Philosophy 125 — Day 22: Overview

- 1st Papers/SQ's to be returned today (end of class – last 10 minutes)
  - Mostly in the A–B range, and (by and large) very nicely done!

- Handout on "Accessibility" and Modality posted (some remarks today)

- Vanessa's handout on Realism about propositions posted

- Second papers/S.Q.'s to be assigned next Thursday (to be due at final)

- Colloquium Today: "The Interiority of Mind and the Publicity of Meaning"
  - Barry Smith, Birkbeck School of Philosophy, University of London

- Agenda: Modality (Unit 3)
  - Retro: (i) "Accessibility" | (ii) Using Possible worlds for nominalization
  - Scrutinizing Lewis' Realism about possible worlds
    * Four basic tenets of Lewisian realism about possible worlds
    * Objections to some of the Lewisian tenets
    * Alternative realist/non-realist accounts (Stalnaker/Rosen)
  - Plantinga's Actualism: Its formulation, and some problems

"Accessibility" and Modality — A Precis of my Handout

- In the *formal* possible world semantics (PWS) of modality, we introduce "possible worlds" w ($w*$ distinguished as 'actual') and an "accessibility relation" R between them as *formal devices* for providing an extensional semantical framework to unify and relate the various modal axioms:

  (†) Necessarily $p \mapsto p$ is true at *every* possible world w such that $R(w*, w)$.
       Possibly $p \mapsto p$ is true at *some* possible world w such that $R(w*, w)$.

- Given this translation schema, the universality of various axioms corresponds to simple properties of R. For instance, (4) "If necessarily p, then necessarily necessarily p" corresponds to R being *transitive*. Instead of arguing about the axioms *per se*, we now argue about the nature of the "accessibility" relation R.

- In *formal* PWS, we give *no interpretation* to the w's or R. These only get concrete interpretations in *applications* of PWS to philosophical problems.

- For instance, we can apply PWS in the context of *metaphysical* theories of *physical* or *nomological* necessity. In applications, it can be illuminating.

- Lewis' theory of nomological necessity says p is *nomologically* necessary if p is true in all possible worlds that are nomologically accessible from the actual world. Lewis' theory gives us an *interpretation* of the w's as *concrete mereological wholes*, and $R(w_1, w_2)$ as w_2's *obeying the physical laws of* w_1.

- Lewis' theory of laws says that R is *reflexive* (all worlds obey *their own* laws), but *not* symmetric (and *not* transitive). This is because w_2 can obey the laws of w_1 without w_1 obeying the laws of w_2 (*e.g.*, if w_2 has *more laws* than w_1).

- Since *this R* is *reflexive*, Lewis' theory of *nomological* necessity must obey the axiom (T) which says that if p is necessarily true, then p is actually true.

- Contrast: *logical* necessity obeys *more* axioms than just (T), because the *logical* accessibility relation is symmetric, transitive, and reflexive. *All worlds obey the exact same set of logical laws.* This means that all possible worlds w are logically accessible from all other possible worlds (*whatever* the w's are).

- In the handout, I discuss other applications of PWS (to metaphysics and epistemology) where the interpretation of R is one based on relations of *similarity* between worlds (*e.g.*, Lewis' *counterpart relation*). I argue that any relation based on similarity will be *intransitive*, and thus *violate* axiom (4).

The Possible & The Actual VI: Possible Worlds as a Tool for Nominalization

- Recipe: a property P is just a very large set *of sets of concrete particulars*. In each possible world w, there will be a set $\mathbf{P}_w$ of concrete particulars that are P in w (*i.e.*, P's *extension in w*). The property P is just the big set, which contains all of the smaller sets $\mathbf{P}_w$ as members: $P = \{\mathbf{P}_1, \mathbf{P}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{P}_n, \ldots\}$.

- A proposition p is also just a set, but a set *of possible worlds* (not a set of *of sets of* concrete particulars). Specifically, a proposition p is just the set of *p-ish* possible worlds. Basically, *p*-ish-ness is a *property of entire worlds*. In this sense, Lewis' account of both properties and propositions is unified.

