter interpretation of the slogan, discussed in section 2, that takes the ‘everything’ to be a mere world-restricted quantifier. In that case, however, there is no further open question about whether the fixed version of the slogan is true. As I have already argued, the fixed truth of the restricted-quantifier reading of the slogan is a trivial consequence of the interaction of the world-restricted quantifier and the ‘actuality’ operator. So the fixed version of the restricted-quantifier slogan is not very interesting, but it does stand to the equally uninteresting restricted-quantifier slogan in the same way as the fixed
versions of domain inclusion and non-domain-inclusion stand to their nonfixed cousins. The
texts of the slogan come in pairs.

They come in pairs, and the same choice arises in each case. This really is a second axis
of actualism; the decision must be made regardless of where one stands on the domain inclusion
question. The choice, for everyone, is between two doctrines that I shall call @-ism and w-ism:

w-ism: the thesis of actualism, whatever it is, is true whichever world w is actual.

@-ism: the thesis of actualism, whatever it is, is true given that this world @ is the actual
world.

Domain inclusion plus w-ism yields fixed domain inclusion; non-domain-inclusion plus w-ism
yields fixed non-domain-inclusion. The question, then, is this. Is actualism fixedly true—i.e.
deeper necessary? Or does its truth hang on the fact that this world is the actual world? To say
yes to the former question is to adopt w-ism; to say yes to the latter is to adopt @-ism. @-ism is
the view that actualism is deeply contingent.

No one takes on this issue directly. Most people—but not all—who discuss anything in
the neighborhood implicitly assume that w-ism is true. At the end of the day, I think that they
are right; w-ism is true. But I nonetheless want to give the issue some explicit attention, and to
elevate w-ism beyond mere assumption. After all, there are some rather interesting arguments in
favor of @-ism. In section 7, then, I explore the benefits of @-ism before laying it to rest in
section 8.

7. The World-Hopping Actualist

The heart of the motivation for @-ism is the fact that it does better justice than w-ism to
the intuition that this world is genuinely special. After all, an actualist presumably should not
think that all worlds are precisely on a par. She should not think that actuality is a world-relative
property that each world has relative to itself and no world has relative to any other. Rather, she
should say that this world—the actual world, the only world that exists—genuinely stands out.
Looked at from this point of view, w-ism sounds like the odd result of combining actualist
inclinations with a view of actuality inherited from David Lewis. W-ism treats every world equally, while @-ism accords one world—the actual actual world, as we might say—a very privileged position. (See Lewis 1970, 1986; Adams 1974; Hazen 1979; and Salmon 1987 for discussion of various notions of actuality.)

Now, there are real questions here about whether a position that privileged is defensible, intuitive though it seems. I shall take up those questions shortly. But if it is defensible, we get some convenient results. In particular, @-ism provides an interesting escape route from a cluster of arguments that I call ‘out and back world-hopping’ arguments. These arguments come in a variety of subtly different flavors, relying on different assumptions, and aiming at slightly different conclusions. Consider the following simple version, cast as an argument directly against domain inclusion actualism.

Most things exist only contingently. While unfortunate in some cases, this is rather pleasing to think about in others. So, pick someone you could do without—Michael Flatley the Irish clog dancer, or Zamfir the pan flutist, say. Zamfir might not have existed. So there is a world in which he does not exist; there is a world that is contracted from the point of view of @. But—and this is the ‘world-hopping’ step—from the point of view of w, @ is an expanded world. It contains something not in the domain of w. The thought, in short, is that countenancing contracted worlds requires countenancing expanded ones. Since we surely want to do the former, we have to do the latter—which means that domain inclusion actualism is false.

