

Possible Worlds
PHIL 499
Tuesday/Thursday 1-2:15
Jessica Pfeifer

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Office Hours: Tues & Thurs 2:15-3:15
(or by appointment)
Course Room #: PAHB 456

Functional Competency: Critical Analysis and Reasoning

Books: [All Available in the Bookstore]

David Lewis On the Plurality of Worlds
Kenneth Konyndyk Introductory Modal Logic

Course Description:

There are numerous ways the world might have been different. Possible worlds provide a way of making sense of this. For every way the world might be there is purported to be a possible world that is that way. Possible worlds have been introduced primarily to deal with modal notions, such as necessity and possibility, but they have also proved fruitful in dealing with a number of other philosophical issues, such as the nature of properties, propositions, causation, laws, and counterfactuals. This course will look at various accounts of what possible worlds are and how they can be used to address various philosophical issues.

Course Goals and Expectations:

The goal of the course is to expose students to debates surrounding a central philosophical issue: the nature of possible worlds. The course is also aimed at helping students hone their philosophical skills through reading professional articles about possible worlds, writing critical discussions of the articles, participating in class discussions, and writing essays. By the end of the course, students will be familiar with some of the central debates about the nature of possible worlds and be better able to critically analyze philosophical arguments.

The course will consist of a combination of lecture and discussion. One cannot learn philosophy well without participating in discussion. Therefore, students are expected to do the assigned reading before class, attend class, and participate in class discussion. I also strongly encourage you to make use of my office hours. If for some reason you cannot attend my scheduled office hours, appointments at other times can be arranged.

Methods of Evaluation:

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| Exam Covering Konyndyk: | 10% of Final Grade |
| 6 Critical Discussions: | Each worth 5% of Final Grade |
| Final Essay: | 50% of Final Grade |
| Class Attendance and Participation: | 10% of Final Grade |

Late Work: Unless you have a very good excuse (serious illness, death in the family, etc.) and you notify me before the assignment is due, late assignments will be graded down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late. For example, if your work earns an A-, but you take the exam 1 day late, you will receive a B+. **Note that late critical discussions will not be accepted under any but the most extreme circumstances.**

Class Attendance and Participation: Class attendance and participation are required. One cannot learn philosophy well without participating in class discussion. Moreover, I will be presenting material in class that is not in the reading. If you miss a class, try to get another student's notes, and you are always welcome (and encouraged) to discuss the material with me. Students are allowed up to 2 unexcused absences. More than that will result in a reduction in your Class Attendance and Participation grade of 1% for every 2 additional days missed. In other words, if you have four unexcused absences, the maximum for the Class Attendance and Participation Grade would be 9%.

Exam Covering Konyndyk: There will be an in-class exam covering the material from the Konyndyk book. I will give you a study guide for the exam to help you prepare.

Critical Discussions: Over the course of the semester, you need to write 6 critical discussions about the readings assigned for a particular date. These must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day we discuss the material; late critical discussion will not be accepted under any but the most extreme circumstances. You are allowed to turn in up to 7 for a grade, and drop your lowest grade. You need to sign up for these ahead of time, and you will be allowed to miss three of these over the course of the semester. In other words, you are allowed to sign up for up to 10 critical discussions over the course of the semester, you are allowed to turn in up to 7 critical discussions, but only 6 of these will be graded. You are only required to sign up for 6 and turn in 6, and only your 6 highest grades will count. Each critical discussion should consist of a 1 ½ - 2 page double-spaced critical analysis of one of the readings assigned for that date (this should be a minimum of 400 words). The critical discussion should begin with a very short summary of what you will be criticizing (no more than 150 words). The rest of the discussion should be devoted to criticizing the article or some aspect of the article assigned for the day. You should focus on problems with the views presented in the article. You needn't criticize the entire article. It is okay to criticize just one aspect of the author's argument. These criticisms can be problems internal to the

arguments of the authors, or they can be problems that arise from considerations outside those particular articles. Basically, any relevant philosophical criticism can be raised. Your criticisms are then to be presented in class, typically during the second half of class. The entire class will then have the opportunity to discuss your criticism(s). These critical discussions will (I hope) lead to fruitful in-class discussions, and also ought to help you hone your critical thinking and presentation skills, in addition to helping you prepare to write a better final essay for the class. These should be criticisms you've thought of on your own. The goal is for you to think about the articles on your own. These are NOT research papers. I want YOU to think about and criticize the material. You should not use sources outside those used for this class. Obviously, the point is not to forget stuff you've learned elsewhere. If you do use other sources, make sure you make the appropriate citations. Otherwise, you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to getting an F on the assignment, an F for the class, or even more serious consequences.

