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Timothy Williamson: *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* Oxford University Press 2013, 464 pages

What there is, what there might be and what there cannot be? Are some things merely possible, could events in the world be otherwise, do past and future situations exist in the same manner as those present do? Questions like these have been bothering philosophers for ages and still stand in the very core of metaphysical debates. However, purely metaphysical considerations like the above ones very often terminated in conceptual confusions. They turned out to be more confusing than elucidating, more obscure than clear, and sadly, more pseudophilosophical than philosophical. In his new book, Timothy Williamson breaks the barriers. His *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* gives some precise connections between the model theory and the metaphysics and aims to put metaphysics on the same level as science.

In eight chapters (Contingentism and Necessitism; The Barcan Formula and its Converse: Early Developments; Possible Worlds Model Theory; Predication and Modality; From First-Order to Higher-Order Modal Logic; Intensional Comprehension Principles and Metaphysics; Mappings between Contingentist and Necessitist Discourse; Consequences of Necessitism and Methodological Afterword) Williamson argues for the claim that one of the roles of quantified modal logic is to supply a central structural core to theories of modal metaphysics. Williamson provides various highly technical arguments, all of which are based on strong modal logic as the arbiter in theory choice. He proposes to look at metaphysical problems through the prism of normal scientific standards, namely through the strongest and systematic logical theories. It is

due to the fact that formally developed metaphysics and science have a lot of in common. Both of them use formal methods and pursue theories with the most theoretical benefits at the least theoretical costs. Moreover, metaphysics as well as science do reject a part of common sense for the sake of simplicity, explanatory power, elegance, and economy in principle.

As far as I can see, Williamson's strategy is (at least) a four-step enterprise. Firstly, we should find a sufficiently strong logic interpreted by an appropriate semantics. Secondly, some sufficiently universal theorems should be provable in the logic. Thirdly, the logic have to be sound as well as complete for metaphysical universality, meaning that "propositional modal logic, *S*, is sound for metaphysical universality if and only if every theorem of *S* is metaphysically universal; [and] is complete for metaphysical universality if and only if every metaphysically universal formula of the language is a theorem of *S*" (p. 95). Finally, it is the appropriately interpreted logical system that forms the structural core of the most feasible metaphysical theory. According to Williamson, metaphysical theories of modality are best formulated in a precise formal language. In particular, Williamson has for it that it is quantified modal logic – higher-order *S5* with the classical rules of inference, identity and plural quantification – that is the most prominent guide in theoretical philosophizing.

Given the formal requirements mentioned above, *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* argues on behalf of necessitism standing against contingentism. Necessitism is a thesis according to which necessarily everything is such that necessarily it is identical with something. Put more briefly, necessarily everything is necessarily something (p. 2). So, according to necessitism, there could *not* have been more things than there actually are, there could *not* even be fewer things than there actually are. What there (unrestrictedly) exists is not contingent. What is contingent, on the other side, is the distribution of properties and relations on what exists.

Undeniably, a man on the street would object immediately since, as common sense dictates, at least some things are contingent. Ordinary objects like dogs, cars, chairs and tables would not exist were the actual circumstances be otherwise. Similarly, it seems rather odd to say that Kripke's (possible) seventh son necessarily exists. Since actuality says he doesn't and given that actuality implies possibility, it is a perfectly respectable possibility that Kripke's seventh son does not exist, full stop.

As controversial and counterintuitive as the thesis of necessitism might seem, Williamson takes it as a preferable alternative, nonetheless. In the book, he adduces a large number of claims, arguments and comments on various objections against his stance. For example, it is argued that although all individuals actually exist *and* are necessary beings, not all of them are necessar-

ily *concrete*. Some of them – those traditionally and pre-theoretically conceived as contingent – are only contingently concrete. He thus dismisses common sense as the ultimate guide in metaphysics. Since common sense has limited authority, various claims about contingency and necessity can properly be evaluated by theoretical enquiry only.

Next, several up-to-time debates are according to Williamson desperately unclear. He explicitly mentions the one between actualism and possibilism, arguing that the actualist principle is supposed to claim something like ‘Everything is actual’. Since whatever is is, whatever is actually is: if there is something, then there actually is such a thing. So on this understanding it turns out to be utterly trivial in modal logic. Consequently, actualism is trivially true and possibilism trivially false. Williamson warns us that unless we resort to another reading of ‘actual’ than the one well understood in modal logic the debates reach a deadlock.

For Williamson, one way of keeping the modal discourse under control is to abandon the distinction as hopelessly muddled, and to get on with the clearer necessitism-contingentism debate. Such a reorientation of modal metaphysics debate around the necessitism-contingentism suggests that unless the actualist provides another reading of ‘actual’ the (traditional) notion of actuality as contrasted with possibility does not bring any theoretical advantages. Since the notion ‘actual’ plays an indispensable role in defining possibilism, without an appropriate grasp of it possibilism is not a feasible alternative.

