

‘Modal’ phenomena pertain to what is necessary or possible. On a canonical analysis, modality is explicated in terms of ‘possible worlds’: necessities hold (are true) in all of them, possibilities in some; while ‘mere’ possibility is distinguished from factuality by identifying a unique ‘actual world’, such that what is true in it is exactly what is true ‘full stop’ (we ‘occupy’ it), with any other possible world verifying at least some falsehood. On this analysis, reasoning about modality involves ‘consideration’ of possible worlds; but a contrast in **modal perspective** in such reasoning has been widely recognized since the late 1970s, between considering a world ‘as counterfactual’ (thinking about it ‘from the outside’) and ‘as actual’ (‘from the inside’: pretending we occupy it).

Metaphysics has long invoked the possible-worlds analysis; but (in striking contrast with epistemology) has made scant use of this contrast in modal perspective, with a pervasive tropism toward the consideration of possibilities as-counterfactual. By contrast, our proposed research program will demonstrate that appreciation of the as-actual dimension of modal perspective generates novel (and systematically unified) solutions to a diversity of long-standing metaphysical puzzles. Headway on this research program has already been made in our recent collaborative investigations. Our objective during the granting period will be to round out and extend this initial research to a full treatment of the metaphysical significance of modal perspective. We envisage the project as generating at least one-half dozen singly- or jointly-authored research articles, collectively establishing the foundations for an extended monograph-length development of the perspectivist program.

The puzzles to be addressed exhibit a common tension: for many claims *M* of metaphysics, certain data supports a **stability** thesis (*M* holds, or else fails to hold, in absolutely all possible worlds) while certain other data supports a verdict of **dependence** (*M* somehow varies in truth from world to world as a function of underlying contingent circumstances). With only the as-counterfactual perspective at our disposal, the tension is genuine: if *M* holds (or else fails) in absolutely all worlds as-counterfactual, *M* has (of course) no scope for variation across worlds as-counterfactual. But invoking the as-actual perspective dissipates any tension: fixing a world as-actual, *M* holds (or else fails) in absolutely all worlds as-counterfactual (stability); but varying the as-actual world can vary which of ‘hold’ or ‘fail’ it is (dependence).

To illustrate: ‘Chisholm’s Paradox’ of material artifact origins poses a long-familiar putative tension in intuitive judgement. Suppose a hammer, *H*, is built from an iron head and an oak handle. Intuitively: (*M*) building *H* from a lead head and an elm handle is absolutely (‘metaphysically’) impossible; plausibly, because *M* concerns what is absolutely impossible, its truth is invariant from world to world (stability). And yet, equally intuitively, *H* built from iron+elm (or lead+oak) is possible; and ‘in’ an iron+elm-world, by parity of reason, lead+elm is possible (not-*M*): so *M* does, after all, vary from world to world (dependence). Solution: the putative tension is generated only by a tacit ‘shift’ of perspective mid-stream in our modal reasoning: the intuitive stability of *M* occurs within the as-actual perspective upon *H* built from iron+oak; whereas the ‘parity of reason’ supporting dependence occurs within the scope of an as-actual perspective upon *H*’s origins in iron+elm.

Aspects of the research program cut across several subregions of philosophy. (1) A canvas of the scope of further metaphysical puzzles falling to this strategy, and their detailed analysis: preliminary work suggests a remarkable breadth, covering, among others, puzzles in ontology (and its logic) as well as in metaphysics of science. (2) Matters in philosophy of language including both ‘descriptive semantics’ (the formal analysis of particular linguistic constructions) and ‘metasemantics’ (the articulation and interpretation of a framework within which descriptive semantics is best pursued). (3) A methodology of ‘bounded naturalism’ in metaphysics, in which the limits of possibility are fixed in tandem by contingent, categorical circumstances together with absolute and invariant principles of metaphysical logic. (4) Historical investigation, to account for the surprising neglect of modal perspective in metaphysics, into both the development of specific subliterations and more general tendencies in the analytical tradition.