Andrea Borghini, *A Critical Introduction to the Metaphysics of Modality*, London—New York: Bloomsbury, 2016, vii + 224 pp.

Using modal notions, such as *possibly*, *might be*, *allowed*, *must*, *necessarily*, etc. seems to be an inevitable practice of our daily life, as well as, our scientific and philosophical discussions. Even if we do not believe in the existence of modal facts *per se*, or in their semantic transparency and logical consistency, their adoption to our vocabularies seems may be more than expedient.

Andrea Borghini's *A Critical Introduction to the Metaphysics of Modality* is about the various philosophical theories of modalities that are on the table in the contemporary debates. Actually, her book is the very first monograph written in a concise textbook-style on the current theories of *modality* and not just of *possible worlds* that are closely related to *almost* all discussions of modality.

A very specific narrative of twentieth-century analytic philosophy could be written about philosophers' attitudes towards the modalities: a wide range of arguments might be reconstructed from skepticism to maximal and critical acceptance of such notions as possibility and necessity. The book of Borghini is written with respect to these two notions: six chapters are about what is possible—with a hint on necessities—and one is about necessity *per se*. (Though this might be considered as extremely unbalanced, this practice was quite widely shared also in the last fifty years among the different approaches to modality.)

Altogether the book consists of eight chapters and a preliminary introduction. The seven chapters on the theories of modality (I will come back to the fist historical chapter separately below) are organized in accordance with a classificatory figure adapted in the volume (see p. 17). The first question addressed by Borghini is whether modal notions express concepts or not. If one answers that they do not, she ends up either with skepticism or expressivism. The *par excellence* modal skeptic is W. v. O. Quine, but Borghini discusses Peter van Inwagen's epistemic skepticism and the so-called radical modal skepticism. What is shared among them is that they suspend their judgments of given modal sentences for various reasons. The other option, modal expressivism, "takes sentences containing modalities to express the speaker's conformity to a certain conventional way of regarding the non-modal content of the sentences" (65).

Though modal skepticism and expressivism are typical non-cognitivist options of the field, one might not want to do without the truth and falseness of modal sentences. In that case, one shall accept the other horn of the conceptual dilemma, namely that modal notions express concepts. The question is, of course, whether these concepts are irreducibly and genuinely modal concepts, or they are reducible to something else. Walking the first line, one ends up with a version of modalism (pursued by Graeme Forbes, Charles Chihara, and Jonathan Lowe) varying in how the ultimate nature of modal facts is conceived.

Fearing some conceptual and metaphysical disaster of admitting irreducible modal facts to our worldview, one shall try to reduce genuine

modal notions to other ones. Here one has again two typical choices: either use the machinery of possible worlds or try to do without it *in a sense*. Accepting possible-worlds talk one might choose (i) modal realism, (ii) ersatzism, (iii) fictionalism, or (iv) agnosticism.

Modal realists, like David Lewis, accept both possible-worlds talk and the ontological commitment to possible worlds; they regard them as concrete, spatiotemporal entities, just like our world (92–102). Ersatzists accept likewise the talk and the ontological commitment but dispense with concrete worlds in favor of various abstracts representations of the ways our world could have been. Both fictionalism and agnosticism admit the usefulness of possible-world talk, but they are antirealist or agnostic regarding the existence of other (either concrete or abstract) worlds than ours. They developed various ways of how we can talk about possible worlds without committing ourselves to the existence of those worlds that we talk about and utilize in our analysis of modal expressions.

Finally, as Borghini shows (157–172), though "[p]possible worlds suit the two modalities of necessity and possibility and are in accordance with the semantics suggested to complement both [quantified modal logic] and [Lewis's] counterpart theory" (159), many would not admit possible worlds beyond the purely logical theories of modality. The most recent account of possibility and necessity utilizes only what is to be found in our *actual world*: the ersatzism is also known as actualism, the *new modal actualism* (or hardcore modal actualism) is more radical in leaving behind all talk and ontology of possible worlds, dealing only with "talk of modalities that are possessed by individuals, such as essences, dispositions, or other modal properties" (158). Individual and property essentialism, along with dispositionalism is introduced in other to present the most tenable options of the book.

