



A Critical Introduction to the Metaphysics of Modality, by Andrea Borghini

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Book Reviews

Borghini, Andrea, *A Critical Introduction to the Metaphysics of Modality*, London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2016, pp. vii + 224, £22.99 (paperback).

We care about the truth, yet this includes more than just actual truth. We also care about *what is possible* or possible truth. But this is puzzling. ‘Clinton won the 2016 U.S. election’ is actually false—but its possible truth still matters, even though it fails to describe our world. Yet, if so, what informational value does this have? Its possible truth seems informative of something important, but of what?

Borghini’s book is a stellar introduction to these and other modal matters. It will be accessible to upper-level undergraduates, yet it is the most up-to-date guidebook around, making it worthwhile for specialists as well. But one highlight is the chapter on the history of modal philosophy (starting with Parmenides, ending with C.I. Lewis). A chapter-length piece on the history is found nowhere else, as far as I know. Appropriately enough, however, the book is focused on contemporary views, featuring coverage of modal realism, ersatzism, modal fictionalism, modalism, and the new modal actualism (including the ‘powers’ metaphysics of modality), among others.

Naturally, one can raise objections. As an organizational matter, it is unclear why modal expressivism is grouped with modal scepticism (ch. 2), why modal agnosticism is grouped with modal fictionalism (ch. 6), and why propositional ersatzism is typed as a kind of pictorial ersatzism (ch. 5). More seriously, chapter 5 is odd in that it makes no mention of Cresswell in the ‘combinatorialism’ subsection, focusing exclusively on Armstrong. Given his greater influence, Armstrong deserves more air-time. But the book may be misleading here; after all, Armstrong is not a paradigm combinatorialist—he’s partly a fictionalist as well. (For what it’s worth, sometimes Armstrong strikes me as an out-and-out fictionalist, where his ‘modal fiction’ is not the closure of Lewis’s theory, as in standard modal fictionalism, but is the closure of a Cresswell-style theory.)

Regardless, the book has much to recommend it. Borghini’s discussion of Quine in chapter 2 is especially admirable in that Quinean modal scepticism is carefully distinguished from ‘radical modal scepticism’. Quine’s views are more moderate than is usually thought, and Borghini’s sensitivity here is much appreciated. I am also grateful to the attention given to Meinong and neo-Meinongians in chapter 8, since those views are often brushed aside. And generally the book is a clear and authoritative roadmap to modal metaphysics, which should be welcomed by students and professionals alike.

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