



Essential readings: contemporary debates on Kit Fine's philosophy

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Kit Fine is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding philosophers of our time. His groundbreaking contributions to the literature have impacted several areas of philosophy, three of which constitute the essence of this long-awaited volume. *Metaphysics, Meaning, and Modality: Themes from Kit Fine* is an edited collection of essays entirely dedicated to some of Fine's major philosophical works on these topics, and it is the very first publication of its kind.

The volume is divided into four main sections, the first three of which consist of nineteen previously unpublished essays by some of the leading experts in the field, including Fine himself. In their respective contributions, each author provides a thorough discussion of either one or several ideas found in Fine's philosophical writings and lays new groundwork that supports further research and careful consideration. Part of what makes this volume a significant contribution to the existing literature is that some of Fine's most influential views regarding metaphysics, modality, and philosophy of language are either strengthened with further arguments, discussed in detail and assessed from a new perspective, or simply challenged on entirely novel grounds. The last section completes this volume by offering an additional dialectical dimension where Fine addresses a series of brief, but enlightening, individual responses to each contributing author.

I strongly recommend this book and believe that its place is in the library of each and every philosophy department. That being said, let me stress that some of the subjects discussed are complex and technical, and might not be readily accessible to everyone. In particular, readers who are not trained in analytic philosophy and/or not acquainted with at least some of Fine's seminal works will likely find the topics covered in this volume quite challenging. In my opinion, the target audience includes, but is not limited to, seasoned readers of Kit Fine who wish

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to tackle some of the key questions that stem from his philosophical works and researchers eager to deepen their knowledge regarding the most recent and ongoing issues in metaphysics and philosophy of language.

Despite my enthusiasm for this volume, I find it unfortunate that Fine's contributions to metaphysical grounding and philosophy of time are not discussed at all in the volume. These two topics have stimulated tremendous attention in contemporary philosophy, and it would have been beneficial to have discussions of some of the key issues that pertain to them. Another point to mention is that there is a striking imbalance regarding the three main sections: *Language* contains 'only' three essays as opposed to *Metaphysics* and *Modality* that contain eight essays each. This is not a negative point per se, but it leaves the reader with the impression that there is somewhat less to be said about Fine's views on language than other themes. I will now present a brief overview of the four sections, starting with *Metaphysics*.

Ontology is central to Fine's metaphysics. Fine claims that we should refrain from engaging in ontological inquiries by means of *quantification*—as Quine did—and instead opt for a primitive notion of *reality* to formulate ontological claims and assess our ontological commitments. In their essay, Fred Kroon and Jonathan McKeown-Green offer a defense of the use of a quantificational approach towards ontology as well as arguments to meet Fine's ontological desiderata without appealing to the notion of reality. Regarding ontology, Philip Percival tackles the division between reality and what he labels 'that which is beyond reality' and undertakes the task of classifying different ways to impose restrictions on reality. He then discusses how a specific kind of restriction can be used to defend actualist and presentist views. Fine's *Reasoning with Arbitrary Objects* (1985) is the focus of two essays. Alasdair Urquhart first offers an introduction and historical overview of arbitrary objects. Then, based on some remarks made by Fine in his aforementioned book, he outlines a way to construct models with arbitrary objects. Gabriel Sandu, on the other hand, explains how arbitrary objects can be used to obtain a full referential interpretation of indefinites in ordinary languages. 'Vagueness' is another important topic in Fine's philosophy. In his own recent essay, Fine expands on his global approach to vagueness by tackling the question of ontic indeterminacy (Fine 2020). Graeme Forbes is interested in Fine's new approach to vagueness and gives an assessment of how it handles three versions of the sorites paradox in comparison to fuzzy logics. Kathrin Koslicki inquires on the notions of essence and identity and how, specifically, Quine's challenge of providing necessary and sufficient conditions for transworld identity can be met. She argues that the best way for essentialists to do so is to turn towards Aristotelian hylomorphism. However, Koslicki also explains that hylomorphists who embrace a non-modal account of essence (*cf.* Fine 1994) face further challenges on their own. Joseph Almog investigates three different questions about the universe: 'Is the universe an object?', 'Can the universe's mathematical objects be unified in an object?', and 'Is there a *unique* universe—a universe that encompasses each and everything—or two universes, one composed of only physical objects and the other composed of mathematical objects?' Almog's careful study of these matters leads him to question whether some of Fine's views about essence are adequate.