- Note: the set of *p*-ish worlds is *not defined* as the set of worlds in which p is true, since this would not *eliminate* propositions. Lewis takes a world's being *p*-ish as a *primitive* or *ontologically basic* feature of a world, and he uses this primitive aspect to segregate worlds into the *p*-ish and the non-*p*-ish.

- On this account, the actual world $w*$ is [[snow is white]]-ish, and [[George W. Bush is President of the U.S.]]-ish, and these are primitive features of $w*$.

- "Necessarily p" is true iff the set of p-ish worlds has every possible world as a member. And, "Possibly p" is true iff the set of p-ish worlds is nonempty.

- Objection: Lewis's account implies there can be *only one necessary truth* T, since a necessarily true proposition is just *the set of all possible worlds*. But, it seems strange to say that "2 + 2 = 4" expresses *the same proposition as* "4 + 4 = 8." Also, there can be only one necessary falsehood F (the null set).

- Is this objection cogent? *What kind* of necessity is involved here? Plausibly, there is only one *logical* necessity on Lewis' view, but is there only one *arithmetical* necessity? We need p's true in ***all*** possible worlds. But, aren't *such* truths *logically equivalent*? So, why *not* say such truths are identical?

- Since Lewis is not confined to *actual* extensions, he gets the intuitively right answer: having a heart (H) and having a kidney (K) are *distinct properties*.

- To see this, note that, despite the fact that $\mathbf{H}_{w*} = \mathbf{K}_{w*}$, there will (intuitively) be worlds w in which $\mathbf{H}_w \neq \mathbf{K}_w$. So, H and K will be different sets $\therefore H \neq K$.

- Abstract Reference: We want claims like "White is a color" ("W is a C") to be *necessarily true*. Can Lewis' theory of properties accommodate this?

- If C is a *kind of property*, then, for Lewis, it will be a *set of properties*. This, for Lewis, makes C a set of sets of sets of individuals. Picture this as follows:

  Color = {White, Blue, ...} = {{**White**$_{w*}$, **White**$_w$, ...}, {**Blue**$_{w*}$, **Blue**$_w$, ...}, ...}

- So, "White is a color" will come out true, since W is a subset of C. And, presumably, *this* will be true in all possible worlds (set theory is *necessary*!).

- What about "Courage is a virtue"? Does Lewis' modal approach allow us to avoid Loux's '*ceteris paribus* clauses'? S.Q. Moreover, how might Lewis handle Quine's trickier example "These two species are cross-fertile"? S.Q.

- Objection: Lewis' account of properties implies that properties which are exemplified by the same individuals in all possible worlds are *identical*. But, being triangular and being trilateral do *not seem* to be *identical* properties. Again, is this cogent? Is this *logical* necessity? If so, what's the problem?

- Lewis concedes that there are many senses of "property" and "proposition", some of which distinguish properties (propositions) that are coextensional in all possible worlds [*e.g.*, perhaps by appealing to *meaning*]. In *The Plurality of Worlds*, Lewis gives an account of meaning as well, which could do the trick.

The Possible & The Actual VII: Scrutinizing Lewisian Possible Worlds 1

- Lewis' Realism about possible worlds rests on the following four tenets:

  1. Possible worlds *exist*. Other possible worlds are just as real as the actual world. They may not "actually exist," if "actually existing" requires something to exist *in* the actual world, but they do, nevertheless, exist.

  2. Other, non-actual possible worlds are *the same sort of thing* as the actual world: concrete, mereological wholes containing "I and my surroundings". They differ from ours "not in kind, but only in what goes on at them." We call ours 'actual' only because it is the one we happen to inhabit.

  3. The *indexical* analysis of the adjective 'actual' is correct. " 'Actual' is indexical, like 'I' or 'here' or 'now': it depends for its reference on the circumstances of utterance . . . the world where the utterance is located."

  4. Possible worlds cannot be reduced to something more basic. "Possible worlds are what they are and not another thing. It would be a mistake to identify them with some allegedly more respectable entity, *e.g.* a set of sentences of a language" – they're "respectable entities in their own right."