Final Essay: The Final Essay will consist of an 8-10 page in-depth essay about one of the topics we discuss in class. Further instructions on this will follow later in the semester.

Student Integrity:

UMBC Statement of Values for Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the [UMBC Student Handbook](#), or the [Office of Undergraduate Education](#).

Disability Statement:

UMBC is committed to eliminating discriminatory obstacles that may disadvantage students based on disability. Student Support Services (SSS) is the UMBC department designated to:

- receive and maintain confidential files of disability-related documentation,
- certify eligibility for services,
- determine reasonable accommodations,
- develop with each student plans for the provision of such accommodations, and
- serve as a liaison between faculty members and students regarding disability-related issues.

If you have a disability and want to request accommodations, contact SSS in the Math/Psych Building, Room 213 or Academic IV-B wing Room 345 (or call 410-455-2459 or 410-455-3250). SSS will require you to provide appropriate documentation of disability and complete a Request for Services form available at <http://my.umbc.edu/groups/sss>. If you require accommodations for this class, make an appointment to meet with me to discuss your SSS-approved accommodations.

Schedule: (Subject to Revision)

- Wk1: August 27: **Introduction to Course**
- Lewis pp. 1-5 (We will read these in class.)
- Wk2: Sept 1-3: **Modal Concepts and Modal Logic I**
- Konyndyk pp. 5, 11-29, 55-67 (31-55 optional) (SKIP THE EXERCISES)
- Wk 3: Sept 8-10: **Modal Concepts and Modal Logic II**
- Konyndyk pp. 69-71, 77-92 (SKIP THE EXERCISES)
- Wk4: Sept 15-17: **Modal Concepts and Modal Logic III**
- Konyndyk pp. 92-117 (SKIP THE EXERCISES)
- Wk5: Sept 22: **Lewis on Possible Worlds I**
- Lewis pp. 5-13
- Sept 24: **Exam Covering Material from Konyndyk**
- Wk6: Sept 29: **Lewis on Possible Worlds II**
- Lewis pp 69-96
- Oct 1: **Problems with Lewis's Account**
- Forrest and Armstrong "An Argument Against David Lewis' Theory of Possible Worlds" pp.164-168 on Blackboard
 - Adams "Theories of Actuality" **only** pp. 190-199 on Blackboard

- Wk7: Oct 6: **Problems with Lewis's Account**
- Bigelow and Pargetter Science and Necessity pp. 189-203 on Blackboard
- Oct 8: **Lewis's Responses**
- Lewis pp. 97-135 (Focus on 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, & 2.6)
- Wk8: Oct 13: **Actualism I: Linguistic Actualism**
- Adams "Theories of Actuality" pp. 199-209 on Blackboard
- Oct 15: **Actualism I: Criticisms of Linguistic Actualism**
- Lewis 136-165 (focus on 142-165)
- Wk9: Oct 20: **Actualism I: Linguistic Actualism, a Defense**
- Reading to be announced
- Oct 22: **Actualism II: Plantingan Actualism & Property Actualism**
- Plantinga "Actualism and Possible Worlds" pp. 253-272 on Blackboard
- Wk10: Oct 27: **Actualism II: Plantingan Actualism & Property Actualism**
- Stalnaker "Possible Worlds" pp. 225-234 on Blackboard
- Oct 29: **Actualism III: Combinatorial Accounts**
- Skyrms "Tractarian Nominalism" pp. 199-206 on Blackboard
- Wk11: Nov 3: **Modal Fictionalism**
- Rosen "Modal Fictionalism" pp. 327-354 on Blackboard
- Nov 5: **Modal Fictionalism**
- Brock "Modal Fictionalism: A Response to Rosen" on Blackboard
- Wk12: Nov 10: **Possible Worlds and Causation**
- Lewis "Causation" on Blackboard
- Nov 12: **Possible Worlds and Causation: Problems with Lewis's Account**
- Kim: "Causes and Counterfactuals" on Blackboard

Wk13: Nov 17:

Possible Worlds and Laws of Nature I

- Pargetter “Laws and Modal Realism” on Blackboard

Nov 19:

Possible Worlds and Laws of Nature II

- Bigelow & Pargetter Science & Necessity pp. 245-258 on Blackboard

Wk14: Nov 24:

Possible Worlds and Laws of Nature III

- Readings to be announced

Happy Thanksgiving Day!

Wk15: Dec 1:

Possible Worlds and Time I

- Readings TBA

Dec 3:

Possible Worlds and Time II

- Readings TBA

WK16: Dec 8:

Time Travel

- Lewis “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”