**February 4: Some Distinctions and Background (KB)**

Actualism vs. possibilism

McMichael’s nonstandard characterization

Actualism: everything that exists actually exists. Everything is actual. ∀xA∃y x=y

Possibilism: there exist things that don’t actually exist. There are ‘mere possibilia’.
∃x~A∃y x=y

Note the possibilist’s reliance on a distinction between a more and less inclusive quantifier.

Issues arising:

1. By the above characterization, Meinong comes out as an actualist. So something stronger is needed (or at least is actually endorsed by actual actualists). As an aside, note Lewis’ advance upon Meinong.
2. Something even stronger than *that* needed to accommodate the thought that there’s something not properly actualist about Linsky and Zalta’s view?
3. The actualist slogan needs to be rescued from triviality.

Williamson thinks it’s hopeless, and wants to replace the actualist-possibilist debate with the contingentism-necessitism debate.

Quick attempt to rescue it.

Necessitism vs. contingentism

Necessitism: [necessarily] everything necessarily exists; [necessarily] everything is necessarily something: [🞎]∀x 🞎∃y x=y

Contingentism: Necessitism is false. It’s not the case that [necessarily] everything necessarily exists; not everything is necessarily something: ~[🞎]∀x 🞎∃y x=y. I.e., [possibly] there is something that possibly does not exist. [◊]∃x ◊∀yx≠y

Necessitism is *prima facie* implausible, because it says/entails:

Nothing that actually exists possibly fails to exist—nothing exists contingently.

It is not possible for there to be fewer things than there are.

It is not possible for there to be something that doesn’t actually exist—aliens aren’t possible.

It is not possible for there to be more things than there are.

It validates both

the Barcan formula: ∃x∃x

and the converse Barcan formula: ∃x∃x

All of these claims fall out of the fact that necessitism says that e*very world has the same domain*.

Fixed and variable domains

Domain constraints on accessibility

Shrinking domains: worlds can only ‘see’ (access) worlds whose domains are (possibly improper) subsets of their own domains. Letting aRb means “b is accessible from a”— w1Rw2 → Dw1 ⊇ Dw2.

The Barcan formula is valid in all and only the models that obey this constraint.

Growing domains: worlds can only ‘see’ worlds whose domains are (possibly improper) supersets of their own domains. w1Rw2 → Dw1 ⊆ Dw2.

The converse Barcan formula is valid in all and only the models that obey this constraint.

Fixed or constant domain constraint: worlds can only ‘see’ worlds that have the same domain: w1Rw2 → Dom w1 = Dom w2

Necessitists accept this. Note that any model that obeys this constraint also obeys both the shrinking domains *and* growing domains constraints.

Relation between the actualism/possibilism distinction and the necessitism/contingentism distinction?

*Prima facie*, they are more or less independent.

Necessitist possibilism: There are things that don’t actually exist, and everything exists necessarily.

Contingentist possibilism: There are things that don’t actually exist, and some things might not have existed.

Interesting question about how to classify Lewisan modal realism. Both Stalnaker (2012, 1-2) and Williamson (2012, 24) suggest that it is necessitist. I think that’s wrong.

Contingentist actualism: Everything actually exists, and yet it is true that there *could be* something that doesn’t (actually) exist.

Held by me, Stalnaker, arguably the mainstream view even if it turns out to be hard to implement.

Necessitist actualism: everything actually exists and everything necessarily exists.

Linsky & Zalta, at least on the above characterization of actualism. One of the morals of “Proxy Actualism” is basically that although there is room for this position in logical space, there’s something about necessitism that offends actualist scruples and motivations, if not the letter of the position. (So it’s necessitist, but is it *really* actualist?)

Linsky and Zalta’s picture.

Motivations for necessitism? → Special reasons for *actualists* to be necessitists?

When we get to Williamson, we’ll see why he thinks everybody ought to be necessitists, even if the actualist/possibilist distinction is chucked..

But it turns out that there might be special reasons for *actualists* to be necessitists. Certainly Linsky and Zalta think so, and Plantinga, too

1. The McMichael problem—accommodating iterated *de re* modal claims.

2. Accommodating contingent existence claims (out-and-back world-hopping arguments)

3. Accommodating the possibility of aliens given a certain (simplistic?) understanding of actualism

4. Entailed/assumed by Kripke semantics?