The Possible & The Actual VII: Scrutinizing Lewisian Possible Worlds 2

- Tenet (1) is consistent with thinking of possible worlds as "ways things might have been". But, tenet (2) seems inconsistent with this way of thinking about possible worlds. If possible worlds are ways things might have been, then the actual world should be *the way things are*, not "I and my surroundings".

- That is, we can think of possible worlds as (i) existing, (ii) things that truth is defined relative to, and (iii) things our modal claims quantify over, *without* thinking that they are *concrete* objects (or made up of concrete objects) like the actual world is. [Stalnaker's slogan: "the way the world is ≠ the world"]

- One might *think* that (3) implies (2), by implying that actuality is *world-relative* – that our world is actual relative to itself, but all other possible worlds are actual relative to themselves too, and so there is no "absolute perspective" from which non-relative judgments of actuality can be made.

- But, this reasoning is mistaken. (3) is merely a *semantical* tenet about how to understand indexical *terms*. (2) can have strong *metaphysical* implications.

- If one thinks (as Stalnaker does) of "the actual world" as being synonymous with "reality", then (2) can be false (and it's plausible to think it is), even if (3) is true. One can be a solipsist (one who accepts the *metaphysical* claim that *only they exist*) even if one accepts the indexical *semantics* for "I". Stalnaker:

    "...fictional characters are as right, from their point of view, to affirm their fullblooded reality as we are to affirm ours. But their point of view is fictional, and so what is right from it makes no difference as far as reality is concerned."

- So, one can accept (1) and (3) without accepting (2). One can, in addition, accept (4) without accepting (2). That is, one can take possible worlds as (1) existing things and (4) *ontologically basic* and *ineliminable* from our best theory of the world *without* taking them to be (2) *just like the actual world*.

- Stalnaker's 'moderate realism' says possible worlds are *different kinds of things* than the actual world — *abstract* entities that *represent ways the world might be*. This kind of view (which Lewis calls *ersatzism*) is consistent with accepting (1), (3), and (4), while *rejecting* (2). Plantinga has a similar view.

- The "actualist" views of Stalnaker and Plantinga are still *realist* views.

- van Fraassen (a non-realist) thinks modality is merely verbal (metalinguistic nominalism about possible worlds); he denies (1), (2), and (4). Rosen endorses *fictionalism* about possible worlds, and also rejects (1), (2), and (4). I have placed links on the website to papers by van Fraassen and Rosen.

- On "actualist" realist views (ersatz), possible worlds are real, but they are abstract, so they are not the sorts of things that *people* could *exist in*. As such, the "people" *represented by* ersatz worlds are *fictional* ("they" are *not* real).

- So, an ersatzer can't complain about Lewis' view having us worry *not* about *ourselves*, but about *other people* (*e.g.*, in deliberation). On the *ersatz* account, we're worrying about *fictional characters* — "they" aren't *us* either! There seem to be 3 realist ways to handle *de re* modality without violating the II:

  1. Say it's *different people*, but *the same properties*, *in* other *concrete possible worlds* that *de re* claims are about (Lewisian Counterpart Theory).

  2. Say that it's *the same people*, but *different properties in* other *concrete possible worlds* that *de re* claims are about (Kripkean? Overlap Theory).

  3. Say it's *fictional characters*, and *the same properties*, *represented by abstract possible worlds* that *de re* claims are about (Stalnaker/Plantinga).

The Possible & The Actual VIII: Actualism 1

- Actualists (like Plantinga and Stalnaker) balk at the idea that there are many non-actual worlds that are *the same kind of thing as the actual world*. They have various problems with Lewis' *possibilism*. First, *technical* problems:
  - Seems to allow only one necessarily true proposition, and (more generally) necessarily coextensional properties (propositions) are identical.
    * Two responses: First, what's wrong with saying that logically necessary coextensionality (LNC) implies identity? 2nd: if you think *meanings* of LNCs can be different, then Lewis has an account of *meaning* too.
  - Lewis says propositions are sets. But, sets don't seem to be the kind of things that can be objects of belief, *etc.*, and/or the bearers of truth-values.
    * Response: Any systematic metaphysical theory is bound to deviate to some extent from pretheoretical usage. Judge it on its *overall merits* vs *alternatives*.
- These sorts of technical problems are not crucial. In the end, it is more fundamental features of possiblism that actualists want to deny. The main issues have to do with the ontological status of non-actual, possible worlds.