That particular argument is very domain inclusion-y, but can easily be made less so, simply by moving away from talk of expansion and contraction to talk of what is possible de re from the perspective of different worlds. Consider again the world w in which Zamfir does not exist. @ is not only expanded relative to w in the sense that @ qualitatively represents the existence of someone that w does not represent as existing; it is expanded relative to w in the sense that it contains a particular individual that w does not contain. That is, it at least looks like Zamfir is possible de re in w. It is not merely true there that it is possible for there to be a Georgian man whose new age music is often played in elevators, and so forth and so on; it looks
to be true that it is possible for Zamfir himself to exist. So the thought in this version of the argument is that admitting that some things exist only contingently would require claiming that there are worlds in which there are *de re* possibilities about things that do not exist in them. And, the story again continues, since we surely want to do the former, we have to do the latter—which means that non-domain-inclusion actualism is false.

World-hopping arguments like these—sometimes domain inclusion-y, sometimes not, sometimes spun as an argument against actualism, sometimes spun as an argument for the possibility of aliens, etc.—are either given or discussed by Adams (1981, 28-32), Lewis (1986, 159; forthcoming), van Inwagen (1986, 200-201), Armstrong (1989, 56-63), and Fitch (1996, 63-65). And when actualists of various stripes consider arguments like these, they almost to a man deny that @ is possible relative to w. They deny that accessibility is symmetric, and move away from S5 to either S4 or T. They claim, that is, that once you hop over to w, you cannot get back to @. They therefore claim that the contingent existence of actual things does not entail the otherworldly *de re* possibility of aliens. Armstrong (1989) and Fitch (1996) make this move, and Adams is also committed to denying S4 (1981, esp. 28-33), though he is a bit less than clear that doing so is a key component of his strategy.

Notice, though, that it is not obvious that this is the intuitive thing to say. There is certainly *something* to the thought—crucial to the world-hopping arguments—that in w, it is possible for Zamfir to exist. But this is what the strategy in question denies. The point of

21 Not to mention Plantinga and Williamson. World-hopping arguments are related to, but importantly different from, an argument of Plantinga’s for the claim that his individual essences can exist uninstatiated (esp. 1981)—an argument that has been recently revived by Williamson as an argument for the claim that everything necessarily exists (2001). I shall not discuss the Plantinga/Williamson argument here, except to note the ways in which it is importantly different. It rests on controversial claims about negative existentials, and does not rely on any version of actualism—@-ist or w-ist, domain inclusion-ish or not. (See Adams 1981 and, especially, Fine 1985 for criticism of the argument; see Plantinga 1985 and Williamson 2001 for replies.)

22 In Armstrong’s case, the move is motivated only by concerns about contracting the number of universals. He does not in fact prohibit alien individuals, and thus does not face this issue for them. See 1989, 62, for his move to S4, and see 1989, 57-61 for his case for alien individuals.

23 Adams misleadingly describes the move to S4 as an alternative to his approach (1981, 31). But if I understand his approach correctly, moving to S4 is only an alternative to his approach in the sense that it involves less. His own approach also involves redefining the modal operators.
moving away from S5 is to claim that @ is not accessible from w, which means that Zamfir is not possible in w—and, indeed, that in w he necessarily does not exist. But how can Zamfir’s nonexistence be necessary in w, when he actually exists? One wants to say—“he’s right there, after all! How can he not be at least possible everywhere?” Fitch bites the bullet and accepts that Zamfir’s nonexistence is necessary in w; Armstrong never directly addresses the issue. Adams, however, discusses it at length, and takes a different line. He manages to deny Zamfir’s necessary nonexistence in w by means of a complex series of maneuvers that culminate in the rejection of the interdefinability of the modal operators. In the end, he claims that although Zamfir’s existence is not possible in w, his nonexistence is not necessary. In sum, one response to the world-hopping arguments is to a) deny that accessibility is symmetric, and either b) accept that in w, Zamfir necessarily does not exist, or else c) adopt an Adams-like account that somehow renders his nonexistence contingent without making his existence possible.

