MODALITY AND ESSENCE

This seminar surveys recent work in the metaphysics of modality and essence, focusing on (i) whether the modal reduces to the non-modal; (ii) whether actuality is special; and (iii) the relation between essence and modality.

PREREQUISITES
PHIL203 + 3 units of philosophy, or permission.

PLACE/TIME
CLE B315, Mondays 3:30pm-6:20pm (Fall 2015)

INSTRUCTOR
DR Mike Raven (mike@mikeraven.net | http://mikeraven.net/)

OFFICE HOURS
CLE B323 Monday 1:00-3:00, or by appointment.

WEBSITE
http://coursespaces.uvic.ca/course/view.php?id=12574

TEXTS
• FINE, Modality and Tense
• KRIPKE, Naming and Necessity
• LEWIS, On the Plurality of Worlds

APPROACH

“Philosophy is the strangest of subjects: it aims at rigour and yet is unable to establish any results; it attempts to deal with the most profound questions and yet constantly finds itself preoccupied with the trivialities of language; and it claims to be of great relevance to rational enquiry and the conduct of our life and yet is almost completely ignored. But perhaps what is strangest of all is the passion and intensity with which it is pursued by those who have fallen in its grip.” (Kit Fine)

Philosophy is a skilled activity which strives for clarity, precision, and rigor in our understanding of the world.

This philosophical skill is best learned by practice. One can no more learn philosophy without practice than one can learn to play a musical instrument without practice. And one can no more learn philosophy merely by reading it than one can learn to dance merely by reading about dancing. Thus, while the course focuses on some central philosophical questions, the main emphasis is on how to do philosophy: to think with clarity, precision, and rigor.

But clear, precise, and rigorous thought is inseparable from the clear, precise, and rigorous communication of thought. Your practice in philosophy will consist in reading the material, discussing the material in class, and communicating it in your written work. Assignments tend to be short, but the standards are high.

Philosophers might initially seem to use obscure technical terms disconnected from ordinary language, to fuss pedantically over insignificant details, and to get caught up in abstract disputes disconnected from everyday life. As a result, some students might initially find philosophy to be unfamiliar, difficult, and irrelevant. But this first impression is misleading. Technical terms are used to avoid unclarity and imprecision, details are fussed over to achieve the strictest rigor, and the abstract is focused on to guard against everyday biases.

Philosophy requires patience and discipline. But it can be rewarding, especially as one hones the skill of sharpening one’s ideas and isolating the justifications for them—a skill which can be used in any academic discipline, and in ordinary life.
EVALUATION

The grade you earn depends solely on your performance in this class. Submitting all the work is required to pass. There is no extra credit. Grades are calculated on the University’s standard scale: A+90 A89.8 B+86 B83 C+79 C76 D+72 D69 F<60

ASSIGNMENTS • 3 problem sets (90%) (Due: FEB 5, MAR 5, APR 6)
(Typically short essay questions; but possibly longer essays too.)

PARTICIPATION • Engaging with the course material in and out of class (10%)
This includes (but is not limited to) discussion in class and with the instructor during office hours or over email.

LATENESS If you do not expect to complete an assignment on time, submit what you have done on time. Except in extreme circumstances (instructor’s discretion), extensions require documentation of a legitimate reason before the due date and will not extend past when timely assignments are returned. Late work is penalized 5 points per day late and does not receive comments.

CONDUCT

You agree to abide by a social contract of conduct by enrolling in this course:

CLASS Attending and contributing to class helps train your philosophical skills. It is not just for your benefit, but also for your classmates. Please be respectful: be prepared to contribute, but do not interrupt, bully, ramble, distract, dominate, or insult your classmates.

CONTACT You are welcome to seek guidance in office hours or by email. Please be respectful: communicate professionally, do not expect answers to questions already answered by official sources (e.g. syllabus, course site, class), and allow ample time for replies.

RECORDING Audio/visual recordings require instructor’s prior consent, or an approved accommodation plan. Do not distribute them publicly.

GUESTS Guests are not permitted without instructor’s prior consent.

INTEGRITY Plagiarism is not tolerated. Ignorance is no excuse. It is your responsibility to learn the university’s policies on academic integrity http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2014/FACS/UnIn/UARes/PoAcI.html).

SURVEY Towards the end of term, you may complete an anonymous Course Experience Survey (CES). The survey provides your instructor with your feedback on this course, which can help improve it in future. When the survey becomes available, you should receive an email inviting you to complete it; but you can also access it directly at http://ces.uvic.ca (ensure your current email address is listed in MyPage: http://uvic.ca/mypage). Use your UVic netlink ID to access the survey. Your feedback is appreciated.
RESOURCES

ADVICE

The material is best learned by reflecting on the readings and class discussions, participating, and preparing for assignments in advance of the deadlines. Consult the instructor and these resources:

VOCAB  http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/
READING  http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html
http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html
http://publish.uwo.ca/~amendel5/slides-sample-paper.html
Bennett & Goroviz (1997) "Improving Academic Writing",
Teaching Philosophy 20.

DISABILITIES

Consult with the Resource Center and instructor at the beginning of the term for resources and accommodations.

SCHEDULE

This schedule is tentative; consult CourseSpaces for the official schedule.

Readings marked † provide overviews of the topics. Read them prior to the other readings (for orientation) as well as concurrently with them (for synergy).

Underlined (linked) readings are available freely online; click them to follow the link.

SEP 14
• KRIPKE, “Semantical Considerations on Modal Logic”
  † BALLARIN, “Modern Origins of Modal Logic”
• FINE, Modality and Tense (excerpts from introduction)

SEP 21
• LEWIS, On the Plurality of Worlds (§§1.1-1.3; §§1.6-1.9; chapter 2)
  † SIDER, “Reductive Theories of Modality”
  † DEROSSET, “Possible Worlds I: Modal Realism”

SEP 28
• LEWIS, On the Plurality of Worlds (chapter 3)
  † DEROSSET, “Possible Worlds II: Non-reductive Theories of Possible Worlds”

OCT 5
• LINSKY & ZALTA, “In Defense of the Simplest Quantified Modal Logic”
• WILLIAMSON, “Bare Possibilia”
• BENNETT, “Proxy ‘Actualism’”
• BENNETT, “Two Axes of Actualism”
  † MENZEL, “Actualism”

OCT 19
• EINHEUSER, “Inner and Outer Truth”
• Fine, “The Problem of Possibilia”

OCT 26
• LEWIS, “Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic”
• LEWIS, On the Plurality of Worlds (chapter 4)
• KRIPKE, Naming and Necessity (lecture I)
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| Nov 2 | • Kripke, Naming and Necessity (lecture III)  
• Robertson, “Possibilities and the Arguments for Origin Essentialism”  
• Rohrabach & deRosset, “A New Route to the Necessity of Origin” |
| Nov 16| • Fine, “Essence and Modality”  
† Robertson, “Essential vs. Accidental Properties”  
• Fine, “The Varieties of Necessity”  
† Kment, “Varieties of Modality” |
| Nov 23| • Kment, “Counterfactuals and the Analysis of Necessity” |
| Nov 30| • Fine, “Necessity and Non-existence” |