

Possible Worlds
2 Credits/4 ECTS credits
Philosophy MA/PhD elective
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Possible worlds are often invoked when discussing what's possible, necessary, contingent, impossible or counterfactually the case. We will begin our examination of the notion with a brief survey of the formal semantics for modal logic and the logic of counterfactuals. We will then look at the various debates on the existence and nature of possible worlds and their inhabitants: realism vs anti-realism, actualism vs possibilism, necessitism vs contingentism.

Course requirements: It is essential that you attend the course regularly, prepared to discuss the readings. At the end of the term you will write a paper of 2000 words on a topic you have chosen and discussed with me.

Assessments: The grade for the course will be based on the final paper as well as a draft of the paper due in the 10th week of class.

Learning Outcomes: We aim to develop the following skills: presenting, with a minimum of jargon, the central claims of our philosophers so that it is clear to a thoughtful non-specialist what these claims mean; providing textual evidence that our interpretation is accurate; making explicit the logical structure of the arguments, which includes uncovering implicit principles and assumptions; and finally, evaluating the arguments for cogency and persuasiveness and considering possible responses to objections.

Topics and Readings:

1. Possible worlds semantics: propositional logic
2. Possible worlds semantics: predicate logic
3. Selections from David Lewis, On the Plurality of Worlds
4. Phillip Bricker, "Absolute Actuality and the Plurality of Worlds"
5. Robert Stalnaker, "Possible Worlds"
6. Robert Adams, "Theories of Actuality"
7. Selections from David Armstrong, A Combinatorial Theory of Possibility
8. Gideon Rosen, "Modal Fictionalism" and "Modal Fictionalism Fixed"
9. Timothy Williamson, "Necessary Existents"
10. Karen Bennett, "Two Axes of Actualism" and "'Proxy' Actualism"
11. E.J. Lowe, "Metaphysical Nihilism and the Subtraction Argument"
12. Ross Cameron, "Much ado about nothing: A study of metaphysical nihilism"
13. Selections from Gendler and Hawthorne, Conceivability and Possibility