One might, however, worry as to what exactly “actuality”, or “the actual world” means in that context. In fact, there are (at least) two notions of the world that should not be confused and, consequently, two quite different actualist/possibilist distinctions at issue. And although Williamson gives us a clue when he asks what actuality is and why it is contrasted with possibility rather than with possibility-cum-impossibility, it is still not clear what is the notion of “actual” Williamson denies.

In the possibility-cum-impossibility debates, it has been argued that there is no cogent reason to presuppose an ontological difference between merely possible worlds and impossible worlds (Priest 1997, 581). Vander Laan’s worries go in a similar vein as, he says, we lack such a principle of ontology that would justify our construing these similar parts of our modal language in such dissimilar ways (Vander Laan 1997, 599).

Now, the question is whether we should be willing to admit such arbitrariness in the actual-cum-possible distinction too. After all, even the so-called *ersatzers*, qua actualists, are happy to admit two different senses of the term “world”. On one side, there is the real world, the spatio-temporal concrete universe that we as concrete individuals occupy. There are chairs, people, planets,

pugs and all the things we experience. On the other side, they're happy to admit that it is the abstract representation rather than concrete bunch of stuff that deserves the name "world". Given this understanding the term "world" picks out an entity ontologically different from the concrete sum of individuals. Rather, it picks out some *ersatz* representation of a way the world might have been.

It seems that an analogous confusion has infected the meaning of "actual" too. For, notions like "the actual world", or "actuality" may be used by actualists as meaning different things. They mean either a thesis

- (1) Everything is actual (terminological actualism)

or a thesis

- (2) Actuality consists of everything that is spatiotemporally related to us, and nothing more. It is not vastly bigger, or less unified, than we are accustomed to think (Lewis 1986, 100).

In the former, the reference of "actual" concerns trivial analytic truth; yet, in the latter it doesn't (Lewis 1986, 99). Naturally, Williamson recognizes the two meanings of "actual" while he adds that the difference between (1) and (2) is not something that is at stake here. But that does not have to be the case. For, as far as we disambiguate the use of "actual" in such a way that we a) indicate its different uses and b) explicitly grasp the philosophically appealing one, triviality of actualism and, *a fortiori*, impossibility of possibilism, disappears. Namely, taken (1) as leading in the actualism-possibilism debate, it makes sense to derive from the fact a) that there is a talking donkey and the fact that b) whatever is actually is that there actually is a talking donkey. But if we consider actuality non-trivially, as a restricted quantification, the inference is blocked. And an introducing an actuality operator that shifts its extension from world to world can do the job (see also Yagisawa 2013).

There is, undeniably, much more to be said about the arguments and comments Williamson makes throughout the whole book. But everybody who had a chance to read it must admit that it is a unique and precise philosophical enterprise. Beside the fact that it demonstrates how powerful the connection between logic and metaphysics is, the book makes a clear case that metaphysical reasoning is meaningful only when backed up by its decent and strong logical counterpart.

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Huw Price: *Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism*
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Naturalism is usually understood as a matter of letting natural science decide the question of what there is. What natural science tells us there is, there is; and what it tells us there is not, is not. Of course, an entity *prima facie* not recognized by natural science may, after investigation, turn out to be a naturalistically respectable entity after all, but just viewed from an unusual angle, or a conglomerate of naturalistically respectable entities, or perhaps a correlate of our odd way of speaking about naturalistically respectable entities – therefore we need something as “philosophical analysis” to tell us which entities are only *prima facie* incompatible with naturalism, and which are really at odds with it (and hence do not qualify as entities at all). If something does not survive such a scrutiny, the naturalist is at liberty to dismiss it as just a phantasm of a confused human mind.

Quine (1969, 26) takes pains to stress a different aspect of naturalism: “knowledge, mind, and meaning”, he claims, “are part of the same world that they have to do with, and ... they are to be studied in the same empirical spirit that animates natural science.” This might seem to be just a special case of the general tenet: if everything that there is is to be sanctioned by natural science, then surely “knowledge, mind, and meaning” are. Huw Price, in the book under review, argues that the Quinean urge marks a *specific variety* of naturalism – which Price calls *subject naturalism*. And he goes on to argue that this variety of naturalism must *precede* the seemingly more general *object naturalism* that grants science the right to arbitrate ontology.

According to Price, the reason for distinguishing between subject naturalism and object naturalism is connected to the fact that our theories of the world, especially scientific theories, are inevitably couched in language. Hence, to let science sanction the existence of an X , we must assume that the word we