

How things are

Graduate course, spring term 2011
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Website: <http://www.philosophie.ch/philipp/teaching/metaphysics11.php>
login: philosophy
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Tentative programme

1. Introduction: two paradigms of contemporary metaphysics

- Modality vs. essence, determination vs. supervenience, Lewis vs. Kripke/Fine.

2. Foundations

- ontological commitment: Quine (1948)
- truthmaker arguments: Rodríguez Pereyra (2005)
- identity and indiscriminability: Hawthorne (2003)
- truth and existence: Jackson (1980)
- the grounding of modality: Shalkowski (1994)
- the modal account of essence: Fine (1994)
- the modal account of supervenience: Leuenberger (2008)
- the danger of conventionalism: Sidelle (1989), ch. 1 and 2

3. Properties

- the truthmaker argument for properties: Devitt (1980); Armstrong (1980)
- universals vs. tropes: Bacon (1997)
- states of affairs vs. events: Wetzel (2003)
- intrinsic vs. extrinsic properties: Weatherson (2002)
- properties and relations: Fine (2000)
- properties and their causal rôles: Hawthorne (2001)
- determinable and determinate properties: Funkhouser (2006)

4. Metaphysical glue

- bundle theories: Simons (1994)
- substratum theories: Adams (1974)
- Leibniz' principle again, adverbial modification: Hawthorne (2006b)
- locations: Sider and Hawthorne (2002)
- aspects and respects: Baxter (1988)

5. Objects

- mereological essentialism: Chisholm (1973)
- the puzzles of coincidence: Burke (1994)
- 3- vs. 4-dimensionalism: Sider (1997)
- persistence: endurance vs. perdurance: Sider (2000)
- A- vs. B-theories: Zimmerman (2005)
- presentism vs. eternalism: Zimmerman (2007)
- Transworld heir lines and transworld individuals: Szabó (2003)

What metaphysics is about

To describe the world in most abstract terms, to uncover what and how it fundamentally is, to understand what it holds it together: the science of being *qua* being.

More specifically: about what makes our true statements true, most fundamentally: truthmaker theory, ontological explanation.

What truthmaking is all about: (i) truth is not brute, it has an explanation; (ii) truth is relational: fundamental explanation is by things.

Method: a compromise to be aimed for between explanation as functional characterization (Quine, Lewis, Chalmers) and explanation as axiomatic characterisation (Carnap, Kripke, Fine).

(Forget about this: metaphysics is what metaphysicians do.)

Assumed background

Hopefully not too much. Lewis (mostly *Plurality of Worlds* and *New Work for a Theory of Universals*) and Fine (mostly *Essence and Modality* and *Tense and Reality*) are important. Readings are on the webpage, as are handouts and (proto-)papers.

Three main theses

The course (and the (proto-)papers to be discussed) revolve around three main theses:

1. Essence is not modality, the two concepts are two-way independent: essential properties may be had contingently; they may also be contingently essential, even though some contingent relations such as supervenience are best seen as grounded in essences.
2. The most fundamental trait of reality is the relation of exemplification, the tie that binds properties to their bearer and relations to their relata: exemplification is a real, albeit formal relation (pace Bradley's regress); it allows of adverbial modification and may itself be bearer of higher-order properties.
3. Essential modifications of the exemplification relation allow for a new understanding of the metaphysics of objects: problems of persistence and trans-world identity may be solved by accepting qua-objects, objects like *Picasso qua painter* (who was more successful than Picasso *qua* writer), without (or so I hope) increasing the ontological bill.¹

Preliminary issues (today): ontological commitment vs. ontological explanation, determination vs. supervenience, explanation by things vs. explanation by existential facts.

Humphrey

A good illustration of the scope and limits of philosophical analysis is afforded by Kripke's famous 'Humphrey'-objection to Ludovican modal realism: Whenever it is true of Humphrey, Lewis (1968: 28) says, that he might have won the election, there is some other entity, isolated from Humphrey in space and time, who did win the election. It is in virtue of standing in some relation, the counterpart

¹As these puzzles are typically generated by applications of Leibniz' law of the indiscernibility of identicals (if two things are discernible, they are not identical: $\forall x, y \exists F((Fx \wedge \neg Fy) \rightarrow x \neq y)$), an important feature of the new theory will be how this principle must be restricted.

relation, to this other entity, that this-worldly Humphrey may truly be said to possibly have won the election. This explanation, elegant and simple as it otherwise is, has met with an incredulous stare by many: how can it be possibly true, Kripke (1980: 45, n. 13) asks, that Humphrey, worrying about whether he (HE HIMSELF!) might or might not have won the election, worries about *some other person*, some entity which is appropriately similar to him, but with whom he never has and never could enter into any kind of causal contact?