But there is an alternate response available—namely, to deny w-ism instead. For the above arguments to pose any kind of threat to actualism, it has to be assumed that actualists should care about the fact that the actually existing Zamfir is an alien as far as the merely possible world w is concerned. But only a w-ist cares about that. An @-ist, who says that actualism is true, but not fixedly true, will not fret that the actualist slogan fails at some other merely possible world. A domain-inclusioner who denies that his version of the slogan is fixedly true can say that the slogan would be false at w, were w actual—that the domain of @ contains a thing not in the domain of w. And a non-domain-inclusioner who denies that her version of the slogan is fixedly true can say that the slogan would be false at w, were w actual—that not only does @ represent the existence of something that does not exist in w, but that that thing really exists. In either case, the claim is that not everything exists in w. The @-ist can perfectly well

24 Adams claims that singular modal propositions can only be true in a world if the particular thing it is about exists in that world. In worlds in which the thing does not exist, all positive singular modal propositions about it are false. (By ‘positive’, I mean ‘without a negation sign in front’.) So Adams claims that both ‘possibly, Zamfir exists’ and ‘possibly, Zamfir does not exist’ are false in w—and that their negations are true. He thus says that both ‘possibly, Zamfir exists’ and ‘necessarily, Zamfir does not exist’ are false at w. He then draws a Prior-like distinction between the ‘strong possibility’ operator ◊ and the ‘weak possibility operator’ ~®~ (1981, 29-32).
say that \( w \) can access @, and can say that ‘possibly, Zamfir exists’ is both true and genuinely de re in \( w \). There is a world accessible from \( w \) in which he does exist—namely, @.

The fact that this option is available can also be seen in a version of the argument that Lewis gives. He concludes his version by drawing an analogy between \( w \) and @. He says that if expanded worlds are accessible from \( w \), then there must be expanded worlds accessible from @ as well. After all, he says, worlds relative to which there are no expanded worlds would be special, “and we have no reason to believe that we live in one of them” (1986, 159). But this just brings the @-ist option to the fore. An @-ist can deny the analogy, and will say that the actual world is special in the relevant way. Armstrong at one point seems to\(^{25} \) take this line, saying that he is an “actual-world chauvinist” and that the contents of the actual world—the actual actual world, @—set a limit on what is possible.

Interestingly, Lewis himself was apparently convinced on this point. In “Ramseyan Humility” (forthcoming), he says that his initial version of the world-hopping argument has no force for actualists, who “do think that our world is special” (ms10). Perhaps Lewis began to think that actualists should be @-ists. If so, he may not be alone; Richard Cartwright, too, defends a quite @-istly flavored view (1998), though his version emerges in a somewhat different context, and I have therefore relegated it to a footnote.\(^{26} \)

The appeal to authority is entirely by the way, of course. The real point is just that

\(^{25} \) It is not entirely clear that Armstrong endorses @-ism. This is largely because he does deny S5 in order to avoid the problem above (1989, 62), but would have no need to if he really were an @-ist.

\(^{26} \) Cartwright is discussing negative existentials, not the ‘possible existentials’ that generate the world-hopping arguments I am primarily discussing. And while actualism itself is not on the table, a doctrine that has come to be known as ‘serious actualism’ is. Serious actualism is the view that things cannot have properties, and singular propositions cannot have truth-values, in worlds in which they do not exist. Cartwright seems to suggest that serious actualism is true of nonactual things but false of actual ones. That is, he suggests that although singular propositions about nonactual things cannot have truth-values in worlds in which they do not exist, singular propositions about actual things can. Here, there are no singular propositions about the current socialist governor of Massachusetts, and claims ‘about her’ have no truth-value. In worlds in which Zamfir does not exist, there are also no singular propositions about him, but ‘Zamfir is a dancer’ is nonetheless false. (1998, 76-78).

So while Cartwright thinks that no nonactual singular propositions can have truth-values in worlds in which they do not exist, he denies the more general claim that no singular propositions can have truth-values in worlds in which they do not exist. His view, like @-ism, turns on a strikingly privileged treatment of the actual world. (For treatments of otherworldly negative existentials that do not require giving up serious actualism, see especially Fine 1985 and Adams 1981.)
rejecting $w$-ism in favor of $@$-ism leaves the out and back world-hopping arguments with no teeth. Rejecting $w$-ism leaves room for the domain inclusioner to say that there are no worlds that are expanded relative to $@$ without sliding into the more general claim that there are no worlds that are expanded relative to any world. It therefore leaves room for him to say that $@$ is the biggest world, rather than having to say that every world has the same domain—or at least the same domain of proxies, as I defined them earlier. And rejecting $w$-ism leaves room for the non-domain-inclusioner to say that there are no de re possibilities or necessities about nonactuals without sliding into the more general claim that there are no de re possibilities or necessities about things in worlds in which they do not exist.

