On Modal Naturalism

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Résumé

Modal Naturalism (MN) provides a modal epistemology based on the view that science is our primary source of evidence concerning the modal facts. Although modal naturalists allow in principle multiple routes to modal knowledge, they nevertheless think that following science is the best way to know truths about possibilities and necessities. MN presupposes that there are objective modal facts, but it aims to be neutral regarding the various theories of modality. In this talk, I will comment on the following three basic tenets of view under consideration: first, MN is a species of naturalism according to which it is the content of best scientific theories that put epistemic constraints on the content of metaphysical theories. Second, MN, in virtue of recognizing science as the primary source of evidence, gives no evidential weight to modal intuitions. Third, MN aims to be neutral between contingentism and necessitarianism about laws of nature. More precisely, in this talk I argue that there are reasons to think that MN should extend the scope of evidential sources beyond the content of scientific theories to scientific practice and methods. In addition, I show that MN's reluctance to appeal to intuitions cannot be reconciled in some cases with the actual practice of scientists. Finally, I argue that pace MN's promise, no modal epistemology aiming to give us epistemic access to facts about a kind of objective modality demarcated by appealing to laws of nature can be neutral regarding the nomic necessitarianism-nomic contingentism debate.

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