Course Syllabus

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Office hrs: TR 12:00-1:50 and by appointment – or try me anytime I am in (sometimes in the Logic Lab, UH 052, x12667).

Brief Description:

There is a Humean problem about possibility and necessity: “I am in San Bernardino now” is true just because it describes the way things are. However, “I could have been at the beach now” seems true, but only because it describes a non-actual possibility. On its face, however, the very idea of that which isn’t actual seems absurd. We will put our toe into the vast literature on possible worlds — asking what these “possibilities” might be, and about the foundations for modal truth. Notions of possibility and necessity are important in their own right, and essential in logic, science, decision theory, ethics, and beyond. So there is no escaping modal thought! After an introduction to issues, we will begin with classic readings by S. Kripke and D. Lewis, and move to a recent discussion by Michael Jubien.

Course Expectations:

The official prerequisite is completion of two 300-level philosophy courses along with the GE upper-division writing requirement. Thus we assume no particular content, though a certain philosophical sophistication is assumed — and, in this case, exposure to at least introductory formal logic is a plus. In a small and advanced class such as this, it goes without saying that each of us specially depends upon the others for the quality and nature of class interaction. So I’ll leave off comments about homework, attendance, phones and the like to simply depend on your honor and good judgement.

Texts:

The readings for this course include an introductory selection by M. Loux, and with classic selections from S. Kripke and D. Lewis, to be distributed in a packet on the first day of class. After that, we will turn to M. Jubien’s Possibility, available in the Bookstore.

Grading:

Grading is based on a series of “reaction” papers (40%), and a term paper in multiple drafts (60%).

a) According to the attached schedule, each week after the first is associated with a (substantive) reading assignment. For each unit, usually on Th, you are responsible for a 3-4 page “reaction” to the reading. The reaction should consist of a summary of some issues from the reading, together with a critique. These papers will be graded on a 0 - 5 point scale, with scores of 4 -5 reserved for papers that rise to the level of philosophical critique, and lower for ones that remain at the level of summary. It will be less important that the critiques are effective, than that you
interact philosophically with the material. Each assignment is of equal weight, though the lowest grade will be dropped. These papers will often be the basis of class discussion; thus late assignments will be accepted only with a point deduction corresponding to the number of class meetings the assignment is late.

(b) The term paper is to take up some topic from the course. According to the schedule below, around week 8 a brief (1 - 2 page) statement of the topic you will consider, along with a projected thesis statement and a projected bibliography must be approved by Prof. Roy. Then in the following week a first draft of your paper is due (10%). You may expect to receive these back with comments the next week. Final versions (50%) are then due in the final exam week. Late drafts will be accommodated as can be, but with a 10% deduction. Nothing can be accepted after the final date.

These required dates reflect a sort of “minimum schedule” for your paper — one which lets us have as background both defenses of possible worlds along with Jubien’s attack. However, nothing prevents an earlier start and/or additional drafts!

Grading Notes: All grading is numerical. Given your weighted total score, you may expect to receive at least the grade associated with the usual scale: ≥ 90 for an ‘A’, ≥ 80 for a ‘B’, etc.

Schedule of Instruction (tentative):

At roughly one unit/week

1. General introduction
2. Loux, “Introduction: Modality and Metaphysics” I, II
4. Kripke, “Identity and Necessity”
5. from Lewis, On the Plurality of Worlds
6. Jubien, Possibility Ch 1: “Concrete Entities”
7. Jubien, Possibility Ch 2: “Abstract Entities”
8. Jubien, Possibility Ch 3: “Against Possible Worlds” (paper topic due)
9. Jubien, Possibility Ch 4: “The Core Analysis” (first paper draft due)
10. Jubien, Possibility Ch 5: “Proper Names”

Very tentative, Jubien Ch 6,7

finals week (final paper draft due)
Details:

There are no adds after the census date. If you are in need of an accommodation for a disability in order to participate in this class, please contact Services to Students with Disabilities at UH-183, (909) 537-5238. As a matter of principle, everyone should receive messages from their CSUSB e-mail. An easy way to do this is to set it up to forward to your regular address through the “delegated administrator.”

You are encouraged to discuss anything, especially reading and homework with other students, the instructor, and/or assistants in the Logic Lab. With this said, all written work is to be your own. Academic honesty is always essential, and particularly so in the give-and-take of philosophy, where the project is to work through and clarify your own views. Plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the course, and standard University discipline. If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism, feel free to talk things over with me. See also “What is Plagiarism” linked from http://philosophy.csusb.edu/~troy/courses.htm and the policy document at http://academic-affairs.csusb.edu/personnel/fam/fam820.htm.