8. Against $@$-ism

At the end of the day, however, $@$-ism is not tenable. Although it captures the intuition that our world has a genuine, absolute advantage over other worlds, it does so at too high a cost. I will now consider four problems that $@$-ism faces. Although the first two are not particularly compelling, the second two are fatal.

Here is the first not-very-compelling worry. If actuality is a genuinely special property of our world, as $@$-ism requires, then how can I know that I’m actual? Mightn’t I be a merely possible person, inhabiting some merely possible world? (See Lewis 1970, 186; 1986, 93). Here is the response: No. All I can do here is quote Stalnaker, who said it better than I can:

The mistake in this reasoning, I think, is in the assumption that the absolute standpoint is a neutral one, distinct from the view from within any possible world. The problem is avoided when one recognizes that the standpoint of the actual world is the absolute standpoint, and that it is part of the concept of actuality that this should be so. We can grant that fictional characters are as right, from their point of view, to affirm their full-blooded reality as we are to affirm ours. But their point of view is fictional, and so what is right from it makes no difference as far as reality is concerned (1976, 69).
Insofar as the worry about how we know that we are actual has force, it feels question-begging. At any rate, it is hard to see how to settle the matter, and there are more pressing objections to consider.

The second not-very-compelling reason can only be clearly formulated against domain inclusion @-ism—that is, as an argument against someone who wants to claim that the domain inclusion interpretation of the slogan is true but deeply contingent. The worry is that doing so entails that @ is the biggest world. But, continues the objection, surely it’s not actual because it’s the biggest, and equally surely we do not want to say that it’s just lucky that it’s the biggest. As van Inwagen puts it, “should we want to say that our modal ontology works only because of the lucky accident that a very rich world happens to be actual?” (1986, 201). But these questions get the matter backwards. Someone who holds the view in question will think that it is the biggest world because it is actual. The actual contents of the actual world set a limit on what is possible (c.f. Armstrong 1989, 56).

Let us move on to the two more serious objections to @-ism. These are serious indeed—serious enough to conclude that @-ism is well-intentioned but hopeless. The first is quite general; the second is specific to the non-domain-inclusion @-ist.

The first serious objection is that adopting @-ism requires either denying that possibility is the same thing as possible actuality, or else denying that it is really actuality that makes @ special. Consider—if actualism is true at @ because it is actual, then why would it not be true at some other world w if it were actual? There are two possible responses to this question, and neither of them are pretty. On the one hand, the @-ist could deny that it is really @’s actuality that makes actualism true at @. The claim would have to be that it is instead true at @ because of some further special feature @ has, some feature that w lacks and would lack even if it were actual. But doing that amounts to taking the ‘actual’ out of actualism—and I cannot see what the further special feature would be. On the other hand, the @-ist could say that the question is moot because no other world w really could be actual. But if we do that, then we are claiming that other possible worlds are not possibly actual. But surely possibility is the same thing as possible
actuality—if saying that a world is possible does not entail that it is possibly actual, what exactly does its alleged possibility amount to? (See Adams 1970, 221-222).

Now, there of course is a sense in which other worlds aren’t possibly actual—namely, no other world could have been actual when ‘actual’ is meant rigidly. However, that is not the right sense; that is not the split between possibility and possible actuality at issue. It just means that no other world w could have been @. This is true; w could no more be @ than I could be Abraham Lincoln.27 Rather, what is at issue, and in danger of being undermined, is the very intuitive link between possibility and possible actuality in the shifty sense. It is hard to see how to proceed if we reject that link. But if we keep it, we are thrown back to the first horn of the dilemma. There is indeed room to say that other worlds really could be actual—but that had they been actual, actualism would have been false. It just is not very much room, because doing so requires saying that it is some feature of @ other than the fact that it is actual that accounts for the truth of actualism at @.

