

Automne 2015, Département de philosophie,
Université de Genève

SE Modality – Syllabus (Schedule updated**)**

Robert Michels (robert.michels@unige.ch)

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Where and when?

Friday 10h15–11h45, B015 (Uni Bastions)

Office hours

My office is in room 204 in Landolt (second floor, same building as the department of philosophy). I don't have regular office hours, but if you have questions or want to meet to discuss something in person, feel free to contact me by e-mail: robert.michels@unige.ch

Course description and overview

There is an obvious commonsensical explanation for the truth of non-modal claims like 'Geneva has an international airport', namely that they correctly describe a particular part of our world. In contrast, there is no analogous commonsensical explanation of the truth of modal claims like 'Geneva might not

have had an international airport'. This raises the general philosophical question of how we can explain modal truths. This question is both of intrinsic and of more general interest, since many recent debates in philosophy, for example the debates about personal identity or about the relation between the mental and the physical, have been explicitly or implicitly framed in modal terms. The aim of this seminar is to introduce and discuss different philosophical answers to this and related questions about modality. The focus will be on the recent literature in the analytic tradition.

We will start with a brief introduction to the logical, linguistic and philosophical background and then cover theories of modality based on the idea that modal truth can be explained in terms of truth and falsehood in possible worlds (including Modal Realism, Combinatorialism, Linguistic Ersatzism, Fictionalism) and alternative approaches which do not rely on possible worlds (Essentialism and the potentiality-account). Depending on the interests of the participants, we may in addition discuss related topics, such as the distinction between Contingentism and Necessitism.

Aims of the seminar

- Familiarize with recent philosophical discussion about modality, in particular in metaphysics
- Practice reading, asking questions about, presenting and discussing advanced philosophical texts

Course website and key text collection in the library

- All required and some optional readings will be made available on the course website on Chamilo URL: <https://chamilo.unige.ch/home/courses/34I0152/>
- Please check the course website regularly; it is the official source for what is required reading
- There is also a key text collection for the seminar in the philosophy library

Modules, requirements, credits

- MA6 – Travail écrit de recherche avec soutenance (env. 25 pages, 50'000 signes) – 12 crédits
- MA7 – Travail écrit de recherche (env. 12 pages, 24'000 signes) et présentation orale durant le séminaire – 12 crédits
- MA8 – Travail écrit de recherche (env. 12 pages, 24'000 signes) ou présentation orale durant le séminaire – 6 crédits

Participation

- The required readings for each session should be read by everyone
- At the beginning of each session, a brief summary of the required reading will be presented by a participant

General readings

Introductory/background

Kripke (1980), Melia (2003)

More advanced

Divers (2002), Hale and Hoffmann (2010), Jubien (2009), , Williamson (2013)

**Schedule and readings (tentative; please check course website regularly!
*** UPDATED)**

18.9. NO SESSION (Conference)

25.9. Introduction: Logical, Linguistic and Philosophical Background

2.10. Modal Realism and Counterpart Theory (required: Lewis (1986), preface, sections 1.2-2; optional: sections 1.6-9, Lewis (1968))

9.10. NO SESSION (Dies academicus)

16.10. Combinatorialism: Introduction and problems (required: Armstrong (1986); optional: Armstrong (1989), Sider (2005))

23.10. Possible Worlds as Properties (required: Stalnaker (2011), ch. 1; optional: ch. 2, Stalnaker (1976))

30.10. Linguistic Ersatzism (required: Melia (2003), optional: Lewis (1986), section 3.2, Sider (2002),)

6.11. NO SESSION (reading week)

13.11 POSTPONED to 20.11. due to absences

20.11. Conventionalism (required: Sider (2011), ch. 12, optional: Sidelle (1989), Cameron (2009))

27.11. Fictionalism (required: Rosen (1990), optional: Brock (1993), Hale (1995), Nolan (2011))

4.12. Essentialism (required: Fine (1994), optional: Vetter (2011), Correia (2006), Kment (2014))

11.12. Essentialism II (required: Correia (2011))

18.12. Dispositionalism (required: extracts from Vetter (2015), optional: Borghini and Williams (2008))

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