

The Metaphysics of Modality

Philosophy 650

Spring 2006

Professor Brandon C. Look

Meeting Place: 110 POT

Meeting Time: Th 4:30-7:00pm

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Course Description:

What is it that allows us meaningfully to employ modal notions such as *necessity*, *possibility*, *impossibility*, and *contingency*? How are we to distinguish (if at all) between the *essential* properties of a thing and its *accidental* properties? In the past several decades, many philosophers have appealed to the Leibnizian notion of a possible world in order to answer these questions. But this move has occasioned another sort of question: what is a possible world anyhow?

This seminar will focus on the metaphysics of modality: that is, the nature of possible worlds, the relationship between individuals and their properties, and the sense in which unactualized possibles can be said to exist.

Our reading will comprise many of the contemporary classics in the field of analytic metaphysics. In some sense, however, the reading could just as well be thought of as falling under the rubric “David Lewis and His Opponents” – in that the seminar will trace the dialectic between David Lewis’ modal realism, actualist realism, and versions of anti-realism.

We shall also devote (at least?) one meeting to modern modal ontological arguments.

Expectations, Requirements, and Grading:

Students are expected to attend all seminar meetings, have read and reflected upon the required readings (indicated by “*” below), and be active participants in discussion.

Each student will be required to write one short “discussion paper” of 4-5 pages in length, in which he or she critiques, analyzes, and/or pulverizes the arguments in the assigned readings. (The assignments will be sorted out on the first day of class.) These papers are to be completed and made available to all members of the seminar by Wednesday afternoon. (These papers will also constitute part of the assigned reading for that day.)

In addition, each student is required to write one seminar paper of approximately 20 pages in length. Due date: Wednesday, 3 May 2006.

Final grades will be based on these components — though the final paper is constitutes the bulk of the grade.

Miscellaneous Policies:

- Except in extraordinary situations, no incompletes will be given.
- Students discovered to have plagiarized will (at a minimum) be failed for the course.

Texts:

Required:

David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986
Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1974

Recommended:

John Divers, *Possible Worlds*, London: Routledge, 2002
Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980
Michael Loux (ed.), *The Possible and the Actual*, Ithaca: Cornell, 1979.

Other than the material from Plantinga and Lewis, everything else will be made available to photocopy. (There are *two* folders in the copy room, each of which contains the reading for the semester. One folder, however, has the material “bookmarked” with Post-It TM notes, so that, if you wish, you can pick and choose what you copy.)

Date Topics/Readings:

“*” denotes required reading that is to (or can) be the subject of student discussion papers.

1/12 *Introduction/Class Mechanics*

Loux (1979), from *The Possible and the Actual*, Introduction
Plantinga (1974), from *The Nature of Necessity*, Chs. 1-3.

1/19 *A First Pass*

Adams (1974), “Theories of Actuality”*
Lewis (1990), “Noneism or Allism?”*
Chisholm (1967), “Identity through Possible Worlds: Some Questions”

1/26 *Actualist Realism I*

Plantinga (1974), from *The Nature of Necessity* (Ch. IV, “Worlds, Books, and Essential Properties”)*
Plantinga (1974), from *The Nature of Necessity* (Ch. V, §§1-2, “The Necessity of Natures”)

2/2 *Actualist Realism II*

Plantinga (1974), from *The Nature of Necessity* (Ch. VI, “Transworld Identity or Worldbound Individuals?”)*
Plantinga (1974), from *The Nature of Necessity* (Ch. VIII, “Possible but Unactual Objects: On What There Isn’t”)
Plantinga (1976), “Actualism and Possible Worlds”*

2/9 *Actualist Realism III*

Stalnaker (1976), “Possible Worlds”*
Adams (1979), “Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity”*
Adams (1981), “Actualism and Thisness”*

2/16 *Modal Realism I*

Lewis (1986), from *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Ch. 1, “A Philosopher’s Paradise,” 1.1-1.4)*

2/23 *Modal Realism II*

Lewis (1986), from *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Ch. 1, “A Philosopher’s Paradise,” 1.5-1.9)*

3/2 *Modal Realism III*

Lewis (1986), from *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Ch. 2, “Paradox in Paradise?”)*

- 3/9 *Modal Realism IV: (On the Attack)*
 Lewis (1986), from *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Ch. 3, “Paradise on the Cheap?”)*
- 3/23 *Modal Realism V*
 Lewis (1986), from *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Ch. 4, “Counterparts or Double Lives?”)*
- 3/30 *Actualist Responses*
 Plantinga (1987), “Two Concepts of Modality: Modal Realism and Modal Reductionism”*
 Van Inwagen (1986), “Two Concepts of Possible Worlds”*
 Stalnaker (1996), “On what Possible Worlds could not Be”
- 4/6 *Combinatorialism (i.e. Realist Anti-Modal Realism?)*
 Armstrong (1989), from *A Combinatorial Theory of Possibility* (Chs. 3-6)*
- 4/13 *Fictionalism*
 Rosen (1990), “Modal Fictionalism”*
 Brock (1993), “Modal Fictionalism: Response to Rosen”
 Rosen (1993), “A Problem for Fictionalism about Possible Worlds?”
 Rosen (1995), “Modal Fictionalism Fixed”
- 4/20 *Further Critique*
 Maudlin (1996), “On the Impossibility of David Lewis’ Modal Realism”*
 Sider (2002), “The Ersatz Pluriverse”*
 Forrest (1986), “Ways Worlds Could Be”
 Forrest-Armstrong (1984), “An Argument Against David Lewis’ Theory of Possible Worlds”
- [4/27 *From Possible Worlds to **the** Necessary Being: Modal Ontological Arguments*
 Malcolm (1960), “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments”*
 Lewis (1970), “Anselm and Actuality”*
 Plantinga (1974), from *The Nature of Necessity* (Ch. X, “God and Necessity”)*
 Van Inwagen (1977), “Ontological Arguments”*
 Adams (1988), “Presumption and the Necessary Existence of God”*
 Sobel (2004), from *Logic and Theism* (Ch. III, “Modern Modal Ontological Arguments”)]