That is probably problem enough. But the non-domain-inclusion actualist has a second serious objection to @-ism. The problem is that @-ism undercuts the motivation for an otherwise very attractive line about the problem of iterated modalities (McMichael 1983). This well-known problem is basically the same as Lewis’ second problem of descriptive power for linguistic ersatzism (1986, 158),28 and it goes like this. George W. Bush could have had a son who was a bookie, but who—that very guy!—could have been a janitor instead. That looks true, and de re. That is, it looks true, and of the logical form ◊∃x(Bx & ◊Jx). But if it is, non-domain-inclusion actualism cannot account for it. That view cannot account for genuinely de re modal truths about things that do not exist at all. Various other worlds represent George W. Bush as having a son, but there is no particular, individual son literally contained within the domain of

27 Similarly, insofar as it is correct to say that worlds in which water is XYZ are possibly actual but not possible—or to say that worlds in which Julius did not invent the zip are possible but not possibly actual—that is not the interesting and dangerous way to split possibility and possible actuality.

28 More accurately, Lewis’ second problem of descriptive power (for alien individuals) is a special case of McMichael’s problem of iterated modalities.
several of them. Note that the proponent of domain inclusion actualism does not have a problem with iterated modalities—at least, not if he postulates the proxies that he needs in order to accommodate aliens in the first place (see section 3, and forthcoming).

Here’s the attractive line for the non-domain-inclusioner to adopt in response: this is simply not a real problem. There is no need to account for such iterated modal claims in a way that makes them both true and genuinely *de re*, because they simply *aren’t*. There are no *de re* modal claims about things that do not actually exist. There *would* be *de re* modal truths about George W.’s son if he existed, but there aren’t any as matters actually stand. As matters actually stand, that is, it is possible for George W. Bush to have a son who is a bookie, it is possible for him to have a son who is a janitor, and it is possible in general for bookies to instead be janitors—and that is all. In a world in which George W. Bush *does* have a bookie for a son, however, it is possible for that very son to be a janitor. That world contains possibilities *de re* that this world does not; at that world, there are true singular modal propositions that actually neither exist nor are true. For further discussion of this idea, I highly recommend Adams 1981 and Fitch 1996. I shall not do much more to motivate it, except that to say that it does not sound in the least *ad hoc* to me. It sounds right. Indeed, I am increasingly unable to hear the iterated modal claims in the way I am supposed to in order to give the objection any bite at all.29

So let us suppose that it is agreed that this is an attractive line for the non-domain-inclusioner to take. Why and how is it in tension with @-ism? It is in tension with @-ism because @-ism says that there are no true *de re* modal claims about things at worlds at which they do not exist—*unless they exist in @*. That is, @-ism says that there can be *de re* modal claims about things that exist in @ in worlds in which they do not exist. That is the whole point of @-ism; that is why it provides a response to the out and back world-hopping arguments. Actual people like you and I always, in every world, get better treatment. There are *de re* modal claims about us even in worlds in which we do not exist.

29 I agree with Lewis that it is “a haecceitist’s problem”. But unlike Lewis, I have the same view about the version about properties. That is a quidditist’s problem.
But that does not sit comfortably with the attractive line on iterated modalities. That line says that had a different world been actual, different things would have existed, and thus different things would have had *de re* possibilities open to them. George W. Bush’s son becomes available for *de re* claims in other worlds. But @-ism says that I never cease to be available for *de re* claims in other worlds. This is an odd combination. Why should ‘new’ things come to be available if the ‘old’ ones never stop being available? There is of course no flat-out contradiction here; the @-ist can stand her ground if she chooses. But doing so does undercut the motivation for the attractive line on iterated modalities, and makes it look oddly *ad hoc*. The whole point of the attractive line is that what is possible depends upon what is actual—what is *shiftily* actual. But @-ism says that what is possible depends in large part upon what is *rigidly* actual. If the rigidly actual is the real, rock-bottom source of *de re* possibility, what on earth have the shifty actuals got to do with it? Thus it seems odd, at best, to say that what is *de re* possible in a world depends upon what exists in that world—except for *de re* claims about actually actual things.

