PHIL 2480: Metaphysics

Syllabus

This is all very tentative. I’ve listed many more topics than there are weeks in the semester. I’ve rated each topic as follows:

A: we’ll definitely spend a session on this
B: while we don’t need to spend a session on this, it’s something I’m especially interested in and would like to cover if possible
C: most of these topics will not be covered: which ones we do cover will depend on peoples’ interests and their desires to give presentations.

The order is also pretty flexible. The ‘A’-rated topics would probably be best to do in the stated order; the rest can be slotted in anywhere after their position in this list relative to the ‘A’-topics.

Further readings, and further classification of the relative importance of readings, will be supplied later in the semester.

A. Introduction

Anjelika Kratzer, ‘What “Must” and “Can” Must and Can Mean’
Saul Kripke, ‘Semantical Considerations on Modal Logic’
Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity
Ted Sider, ‘Reducive Theories of Modality’, sections 1-3

A. Modal realism and counterpart theory

David Lewis, On the Plurality of Worlds, 1.1-1.2; 1.5-1.9; 2.8, 3.1, 3.3; 4.1-4.5
David Lewis, ‘Counterpart theory and Quantified Modal Logic’

A. Objections to modal realism and counterpart theory

David Lewis, On the Plurality of Worlds, chapter 2
Optional: Timothy Williamson and Michael Fara, ‘Counterparts and Actuality’

A. Reducing possibilist discourse to ordinary modal discourse

David Lewis, On the Plurality of Worlds, chapter 3
Alvin Plantinga, ‘Actualism and Possible Worlds’
Robert Adams, ‘Thisness and Actuality’
Kit Fine, ‘The Problem of Possibilia’
Optional: Robert Adams, ‘Theories of Actuality’
Optional: Allen Hazen, ‘Expressive Completeness in Modal Language’
Optional: Theodore Sider, ‘The Ersatz Pluriverse’

B. Properties, propositions and non-existent objects

Alvin Plantinga, ‘On Existentialism’
George Bealer, ‘Universals’
Kit Fine, ‘Plantinga on the Reduction of Possibilist Discourse’
Timothy Williamson, ‘Necessary Existents’

A. Conventionalism

A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic (excerpts)
Rudolf Carnap, ‘Meaning Postulates’
Casimir Lewy, Meaning and Modality, chapter 5
Theodore Sider, ‘Reductive Theories of Modality’, section 4.1
Alan D. Sider, Necessity, Essence and Individuality
Stephen Yablo, review of Sider
Optional: W.V. Quine, ‘Truth by Convention’
Optional: Paul Boghossian, ‘Analyticity Reconsidered’

C. Sceptical views about de re modality

W.V. Quine, ‘The Problem of Interpreting Modal Logic’
W.V. Quine, ‘Three Grades of Modal Involvement’
Kit Fine, ‘Quine on Quantifying In’
Kit Fine, ‘The Problem of De Re Modality’
John Burgess, ‘Quinus ab Omni Naevo Vindicatus’

C. Modal fictionalism

Gideon Rosen, ‘Modal Fictionalism’
Gideon Rosen, ‘Modal Fictionalism Fixed’
Daniel Nolan and John O’Leary Hawthorne, ‘Reflexive Fictionalisms’

C. The analysis of nomological necessity

D.M. Armstrong, What is a Law of Nature? (excerpts)
David Lewis, ‘Humean Supervenience Debugged’
John Hawthorne, ‘Causal Structuralism’

B. Essence and modality

Kit Fine, ‘Essence and Modality’
Kit Fine, ‘Senses of Essence’
Optional: Kit Fine, ‘Ontological Dependence’

A. Reducing modal notions using set theory
Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, section 3.2
John Etchemendy, *The Concept of Logical Consequence* (excerpts)
Hartry Field

A. Reducing modal notions using proposition-talk

Theodore Sider, ‘Reductive Theories of Modality’, section 4.2
Theodore Sider, ‘Reducing Modality’ (MS)
*Optional*: Christopher Peacocke, *Being Known*, chapter 3

A. Reducing modal notions without unreduced proposition-talk

C. Non-factualism about modal discourse

Simon Blackburn, ‘Morals and Modals’

C. Metaphysical necessity and the a priori

Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, lectures 1 and 3
David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (excerpts)
George Bealer, ‘The Philosophical Limits of Scientific Essentialism’

C. The epistemology of modality

Stephen Yablo, ‘Does Conceivability imply Possibility?’
Peter van Inwagen, ‘Modal Skepticism’