**The Post-modal Approach to Metaphysics (Spring 2021, Peking University)**

Thursday 3:10-6pm; 文史楼207

Instructor: Zeyu Chi ([zc255@cornell.edu](mailto:zc255@cornell.edu))

**1. Description**

Metaphysics concerns itself with how the world is like in the most general and fundamental way. Notions such as dependence (causal, ontological, or metaphysical), identity and essence are key to metaphysicians’ inquiry into the structure of the world. These key metaphysical notions could be formulated by different conceptual tools: modality was once the default conceptual tool that philosophers use for formulating and engaging with questions centered around these key metaphysical notions, and it is only recently replaced by new conceptual tools such as grounding, disposition and structure. What are the reasons for rejecting the modal formulations? What lessons should we draw from the downfall of the modal approach to metaphysics? Can the new theoretical tools fulfill their promise by getting us a better understanding of the various philosophical intuitions that we have about the key metaphysical notions? These are the main questions that we look into in this seminar.

**2. Requirements**

* One longer term paper (15-20 pages, double-spaced) or two shorter pieces (6-7 pages each, double-spaced). At least two drafts of the same paper are required for this course (grade will be only assigned for the final draft).
* Submit weekly reading report (1-2 page, single-spaced) before the class each time, which will be used as the basis for in-class discussion and ideally for constructing term paper outlines. The report will be counted as the attendance record of the participants only.
* Lead half of the discussion for the assigned readings of one week of one’s choice.

**3. Schedule (subject to revision)**

Week 1 (3/11): Introduction.

Optional reading: Sider, chapter 1 of *The Tools of Metaphysics and the Metaphysics of Science*.

Vetter, “Recent Work: Modality without Possible Worlds”.

Week 2 (3/18): Supervenience.

Required readings: Kim, “Concepts of Supervenience”. “Postscripts on Supervenience”.

Optional readings: McLaughlin and Bennett, the SEP entry on supervenience. Kim, “Supervenience as a Philosophical Concept”.

Week 3 (3/25): Casual Dependence and Counterfactuals.

Required readings: Lewis, “Causation”. “Postscripts to Causation”. “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow”.

Optional Readings: Kim, “Causes and Counterfactuals”. Sider, chapter 8, *Logic for Philosophy*. Lewis, section 2.3 & 4.2 of *Counterfactuals*.

Week 4 (4/1): The Modal Approach to Essence.

Required readings: Kripke, “Identity and Necessity”. Marcus, “Essentialism in Modal Logic”. Lewis, sections from “Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic”.

Optional readings: Quine, “Three Grades of Modal Involvement”. Marcus, “Essential Attribution”.

Week 5 (4/8): The Post-modal Turn in Metaphysics.

Required readings: Fine, “The Question of Realism”. “Essence and Modality”.

Week 6 (4/15): Essence in the Post-modal Era I.

Required readings: Fine, “Senses of Essence”. Koslicki, “Essence, Necessity and Explanation”.

Week 7 (4/22): Essence in the Post-modal Era II.

Required readings: Fine, “Ontological Dependence”. Koslicki, “Varieties of Ontological Dependence”.

Week 8 (4/29): Grounding I.

Required readings: Fine, “Guide to Ground”. Schaffer, “On What Grounds What”.

Optional readings: Bennett, Intro & section 2.1 of *Making Things Up*. Rosen, “Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction”. Trogdon, “An Introduction to Grounding”.

Week 9 (5/6): Grounding II.

Required readings: Wilson, “No Work for a Theory of Grounding.” Schaffer, “Ground Rules”.

Optional readings: Bennett, 2.2-2.5; 3.1-3.6 of *Making Things Up*. Sider, 8.2 of *Writing the Book of the World*.

Week 10 (5/13): Dispositions I.

Required readings: Bird, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1 of *Nature’s Metaphysics*. Sider, 2.1 of *The Tools of Metaphysics and the Metaphysics of Science*.

Optional readings: Shoemaker, “Causality and Properties”. Lewis, “Finkish Dispositions”.

Week 11 (5/20): Dispositions II.

Required readings: Vetter, “Williamsonian Modal Epistemology, Possibility Based”. Williamson, “Reply to Vetter”.

Optional readings: Vetter, “Dispositions without Conditionals”.

Week 12 (5/27): Metaphysical Possibility I.

Required reading: Chalmers, “Does Conceivability Entail Possibility?”

Week 13 (6/3): Metaphysical Possibility II.

Required reading: Kung, “Imagination as a Guide to Possibility”.

Week 14 (6/10): Workshop on Term Paper.

Week 15 (6/17): Workshop on Term Paper.