

What Stuff *Could* Do, Physically and Metaphysically

PHIL 230: Metaphysics

1. Introduction: A Map of Modal Metaphysics

After an introductory lecture, we'll consider Support and Possible World analyses of subjunctive conditionals. The Support theory is associated with Goodman and Chisholm, the Possible Worlds theory with Todd, Stalnaker and Lewis. Among other things, we'll focus on how the notion of a 'law of nature' functions in these analyses.

Reading: Goodman, (1947) "The Problem of Counterfactual Conditionals"

Lewis, (1978) "Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow" And postscripts-- Focus on the similarity metric, not the time stuff; or if you prefer, read the first chapter of *Counterfactuals*.

Extra: Can't beat Bennett's *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals*, chapters 10-20.

Physical Possibility

2. Governing Approaches to Laws of Nature

The "classic" universalist account of laws is due to Tooley, Armstrong and Dretske. Primitivism about laws is associated with Carroll and Maudlin, among others. We'll look at a version of each, plus van Fraassen's criticisms.

Reading: Dretske, F., 1977, "Laws of Nature"
Maudlin, *Metaphysics within Physics*, chapter 2, selections
Van Fraassen, 1989, *Laws and Symmetry*, chapter 5.

3. Humean Approaches to Laws of Nature

"Systems" accounts of laws are due to Mill, Ramsey and Lewis. After reviewing some of the pro's and con's in Beebe, we'll look at two new theories, a systems theory due to Cohen and Callender and a non-systems but Humean theory by Roberts.

Reading: Beebe, "The Non-Governing Conception of Laws of Nature"

Cohen & Callender "A Better Best System Account of Lawhood"

Roberts, *The Law-Governed Universe*, selections

Extra: van Fraassen, *Laws and Symmetry*, chapter 3;

4. Humean Supervenience

At this point we'll zoom out and ask whether the modal (physical, natural?) supervenes upon the non-modal. Humeans say "yes," and non-Humeans say "no." We'll look at recent work.

Reading Hall, "Humean Reductionism"
Loewer, "Humean Supervenience"

Extra: Maudlin, "Why Be Humean?" in *Metaphysics Within Physics*. Earman and Roberts, "Contact with the Nomic"; Callender, "Rotating Disks"; Carroll, "Nailed to Hume's Cross"

5. Special Topics

Let's reserve this class for some fun topics that are connected to the issue of laws of nature, e.g., compositionality of forces.

Reading Lange, "A Tale of Two Vectors"
More to be announced.

Extra: Lange, *Laws and Lawmakers*.

Metaphysical Possibility

6. De Re Modality and Essentialism

During earlier classes I'll assess what kind of background students have on modal topics with respect to Quine, Kripke and Putnam. I'll try to fill in some necessary background. As a placeholder for what's to come...

Reading Quine 1953
Putnam 1973;
Sidelle 1989, chs. 1, 2
Kripke, "Semantical Considerations on Modal Logic"

7. The Pluriverse

David Lewis put forward the wild idea that modal statements are true in virtue of their relationship to a pluriverse of real, concrete, honest-to-goodness worlds. We'll examine the pro's and con's of this theory.

Reading: Lewis, *The Plurality of Worlds*, 1.1-1.3, 1.6-1.9, ch. 2;
Divers and Melia 2002
Shalkowski, S.A. 1994, "The Ontological Ground of the Alethic Modality"

8. Abstract Worlds, Fictions, Ersatzism and Conventionalism

Alternatives to extreme realism about possible worlds abound: fictionalism (Rosen), combinatorialism (Armstrong), ersatzism (see Melia's review), abstract worlds (Plantinga), and more. We'll examine one or two of these theories, but also a forthcoming reductive account, namely, an improved version of conventionalism by Sider.

Reading Heller, tba
Melia, "Ersatz Worlds"
Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*

Extra: tba

Connections?

9. Physical and Metaphysical Possibility

Time to bring the two halves of the course together. What is the relationship between metaphysical and physical possibility?

Reading Leeds, "Physical and Metaphysical Possibility"
Edgington, "Two Notions of Possibility"
Hall (?)

Extra. Tba

10. What is Metaphysics?

In philosophy today, a debate is ranging over the status of metaphysics. Since so much of this, at bottom, is about metaphysical possibility, it's appropriate that we end with a taste of meta-metaphysics.

Reading Hirsch, tba
 Sider, tba
 Chalmers, tba

Extra: Callender, "Philosophy of Science and Metaphysics"
Shalkowski, 'IBE, GMR, and Metaphysical Projects'

Useful Books. Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffmann (eds.), *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, 2010; Melia, *Modality*; Divers, *Possible Worlds*.

Alternative Topic? The Source and Function of Modality

Why do human beings use modal discourse? And what is its source? Here we could examine Blackburn's challenge to any answer to the second question, Divers answer to the first, and much more.

Reading Cameron, 'On the Source of Necessity'
 Blackburn, tba
 Sherat, 'The Reality of Modality'
 Divers, "Modal Commitments"