

Modal Metaphysics: Issues on the (Im)Possible II

The five articles in this volume were presented at the Issues on the (Im)Possible II, a conference organized by the Institute of Philosophy of Slovak Academy of Sciences and Slovak Metaphysical Society. As usual, the primary goal of the conference was to address questions regarding modality (broadly construed). We are happy to say that the conference fulfilled the expectations. This editorial has two sections. The first section sets the papers in a contemporary context of modal metaphysics and epistemology, while the second one provides an overview of the papers themselves.

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The problems of modality penetrate both our everyday reasoning and theoretical investigations about it. Reasoning about things that could, could not or must happen, beside things that do happen, belongs to our everyday practice. Similarly, modal notions play important – or even indispensable – roles in philosophical theorizing. To mention just a few: an occurrence of one event necessitates an occurrence of the other; a set of properties A supervenes upon a set of properties B just in case no two things can differ with respect to A-properties without also differing with respect to B-properties; a set of sentences implies so-and-so just in case those sentences could not all be true together without so-and-so being true.

In order to approach the problem of modality, realistically oriented philosophers proposed to postulate various kinds of entities. Among them, possible worlds were thought to bring the desired theoretical benefits. For, possibility, impossibility and necessity conceived as going-on in some, none and every possible world respectively enabled quite elegant analyses. The burden of proof has then moved from conceptual analyses to metaphysical and epistemological justification of such a commitment. In the former, philosophers have been struggled with the question: “What possible worlds, if they exist, are?” In the latter, given we accept the existence of possible (and impossible) worlds: “How can we know them?” Both questions are essential to contemporary metaphysics and, as it goes in philosophy in general, receive still new answers.

The old problem in metaphysics of modality is the ontological status of possible worlds. The traditional literature on the topic balances between two stances: possible worlds are either concrete or abstract in nature. Despite the fact that the distinction is far from being

clear, there is a general agreement that worlds are one of those categories. In opposition to realistic positions stand positions according to which possible worlds do not exist. However, such positions are still underdeveloped, or at least less developed than their realistic counterparts. It is therefore not a surprise that a part of this issue concentrates on the antirealist positions.

Given the (existent or non-existent) modal facts are about what is possible, impossible or necessary, the natural question arise: “How do we acquire beliefs, or even knowledge of such facts?” The answers vary from reliability of our intuitions; our ability to conceive, imagine or suppose the (im)possible; an appeal to counterfactual analysis of modal knowledge; the focus on the need of causal, empirical information to gain modal knowledge; to modal skepticism all the way down. Each of these positions has its own advantages but to find the best one is always a matter of distinct, and very often incompatible, criteria. We are happy that this issue contains contributions that aim at some positive results in modal epistemology.

2

Each of the five papers in this issue addresses some aspect of modal metaphysics, epistemology and logic.

Anthony Dardis discusses modal fictionalism, the Brock-Rosen argument and its consequence that modal fictionalists are committed to possible worlds. Dardis then suggests that we should consider alternative ways of analysing modal discourse. Namely, his Modal Fictionalism and Modal Instrumentalism avoids the damaging conclusion of the Brock-Rosen argument by treating possible worlds as an instrument, an acceptable but false theory.

A related paper by Zsófia Zvolenszky entitled *An Argument for Authorial Creation* takes the thesis of artifactualism seriously. The paper builds on Kripke’s initial idea that incorporating authorial creation is an intuitive and natural move. Beside the mere statement though, Zvolenszky constructs an argument according to which artifactualism, understood on the background of the causal-historical chain account of reference determination, plays well in comparison to both Meinongianism and nonactualism.

Epistemologically oriented papers are *Dusko Prelević’s* *Modal Empiricism and Knowledge of De Re Possibilities: A Critique of Roca-Royes’ Account and Why You Can’t Actually Imagine the Impossible (But Think that You Can)* by *Luke Malik*.

In the former, Prelević puts in contrast two representative accounts of modal epistemology: modal empiricism and modal rationalism. He states the difference between them as the difference between a priori and a posteriori access to modality. While the former is the view that there is an a priori access to metaphysical modality, the latter requires

a posteriori justification for at least some modal beliefs. Prelević then argues that the modal empiricists' epistemology of *de re* modality as presented in Roca-Royes' account faces serious problems and that modal rationalism is still an open alternative.

Luke Malik opens the old problem of imagination and its relevance to possibility (*contra impossibility*). His (Kripkean) position is that it is not actually possible to imagine metaphysically impossible things although he is happy to admit that it appears to be so. Malik's claim is backed up by a unique theory of imagination according to which epistemic frailty and misunderstanding the relation between objects and phenomenal properties give rise to the confusion between what is denoted and what it is represented.

Finally, Adam Tamas Tuboly's paper *Quine and Quantified Modal Logic – Against the Received View* scrutinizes the debate about modality in general, quantified modal logic in particular. Tracing the debate back to Quine-Kripke paradigms, Tuboly thinks that although Kripke has provided some important responses to Quine's attack against modal logic, the gap between formal semantics and metaphysics leaves a lot of issues unaddressed. As he concludes, the debate about the modalities is still on the table and the ideas of Quine deserve a fresh start.

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The Issues on the (Im)Possible is a unique event. One reason to think so is the second special issue of *Organon F* dedicated to its topic. A special thank goes therefore to the journal itself, especially the Editor-in-Chief, the Executive Editor and its Editorial Board. Their professional and responsible attitude made the work on this issue much easier and without them this issue would never have appeared. Finally, many thanks to all the authors and reviewers for their time and thoughtful engagement. They all together made this issue actually possible.

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