Phil 290P: David Lewis
Fall, 2023

Monday and Wednesday, 5:20–6:55pm, Hum 1 400

Contact Information
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Course 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 ended up limiting this, in the
assigned reading, to a few pieces by Carnap and Quine, but many of their other writings would be relevant, in addition to the writings of many other recent philosophers — Davidson, Goodman, Kripke, Montague, Putnam, and many others. I will be semi-happy to suggest appropriate extra reading to interested students.

**Course Requirements**

Seminar participation. You should be prepared to ask at least one brief question about the reading, or make at least one brief comment about it or one brief objection to it.

One in-class presentation (approximately 15 minutes). The presentation should be aimed at getting seminar discussion started on a certain day.

One final paper (approximately 15–20 pages), due Wednesday, December 13 (via the Assignments tool on Canvas) on a topic related to the course to be determined by the student (with advice from the instructor if desired).

AI policy: I encourage the use of AI assistance with proper caution (i.e., keeping in mind that current AI is often wrong). You may use AI assistance basically in any way that would not constitute cheating if you used a human for the same thing. Similarly, you should cite the AI in cases where you would cite a human. If in doubt, feel free to ask me for clarification.

All readings for the course are available on Canvas.

You can find answers to some commonly asked questions about my assignments and grading in my FAQ [https://people.ucsc.edu/~abestone/courses/faq.html](https://people.ucsc.edu/~abestone/courses/faq.html).

**Readings**

Monday, October 2: (no reading, first class).

**Basic system**

Wednesday, October 4: “Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic,” with postscripts (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 26–46). Note this is proba-
bly the most technically challenging reading we will have, but I think necessary.

Monday, October 9:  *On the Plurality of Worlds*, §§1.3 (pp. 20–27), 1.6–8 (pp. 69–96)

Wednesday, October 11: *On the Plurality of Worlds*, §1.9; §2.1 (pp. 97–101); §2.4 (pp. 108–15), §2.8 (pp. 133-5)

Monday, October 16: *On the Plurality of Worlds*, §§ 3.1–2 (pp. 136–165)

Wednesday, October 18: *On the Plurality of Worlds*, §§§4.1–3 (pp. 192–220)

**Methodology**


Wednesday, October 25: Introduction to *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (pp. x–xii); “Holes” (with Stephanie Lewis) (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 3–9); *On the Plurality of Worlds*, §1.1 (pp. 1–5).


Wednesday, November 1: *Convention*, ch. 3 1–4 (pp. 83–107) and 3.6 (pp. 118–121).


The possibility of science and of meaningful thought


Wednesday, November 15: Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” §5; “Ontological Relativity.”


Wednesday, November 29: “How to Define Theoretical Terms” (*Phil. Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 78–95).


Wednesday, December 13: **final paper due.**