The second section, *Modality*, starts with Steven T. Kuhn's essay which focuses on Fine's *Necessity and Non-Existence* (2005). In that paper, Fine draws an important distinction between worldly and unworldly (transcendental) truths in order to solve a metaphysical puzzle regarding the possibility that Socrates is both human and non-existent. Kuhn argues that Fine's own solution is undermined and propounds an alternative view to overcome the puzzle of non-existence. In his essay, Gideon Rosen first investigates Fine's idea that ethical facts supervene on natural facts as a matter of *normative* necessity, and provides an argument to support that conclusion. Then, Rosen tackles the question of what normative necessity is and provides an analysis of the notion. Bob Hale is interested in Quine's attacks against the intelligibility of *de re* modality. According to Fine, Quine propounds a logical and a metaphysical argument against the notion, and Hale questions whether Fine is right in thinking that either of these arguments are forceful *independently* of one another.

The four next essays are of special interest for essentialists. Penelope Mackie provides arguments to the effect that Fine's thesis according to which essence is the source—and therefore explains—*metaphysical* necessity is compromised because there is a gap between these two notions. Her skeptical stance is a considerable challenge to proponents of Finean essentialism which triggered a vivid and interesting debate in the recent literature. Fabrice Correia, on the other hand, offers substantial clarifications regarding what reducing metaphysical necessity to essence amounts to. In an earlier paper, Correia argued that among the different ways to formulate this reductive thesis, his 'rule-based' account is theoretically superior to other rival accounts. In this essay, Correia strengthens the case for his view and discusses how some objections against it can be met. Jessica Wilson offers a critical overview of Fine's approach to metaphysical theorizing and puts a special emphasis on his views regarding dependence and essence. She raises a series of objections against Fine's account of ontological dependence and explains that because of their highly diverse applications, finding general principles for such phenomena might be unsuccessful. Scott A. Shalkowski shares Fine's views against the kind of ontological inflation that Lewis advocates. Shalkowski argues that, as opposed to what one might *prima facie* be inclined to think, essentialism is compatible with nominalism (roughly, the theory according to which there are no properties). The last essay of this section is by Robert Goldblatt who gives a critical survey of Fine's contributions on the formal development of modal logic with a special focus on his *Canonicity Theorem*. Goldblatt expands on the notions of 'first-order complete' and 'canonical' and provides a point of distinction between them with algebraic characterization.

The third section, *Language*, is constituted of three essays. Gary Ostertag investigates issues that pertain to Fine's theory of meaning, namely *semantic relationalism*. Ostertag criticizes Fine's views regarding the notion of *coordination* on the grounds that it is inadequate; he argues that coordination is not a matter of *what* is said but rather of *how* something is said. Regarding the notion of coordination, Paolo Bonardi tackles the question of what coordination between proper names is. Bonardi argues that coordination is grounded in a notion of *understanding* that needs to be characterized. However, Bonardi's verdict is negative: He argues that there is no clear answer to the question he is interested in. The last essay is by Friederike Moltmann

who focuses on two important notions that pertain to Fine's philosophy: *truthmaking* and *variable embodiment*. She argues that *intensional noun phrases* such as 'the book John needs to write' are referential and stand for variable embodiments. She then provides a compositional semantic analysis of such phrases and shows that product-dependent variable objects are to be distinguished from intentional objects.

As mentioned, in the last section, Fine directly engages with the objections and criticisms made against his views. He does so in a very humble and respectful way while bringing important points of clarification and insights to continue the debate in a thorough and meaningful way. Offering the opportunity to Fine to directly reply to his critics is a decision from the editor that can only be welcomed. I recommend that readers read each and every reply from Fine after finishing the corresponding essays, take a stance, and pursue the debate even further. Together with the first three sections, Fine's replies consist of a fertile ground to shape the horizon of philosophical investigations in the coming years.

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