...if we say ‘Humphrey might have won the election (if only he had done such-and-such)’, we are not talking about something that might have happened to *Humphrey*, but to someone else, a “counterpart”. Probably, however, Humphrey could not care less whether someone *else*, no matter how much resembling him, would have been victorious in another possible world. (Kripke 1980: 45, n. 13)

In defense of Lewis, Alan Hazen reminds Kripke that Lewis offered a *translation* of modal talk into counterpart theory:

Kripke’s argument confuses sentences of the technical language of Lewis’s semantic theory, which are outside our natural language or at least constitute an extension of it, with sentences of our ordinary language, and so misapplies intuitive judgements about sentences of ordinary language to the technical ones. (Hazen 1979: 321)

This reply, however, is not entirely satisfactory: while it is true that both “possible world” and “counterpart” are theoretical notions, counterpart theory is not intended to be just another modal logic; instead, as Lewis (1986) makes very clear, both of its central theoretical notions are intended to play a part in ontology. Hazen is right, however, that Lewis is not committed to endorse any possible way of phrasing his proposed analysis in ordinary language. In his first reply, Lewis stresses that he offers a theory about the truthmakers of ordinary modal propositions, and that there is no presumption that they have to be read off from surface grammar:

I think intuition is well enough satisfied if we take “myself” [in Humphrey’s thinking ‘I myself might have won’] to modify “might have won.” Humphrey thinks that he himself, and not someone else who resembles him, has the modal property expressed by “might have won.” And that is true on anybody’s theory. In counterpart theory, it is true because Humphrey himself, in virtue of his own qualitative character, is such as to have some winners for counterparts. (Lewis 1983b: 42)

Even though Lewis never puts it that way, it is the emphasis on the *truthmakers* of the modal proposition that allows Lewis to say that Humphrey indeed worries about himself, namely about whether or not he is similar enough to someone who in fact won the election (in another possible world): his worry does not concern an obscure property as *being such that one might have won*, but the real, this-worldly properties that, if he had them, would make him the winner. Lewis later elaborated this defense, pointing out that the adequacy constraint is *preservation* of common sense, not complete conformity with it – alternative descriptions of the truthmakers do not have to be intuitively acceptable:

I think counterpart theorists and ersatzers are in perfect agreement that there are other worlds (genuine or ersatz) *according to* which Humphrey – he himself! (stamp the foot, bang the table) – wins the election. [...] Counterpart theory does say (and ersatzism does not) that someone else – the victorious counterpart – enters into the story of how it is that another world represents Humphrey as winning, and thereby enters into the story

of how it is that Humphrey might have won. [...] Thanks to the victorious counterpart, Humphrey himself has the requisite modal property: we can truly say that *he* might have won. There is no need to deny that the victorious counterpart also makes true a second statement describing the very same possibility: we can truly say that a Humphrey-like counterpart might have won. The two statements are not in competition. Therefore we need not suppress the second (say, by forbidding any mixture of ordinary modal language with talk of counterparts) in order to safeguard the first. (Lewis 1986: 196)

The so-called “Humphrey objection”, I think, is a good example for what metaphysical theories are about:

1. Though metaphysical theories have to ‘save the phenomena’ (allowing us to say what we think is the right and uncontroversial description of the situation), they are theoretical and hence have the right to their own technical vocabulary. They are concerned not with an elucidation of concepts, but with the provision of truthmakers; and truthmakers are not always what we think they are.
2. The question how to analyse true predications like “Humphrey cares about whether he might have won the election” is reducible neither to empirical questions of matter of fact nor to questions about how best to analyse a concept we happen to possess.
3. In metaphysics, more often than not, everything turns on the strength of a biconditional given as a philosophical analysis.² This is the Eutyphro dilemma: even once it is agreed that an action is pious iff (if and only if) the Gods love it, the crucial question is about the direction of the explanation: are the pious actions pious *because* the Gods love them or do the Gods love them *because* they are pious?

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²It is not entirely wrong, though clearly uncharitable, to interpret Kripke as taking the biconditional of philosophical analysis to licence substitution in attitudinal contexts like “Intuitively ... □□□: this is a demand that may legitimately be refused.

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