

Here is David Lewis's footnote 3, from p. 7 of *On the Plurality of Worlds* (1986). Some background: Lewis has been talking about 'restricting modifiers', that is, modifiers that can be placed at the beginning of sentences to restrict the scope of the quantifiers they contain. These work for standard geographical space; the restricting modifier 'In Australia' attaches to the sentence 'Some parrots are green' to give the stronger sentence 'In Australia some parrots are green' (stronger in the sense that the second sentence entails the first, but not vice versa). It restricts the domain over which the quantifier must range to Australia. Similarly, some modifiers restrict the possible worlds over which the quantifiers range, e.g. 'at W'. This is what he goes on to say:

This discussion of restricting modifiers enables me to say why I have no use for impossible worlds, on a par with the possible worlds. For comparison, suppose travellers told of a place in this world—a marvellous mountain, far away in the bush—where contradictions are true. Allegedly we have truths of the form 'On the mountain both P and not P'. But if 'on the mountain' is a restricting modifier, which works by limiting domains of implicit and explicit quantification to a certain part of all that there is, then it has no effect on the truth-functional connectives. The order of modifier and connectives makes no difference. So 'On the mountain both P and Q' is equivalent to 'On the mountain P and on the mountain Q'; likewise, 'On the mountain not P' is equivalent to 'Not: On the mountain p'; putting these together, the alleged truth 'On the mountain both P and not P' is equivalent to the overt contradiction 'On the mountain P, and not: on the mountain P'. That is, there is no difference between a contradiction within the scope of the modifier and a plain contradiction that has the modifier within it. So to tell the alleged truth about the marvellous contradictory thing that happen on the mountain is no different from contradicting yourself. But there is on subject matter, however marvellous, about which you can tell the truth by contradicting yourself. Therefore there is no mountain where contradictions are true. An impossible world where contradictions are true would be no better. The alleged truth about its contradictory goings-on would itself be contradictory. At least, that is so if I am right that 'at so-and-so world' is a restricting modifier. Other modifiers are another story. 'According to the Bible' or 'Fred says that' are not restricting modifiers; they do not pass through the truth-functional connectives. 'Fred says that not P' and 'Not: Fred says that P' are independent: both, either, or neither might be true. If worlds were like stories or story-tellers, there would indeed be room for worlds according to which contradictions are true. The sad truth about the prevarications of these worlds would not itself be contradictory. But worlds, as I understand them, are not like stories or story-tellers. They are like this world; and this world is no story, not even a true story.

(NB: a truth functional connective or operator is one in which the truth value of the compound sentence containing the connective or operator is a function of the truth values of the sentences that it contains. For instance 'It is true that' 'Not' and 'or' are all truth functional; 'John believes that' is not (since what he believes is not a function of its truth; he might believe false things).)