

## Knowledge and Reality

### *Necessity and Possible Worlds*

How should we understand *modal* statements – e.g. about what *might have* been the case had things been otherwise, or about what *must necessarily* be the case? Should we interpret these in terms of *possible worlds*, and what are the advantages and drawbacks of doing so? What is the nature of possible worlds and their inhabitants? Does talk of possible worlds commit us to things that do not exist, and should we be concerned about this? Can individuals in different possible worlds really be *one and the same* individual?

#### **READING**

*Crane and Farkas give a useful introduction which includes a historical perspective on the debate, linking more recent concerns to Quine and Kripke's seminal work:*

Tim Crane and Katalin Farkas, Introduction to section on 'Necessity' in *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 301-12.

*Lycan provides a 'State of the Art' essay, summarizing a range of options, together with advantages and disadvantages:*

William G. Lycan, 'Possible Worlds and Possibilia', in Stephen Laurence and Cynthia Macdonald (eds), *Contemporary Readings in the Foundations of Metaphysics* (Blackwell, 1998), pp. 83-95.

*Loux's chapter discusses the issues in more detail, focusing on the Lewis vs. Plantinga debate which also figures largely in Crane and Farkas:*

Michael Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, second edition 2002), chapter 5, pp. 176-214.

*Kripke's work is well worth reading in its entirety, especially if you are also studying Philosophy of Logic and Language. (However if you're pushed for time, the most relevant selections for this essay are reprinted in the Crane and Farkas collection.)*

Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Blackwell, second edition 1980)

*Lewis, the most influential metaphysician since Kripke, first became well known for his realism about possible worlds, which remains at one extreme of the philosophical options:*

David Lewis, Selection from *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Blackwell, 1986), in Tim Crane and Katalin Farkas (eds), *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 330-3.

David Lewis, Selection from *Counterfactuals* (Blackwell, 1973), in Stephen Laurence and Cynthia Macdonald (eds), *Contemporary Readings in the Foundations of Metaphysics* (Blackwell, 1998), pp. 96-102.

*Plantinga and Stalnaker take an 'ersatzist' view of possible worlds as abstract entities rather than concrete realities:*

Alvin Plantinga, 'Actualism and Possible Worlds', *Theoria* 42 (1976) and reprinted in Tim Crane and Katalin Farkas (eds), *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 334-49.

Robert Stalnaker, 'Possible Worlds', *Noûs* 10 (1976), pp. 65-75, and available online. Or chapter 3 of *Inquiry* (MIT Press, 1984), pp. 43-58, and reprinted in Stephen Laurence and Cynthia Macdonald (eds), *Contemporary Readings in the Foundations of Metaphysics* (Blackwell, 1998), pp. 103-16.

*Armstrong instead interprets possibilities combinatorially:*

D. M. Armstrong, Selection from *A Combinatorial Theory of Possibility* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), in Tim Crane and Katalin Farkas (eds), *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 350-63.