In fact, the attractive line about iterated modalities can be extended to account for the out-and-back world-hopping cases that were one of the main motivations for @-ism, but the converse is not true. This is because the world-hopping arguments are a special case of the problem of iterated modalities, and not *vice versa*. The problem of iterated modalities arises from apparently true, apparently *de re* modal claims that take us from @ to another possible world $w_1$ to a third possible world $w_2$. The world-hopping arguments arise from apparently true, apparently *de re* modal claims that take us from @ to another possible world $w_1$ and back to @. That is, they are cases of the problem of iterated modalities in which $@ = w_2$. So it is not surprising that the attractive line about iterated modalities can be extended to the world-hopping arguments. The line would be that just as there aren’t any *de re* truths about Bush’s son, but would be if he existed, there are *de re* truths about Zamfir, but if he hadn’t existed there wouldn’t be any. Insofar as claims like “Zamfir might not have existed, but if he hadn’t existed, he might
have existed” are true, they not fully de re either.^[30]

Now, that last is of course precisely the point that the @-ist denies. The @-ist thinks that there indeed are de re claims about actual things in worlds in which they do not exist. The @-ist thinks that it matters that the world-hopping arguments start with something that does actually exist, and the problem of iterated modalities typically starts with modal claims about something that does not actually exist. He thinks that the fact that the world hopping arguments start at @ and return to @ make them crucially different than the problem of iterated modalities. I am not saying anything here that will erase the force of the @-ist intuition that the cases are different. I am simply saying that they are structurally analogous, that the world-hopping arguments can be treated as a special case of the problem of iterated modalities, and that they can be given the same solution. The converse is not true. The w-ist can provide a unified treatment of the cases, and the @-ist cannot. Privileging the actual world @ does nothing at all to deflect the concerns of those who think that there are genuinely de re modal truths about Bush’s merely possible son. And since the @-ist cannot well-motivatedly adopt the w-ist’s attractive line about such cases, he is left with an unanswered question.

Particularly for the non-domain-inclusion-actualist, then, @-ism looks to be a wobbly, unstable position. If actualism is true, it is fixedly true. But I do acknowledge that w-ism can make it hard to see what is so special about either the actual world or actualism. Adams (1974) has a nice discussion of the tension involved in wanting to claim that our actuality is both absolute and contingent. That is, we want to claim that there is more to actuality than the anemic Lewisian notion (1970, 1986), but also to claim that other worlds really could be actual. W-ism gets the latter right and the former wrong; it makes our actuality world-relative and (deeply) contingent. @-ism gets the former right and the latter wrong; it makes our actuality absolute and (deeply) necessary. So I recognize—and think it is important to recognize—that there is

[^30]: That is, if you insist on hearing “Zamfir might not have existed, but if he hadn’t existed, he might have existed” as de re, it is not true. What is true is a de dicto claim in the vicinity: “Zamfir might not have existed, but if he hadn’t existed, a pan flute playing Georgian man… might have existed.”
something to the motivation for @-ism, something that w-ism is not able to capture. Unfortunately, @-ism is not worth the cost. It is not a viable view.

4. The End

There are many ways to interpret the actualist slogan ‘everything is actual’, along two axes. The intrapair choices between the two versions of domain inclusion actualism, and again between the two versions of non-domain-inclusion actualism, turns on one’s views about the viability of @-ism in light of the difficulties just discussed. Those who—like me—want to preserve the link between possibility and possible actuality, and who want to have a unified solution to the problem of iterated modalities, must reject @-ism. The interpair choice between domain inclusion and non-domain-inclusion turns on one’s view about whether, and how, there could be things that do not actually exist. Those who—like me—want to accept the possibility of aliens without postulating proxies must reject domain inclusion. The actualist slogan, then, should be read in w-ist, non-domain-inclusion terms. That is what it means to say that everything is actual, that there are no mere possibilia. That is what means to be an actualist.