Borghini's discussion is closed with a short chapter on the notion of necessities and necessary existents as developed by Timothy Williamson (185–186), approaching also the relation of grounding (182–184), Meinongianism (187–190), and impossible worlds (190–192).

These chapters are well-written and well-structured: they are organized around four basic questions that always recur in the context of the theories of modality that are on the table: (1) *What does it take for a certain situation to be possible?* (2) *What does it mean to say that a certain situation is possible?* (3), *How do we come to know that which is possible?* (4) *What sort of entity is a possible entity?* In fact, (2), (3), and (4) are just the semantic, epistemic, and metaphysical sub-questions of (1), that is, of the "The Problem of Possibility" (3). Since the book is an introduction to the *metaphysics* of modality, (1) and (4) are the most favored questions, though occasionally (2) and (3) are also treated by the author. The various solutions (nineteen after all) provided by the different modal theories are gathered together at the end of the book (195–197), helping thus the reader to keep up with the main points of a given theory among the many arguments and reasons pro and contra of it.

According to Borghini (196–197), there are two main lessons to be drawn from the discussion of the metaphysical theories of modality. Firstly, at the moment no one can provide a full-blown theory that is able to entirely re-

duce the modal vocabulary to any type of non-modal vocabulary. It is a fur-
ther question whether the non-reductive character of the various theories
provides a fatal blow to possible-worlds theories, especially to modal real-
ism, which main theoretical advantage supposed to be its alleged reductive
approach. If "*some modal entities are nonetheless here to stay*" (196), one
might temp to restrict her attention to the actual world and dispense with
all of the possible-worlds talk and machinery in the philosophically relevant
discussions.

The other lesson is that *"a piecemeal approach to the metaphysical (and,
arguably, philosophical) analysis of modality has the best payoffs"* (197).
Borghini seems to suggest that the different modal theories should be apt
for different versions of modalities, like deontic, alethic, nomic, and meta-
physical. Fair enough—though one shall weigh the costs and benefits of the
pluralistic and monistic/unified accounts.

What need to be emphasized are some misleading and quite unneces-
sary features of the book. Borghini's first chapter, which supposed to be
a historical overview, is everything but a historical overview in the usual
and relevant sense of "historical overview". The author discusses the well-
known views and paradoxes of Parmenides and Zeno, the theories of Aris-
totle, the Megarian School, the Arabic and Scholastic traditions, and the
considerations of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hume. The list is quite
impressive, especially given that the overview is twenty-five pages long (it
is already the longest chapter)—counting the numbers, one might see that
most figures got half of a page or just two-three pages.

If one may argue that such histories are histories of problems and not
exegetical inquiries (thus legitimating the quite general and broadly con-
ceived treatments), then one could expect that these figures and their solu-
tions will occur later in the text—that is not happening, after all. Though
Borghini notes that "it is difficult to understand the work of a prominent
contemporary author in the field, David Lewis, without reading Hume's
work" (45), it is quite debatable whether in what sense could Hume be rel-
evant for the discussion of Lewis or whether Lewis ever studied Hume in
details, or just mobilized the Humean insights of his teacher, Quine. It is
quite possible that one could be a good Lewisian or could solve some prob-
lems of Lewis without ever encountering herself with Hume's philosophy.

After all, however, a story is needed, of course, but the reader may have
found it more useful to get a narrative of the twentieth-century history of
the modalities. Quantified modal logic and its possible-worlds semantics
caused many debates on both sides of the Atlantic and across Europe, and
dealing with it in a more detailed manner could have helped the reader
to appreciate their contemporary estimation. Perhaps then one should not
face such admittedly bizarre sentences, as "[t]oday, we can claim that the
conceptual machinery of possible-worlds semantics enabled an analysis of
the various modal expressions, and of their conceptual ties, that is much
more profound than the analyses provided by any other society or civiliza-
tion up until this point" (88).

Despite the historical parts, Andrea Borghini's introductory textbook is
a useful and thorough reading for anyone interested in the current analytic-
philosophical theories of and approaches to modality. It is the most up-to-

date and comprehensive survey of those options that one shall weigh when enters the contemporary debate. The pleasure of choosing between the theories is, as Borghini says (197), of course, ours.

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