

## **Phil 290P: David Lewis**

Autumn 2010

Tues., 4pm–7pm.

Professor: Abe Stone

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### **Description**

David Lewis (1941–2001) is by far the most important member of the school or field now known as Analytic metaphysics, and, in my opinion, a very important philosopher generally speaking. He is best known as a proponent of “modal realism,” that is, the view that there (literally) are other possible worlds, besides the actual one.

I have divided the reading into three parts, by a division whose validity I don’t feel entirely certain about, but which seemed convenient. The first part introduces modal realism and the other basic views which go along with it to determine the structure of Lewis’s metaphysical system. The second part focuses on Lewis’s thought about the nature of philosophical speech, conversation, and argument, in part so we can see more clearly what he might think he was doing, and why, in maintaining such views. The third part introduces some less-basic metaphysical apparatus and applications of the basic apparatus to specific topics, all centered around Lewis’s version of the traditional metaphysical tasks, to provide a foundation for the (special) sciences and demonstrate generally the possibility of language and thought.

A good deal of mostly recent historical background would be helpful in understanding better what Lewis is up to. I considered including readings from Carnap, Davidson, Goodman, Kripke, Montague, Quine and possibly others, but couldn’t tell how to fit it in or where to draw the line. However, I will be semi-happy to suggest appropriate extra reading to interested students.

### **Course Requirements**

Seminar participation.

One paper, on a topic to be discussed with me, due Tues., Dec. 7, by e-mail to me in PDF or some format easily convertible to PDF. (For undergraduates enrolled in the course this should be approximately 8–12 pages; grad students will probably need to make it longer, but remember that a good short paper is better than an equally good long paper.)

In addition, students may optionally hand in up to two 2–3 page papers in response to questions about the reading, which I will try to provide in a timely manner if there is demand. These will be due (also by e-mail) one week after the question is provided. Because these are optional (and because I don't want to end up with lots of extra work at the end of the quarter), late papers will not be accepted at all, even if your grandmother should (God forbid) pass away. Each such paper handed in will count for 12.5% of the grade.

Please do not plagiarize or hand in any work not clearly written for this course.

## Texts

Readings are from the following books by Lewis: *Philosophical Papers* (vols. 1 and 2) (1983, 1986); *On the Plurality of Worlds* (1986); *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (1999); *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (2000). I have not ordered copies of these because they are fairly expensive and we will have only selected readings from each (but they are available on-line if you want to purchase them). The readings will be made available on e-res (which is now via eCommons), and the books, along with a few other books by Lewis, are on reserve at McHenry.

## Readings

Sep. 28: no reading, first class.

## Basic system

Rockt. 5: Introduction to *Philosophical Papers*, volume I (pp. x–xii); “Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic,” with postscripts (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 26–46). Note this is probably the most technically challenging reading we will have, but I think necessary.

Rockt. 12: *On the Plurality of Worlds*, §§1.6–9 (pp. 69–96); §2.1 (pp. 97–101); §2.4 (pp. 108–15).

Rockt. 19: *On the Plurality of Worlds*, §2.8 (pp. 133–5); §§4.1–3 (pp. 192–220).

## Methodology

Rockt. 26: “Holes” (with Stephanie Lewis) (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 3–9); “Score-keeping in a Language Game” (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 233–49).

Nov. 2: “Academic appointments: Why ignore the advantage of being right?” (*Papers in Ethics*, pp. 187–200); “Noneism or Allism?” (*Papers in Metaphysics*, pp. 152–63).

**The possibility of science and of meaningful thought**

Nov. 9: “New Work for a Theory of Universals” (*Papers in Metaphysics*, pp. 8–55).

Nov. 16: “Causation” (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 2, pp. 159–72; postscripts, pp. 172–213, recommended but not required).

Nov. 23: “How to Define Theoretical Terms” (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 78–95).

Nov. 30: “Radical Interpretation,” with postscripts (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 108–21); recommended: “Putnam’s Paradox,” (*Papers in Metaphysics*, pp. 56–77).