The Possible & The Actual VIII: Actualism 2

- According to Loux, Plantinga's Actualism has several crucial features:

  1. There are no *non-actual objects*. The only existents are those things that exist in the actual world. Abstract entities *do* exist in the actual world.

  2. Our modal concepts form a "network of concepts", and individual concepts in tbis "network" cannot be reduced to others. So, Lewis' attempt at a reduction of all modality to possible worlds and sets is misguided.

     – So, the only correct story about modality must be an *actualist and non-reductive* account. This is what Plantinga tries to provide. Stalnaker rejects this non-reductive aspect (2), but accepts the actualist aspect (1).

  3. Plantinga chooses *maximal states of affairs* (MSOAs settle every issue one way or the other) as his possible worlds. MSOAs *exist* necessarily (and *actually*!), but they don't *obtain* necesarily. They *represent* complete and total ways the world might be. The actual world is *the* MSOA that obtains.

  4. Plantinga embraces trans-world individuals and identity (like Kripke).

The Possible *&* The Actual VIII: Actualism 3

- As Loux explains, Plantinga accepts the II. But, because of (4), he feels forced to say that properties are *world-indexed*, so as to avoid one object both having and failing to have the same property. This is where things start to get weird.

- Because he is (i) an actualist and (ii) a realist about possible worlds, Plantinga takes non-actual, possible worlds to be *abstract entities* (MSOAs that fail to obtain). All MSOAs actually exist, and so are "real" in an actualist sense.

- All of this is supposed to allow Plantinga a realistic, actualistic, trans-world indentical understanding of *de re* modal claims like "x is necessarily P" $\mapsto$ "x has P-in-w for all possible worlds w in which x exists". How does this work?

- On the one hand, if x is an *actual, concrete* object, but non-actual, possible worlds w' are *abstract* objects, then how can something identical to x (*i.e.*, x *itself*!) "exist in w'"? How can a concrete object "exist in" an abstract object?

- On the other hand, if x *doesn't need to exist in w* in order for Plantinga to explain *de re* claims about x, then why was the II a problem in the first place?

- Intuitively, on Plantinga's view, non-actual possible worlds ("in which x exists") are just *misrepresentations of x* (as *x actually is*). But, if that's right, then how are violations of II possible here, when misrepresentations are *false*?

- If "x has P" is actually true of x, and "x lacks P" is actually false of x, then x and P provide no counterexample to II. *According to* some MSOAs, x has P, and *according to* other MSOAs, x lacks P. So? For actualists, it's only *the MSOA that obtains* which should have any force. Recall Stalnaker's remark:

  > "their point of view is fictional [*i.e.*, that of a *non-actual x*], and so what is right from it makes no difference as far as reality is concerned."

- Don't the MSOAs "about x" that *do not obtain* represent *fictional* accounts of x? If so, then shouldn't it be that what is right from the point of view of a *non-obtaining MSOA* makes no difference as far as reality is concerned?

- In other words, there is only a threat of II being violated if two conflicting predications of *x can both be true*. I don't see how that's possible on Plantinga's account — even for a single property. Only one MSOA will obtain, and so only one predication of x will be true. Where's the II problem?

The Possible & The Actual IX: A Menu of Views

- *Possibilists* (P) believe that non-actual objects *exist*. *Actualists* (A) deny this. *Modal Realists* (MR) believe that possible worlds exist. *Modal Non-Realists* (MNR) deny this. *Reductionists* (R) believe that all concepts with modal content (*e.g.*, properties, propositions, *etc*.) can be reduced to possible worlds (plus sets, perhaps), which are *primitive*. *Non-reductionists* (NR) deny this.

	Possibilist	Modal Realist	Reductionist
Lewis	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stalnaker	No	Yes	Yes
Plantinga	No	Yes	No
van Fraassen	No	No	No
Rosen	No	No	Yes