

Alternative Theories of Modality Spring 2014

Faculty: Sam Newlands (snewlands@nd.edu) and Meghan Sullivan (sullivan.meghan@gmail.com)

Time and Location: Mon, 12:30-3:15pm, Malloy 220

Course Description:

For the past sixty years, the most popular approach to understanding necessity and possibility has been in terms of possible worlds. While the possible worlds framework has been very fruitful for framing debates in metaphysics, epistemology and semantics, it has also faced some recalcitrant problems. Some of these problems are technical (i.e. coming up with a consistent, coherent modal logic). Others are ideological (i.e. developing a theory of what these worlds are such that they can perform their myriad roles in metaphysics, semantics, and epistemology).

The possible worlds framework was not always orthodoxy, and even today there are dissenters---lesser-known but nonetheless systematic and compelling approaches to modality that eschew or diminish possible worlds. Our course aims to introduce graduate students to these neglected but vibrant alternatives in both their historical and contemporary forms. Primary topics include: theistic theories of modality, conventionalism and neo-conventionalism, powers-based theories, necessitism, and primitivism.

Course Goals:

- (1) To write clear, interesting, and accurate research papers that approach the standard of professional publications in philosophy.
- (2) To learn to read, understand, and evaluate arguments expressed in modal logic.
- (3) To become more familiar with historical traditions and better equipped to connect historical debates with their contemporary analogues.
- (4) To develop a fluency with alternative theories of modality and to contribute interesting and original research to these ongoing debates.

Procedures and Standards for Evaluation:

Students taking the course for credit will be asked to produce a seminar-length research paper due at the final meeting of the class. Because this is an advanced seminar in metaphysics, we expect the final seminar papers to make an interesting and original contribution to these debates with an eye towards future conference presentation and/or publication. Everyone, including auditors, is expected to do the reading and contribute regularly to our seminar discussion.

Topics and Readings:

The citations are incomplete right now, but all of the readings will eventually be made available in the course's Dropbox folder. The lineup is likely to change depending on class interests. Readings should be done prior to the seminar meeting; come prepared to discuss.

Background to Recent Trends in Modal Metaphysics

Sider, Theodore. "Reductive Theories of Modality." In *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*. Oxford: OUP.

DeRossett, Louis. "Possible Worlds II: Non-Reductive Theories of Possible Worlds." *Philosophy Compass*. Vol. 4, Issue 6. Dec 2009.

Weeks 1: A (Very!) Selective History

Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* II.11-12; *On the Heavens* I.11 [Optional: *Metaphysics* Theta 3-4; *De Interpretatione* 9]

Aquinas, ST I48q2 and I49q2

Leibniz, "On Freedom and Possibility"; "On Contingency"; and "Necessary and Contingent Truths"

Hume - *Treatise* 1.3.14

Ayer – Chapter 4 from *Language, Truth, and Logic*.

Optional secondary:

Adams, Robert Merrihew. "Leibniz's Theories of Contingency," from *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (OUP 1999)

Holden, Thomas. "Hume's Absolute Necessity," *Mind*, forthcoming.

Weeks 2-4: Quine and Neo-Conventionalism

Carnap, TBD

Quine, W.V.O. "Three Grades of Modal Involvement." *The Ways of Paradox*. New York: Random House, 1966.

Quine, W.V.O. "Reference and Modality." *From a Logical Point of View*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.

Sidelle, Alan. Selections from *Necessity, Essence, and Individuation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1989. Chapters 1,2, and 4.

Sider, Theodore. "Modality." *Writing the Book of the World*. Oxford: OUP 2011. 266-291.

Sider, Theodore. Section 4 from "Reductive Theories of Modality." In *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*. Oxford: OUP. 199-205.

Thomasson, Amie. "Identity, Persistence and Modality." from *Ordinary Objects*. OUP 2007.

Week 5: Anti-Essentialism

Della Rocca, Michael. "Essentialism vs Essentialism." Gendler and Hawthorne (eds.), *Imagination, Conceivability, Possibility*, OUP, 2002
Sullivan, Meghan "Anti-Essentialism." DRAFT.
Yablo, Stephen. "Identity, Essence and Indiscernability." *Journal of Philosophy* (1987)

Weeks 6-8: Modal Logic, Necessitism, and Primitivism

Williamson, Timothy. "Bare Possibilia." *Erkenntnis*. 1998. 48: 257-273.
Williamson, Timothy. Selections from *Modal Logic as Metaphysics*. Oxford: OUP 2013.
Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 8.
PPR Symposium Articles
Stalnaker TBD

March 17: No class; begin paper writing prep and discuss proposals with us

Week 9-10: Essences, Powers and Modality

Fine, Kit - "Essence and Modality"
Jacobs, Jonathan - "A powers theory of modality: or, how I learned to stop worrying and reject possible worlds" *Phil Studies*, 2010
Pawl, Timothy - "Nine problems (and even more solutions) for powers accounts of possibility," forthcoming]
Vetter, Barbara - "'Can' without possible worlds: semantics for anti-Humeans" *Philosophers Imprint*, Aug 2013.
Borghini, Andrea and Neil Williams. "[A dispositional theory of possibility](#)"

April 7: No Class...Class will be rescheduled and meet at one of our homes later in the week.

Week 11-12: Theism and Modality

Leftow, Brian- Excerpts from *God and Necessity*. chs. 9,10, 13.
Leftow, Brian- "Aquinas on God and Modal Truth", *The Modern Schoolman* 82 (2005), 171-200
Descartes, excerpts
Leibniz, excerpts
Kant, excerpts

Optional secondary:

Newlands, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility", *Phil Review* 2013
Andrew Chignell, "Kant, Real Possibility, and the Threat of Spinoza" *Mind* 2012