

A note on “Against Relationalism About Modality”

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In [Romero \(2023\)](#), I argued against relationalism —roughly, the general view that the modality of a state is explained by (i) the state being composed of properties, and (ii) these properties being related by a higher-order and primitively modal relation— with four objections. One of those was that, under reasonable assumptions, relationalism’s modal relation \mathcal{M} needs to be what I called an ‘extra order’ relation: a relation that cannot belong to any particular logical order. As extra order relations are not even conceptually possible, I argued, relationalism is implausible.

In particular, I argued that relationalism needs \mathcal{M} to be an ‘extra order’ relation because relationalism needs \mathcal{M} to be what I called an ‘*intra-order*’ relation: a relation that (purportedly) relates relations of different orders. In turn, I argued that \mathcal{M} must be intra-order if relationalism is to account for seemingly obvious truths like:

Nothing could be both an animal and a property. (1)

I called sentences like these ‘order-dissonant predications’, as they involve a relation (in this example, of incompatibility) between properties of different levels: *being an animal* is a first-order property, while *being a (first-order) property* is a second-order property.

So, to sum up, my argument was that, if relationalism is to account for order-dissonant predications, it needs \mathcal{M} to be an intra-order relation, and this in turn requires \mathcal{M} to be an extra-order relation; but extra-order relations are impossible, and therefore relationalism is, at least, implausible.

Then, the bulk of the relevant section of the paper is dedicated to battling possible objections to the this argument: one coming from the thesis that there are modal relations for every order; another from first-orderism, the view that there are no logical orders to begin with, and a final one from *noncumulativism*, the view that order-dissonant predications are meaningless. More explicitly,

Noncumulativism Sentences of the form of ' $R(a_1, \dots, a_n)$ ' are well formed only if the type of each ' a_i ' is j and the type of ' R ' is $j + 1$.

I recently came to notice that the objection could have been posed with much less substantive assumptions. In particular, I recently noticed that order-dissonant predications are not required for the objection; therefore, noncumulativism is not relevant for my argument. Now, it's very nice (for my project) if order-dissonant predications are indeed not needed,¹ as the details of the debate surrounding noncumulativism are very complicated and, in the end (and as I explained in the paper) we may have to recur to a weighing of meta-theoretical vices and virtues — but such anti-climatic conclusions rarely make for very convincing arguments.

As it turns out, the objection can be posed much more directly.

Consider any properties (including relations) P, Q, \dots , each of them of the *same* level o , where o may be finite or infinite. There are going to be modal relations between P, Q, \dots . For example, P is either incompatible or compatible with Q , or P may entail or be entailed by Q , etc. So, \mathcal{M} must be of level (at least) $o + 1$. But given that o could be any level, \mathcal{M} must be extra-order. In this way, no commitment to order dissonant-predications is required for my discussion, and the truth of noncumulativism turns out to be independent from it.

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References

Romero, Carlos. 2023. Against Relationalism About Modality. *Philosophical Studies*, 180(8), 2245–2274.

¹I still stand by what I argued in the paper, it's just that the discussion of noncumulativism is no longer needed.