I will give an ontological argument for modal realism. Of course, not everyone will accept its premises, but for a realist, I believe, the premises have some initial plausibility. In any case, someone who accepts the premises, accepts premises from which modal realism follows. The argument is ontological because it argues for the truth of modal realism from its possibility. So it is similar to the ontological arguments for the existence of God from the mere possibility of God’s existence.

I.

Modal realism, as I use the term, is a theory of truth for modal propositions according to which certain modal propositions are true just in case there are concrete entities that make them true.¹ Such

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1. This use of ‘realism’ is not wholly idiosyncratic. That a realist theory of truth (the so-called correspondence theory of truth) is typically thought of as one in which true propositions are true in virtue of concrete entities is illustrated by the fact that in the first edition of *Theory of Knowledge*, Roderick Chisholm is unhappy with his correspondence theory of truth because it relies on abstract states of affairs. “An account of truth”, he writes, “that spoke only of concrete individual things, if it were otherwise adequate, would be preferable to the one we have given,” namely one according to which propositions are true just in case they correspond to existing states of affairs (Chisholm, 1966, p. 103f.).

Some features that, I believe, are necessary of concrete entities are:
truth-making concrete entities are called ‘truth-makers’ (Mulligan, 1984). To show that modal realism is true it is sufficient to show

(MR) There is a proposition, p, such that $\neg p$ is false and there are truth-makers for $\neg \diamondsuit p$.

MR is also a necessary condition for modal realism because a modal realism according to which $\neg \diamondsuit p$ has truth-makers only where $\neg p$ is true would be a spurious and, I think, uncontroversial one. Contro­versy emerges when we take a false proposition, embed it in a modal context that yields a true proposition, and claim that the resulting modal proposition has truth-makers.

A few remarks on truth-makers are in order. Truth-makers will always be concrete, particular entities. Physical objects, bundles or mereological sums of physical objects, events, states, and conditions will all be regarded as types of concrete entities that can make propositions true. For example, that snow is white is made true by physical objects (snowflakes and accumulations of snowflakes) that have certain states and are involved in certain processes (their physical structure and how they refract light).

I will not discuss how truth-makers are related to propositions. However, it seems plausible to suppose that at least some of these relations will be causal ones. I do not assume that there is an isomorphism between the structure of a truth-bearing proposition and the structure of its truth-makers.

Not all true propositions need to have their own characteristic, individual truth-maker. For example, we don’t need to hold that true conjunctions are made true by conjunctive truth-makers that fuse the truth-makers of each conjunct. All we need is a manifold of truth-

1) concrete entities are individuals in the sense of (Goodman, 1972); 2) they are unique or non-repeatable; and 3) they are located either in space or time, but not necessarily both.

2. “$\neg \diamondsuit$” is to be read as “the proposition that...”. Propositional quantifiers (‘there is a proposition, p’ and ‘for any proposition, p’) bind propositional variables in both use and mention contexts. See (Grover, 1972). Existential quantifiers, particularly in ‘there are truth-makers’, aren’t restricted and cover both actual things and merely possible things (if there are any). ‘Exists’ and its cognates is used in the same manner.

3. The following discussion borrows much from (Mulligan, 1984).