

Philosophy 570: Contemporary Analytic Philosophy

Presuppositions and the Semantics of ‘Knowledge’ Attributions

Instructor: Professor Michael Blome-Tillmann

Office: 940 Leacock

Office Hours: Monday, 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Email: michael.blome@mcgill.ca

Course Location and Time: Leacock 927, Monday 1:05 p.m. - 2:55 p.m.

Prerequisites:

- Phil 210 – Introduction to Deductive Logic
- Phil 419 – Epistemology
- Phil 415 – Philosophy of Language

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In recent years, the semantics of the predicate ‘know’ has become one of the most actively and controversially discussed topics in epistemology and the philosophy of language. This seminar is located at the heart of this debate: its goal is to examine in detail and to critically evaluate the theories currently defended.

The seminar is organized in two parts. The first part offers an overview of the current debate and critically assesses existing views in the field. In particular, the first part offers an in-depth examination of recent versions of Epistemic Contextualism (Cohen, DeRose, Lewis), their motivation by linguistic data, and their relation to sceptical puzzles.

The second part of the seminar is more experimental. We will discuss recent work by the instructor on the semantics of ‘know’, viz., an account that suggests a close connection between the content of ‘know’ in a given context C and what is pragmatically presupposed in C . The emerging view—*Presuppositional Epistemic Contextualism*—shall build on previous work regarding the notion of a pragmatic presupposition (Stalnaker): it is argued that modelling the context-sensitivity of ‘know’ in terms of pragmatic presuppositions results in a fruitful and illuminating account of the contextual mechanisms influencing the content of ‘know’. After an introduction to this new approach, we will explore its consequences for a wide array of epistemological issues relating to the nature of evidence and epistemic justification, proper basing, closure, transmission failure, Moorean dogmatism, epistemic bootstrapping, assertion, and practical reasoning. The second part of the seminar will thus be concerned with a fresh approach not only to the semantics of ‘know’ but also to a variety of other hotly debated topics in epistemology and the philosophy of language.

REQUIREMENTS

It is required that students attend the seminar and participate in the discussion. Participants will be required to give up to three seminar presentations of 15 minutes and to prepare a handout of (exactly) one page.

ASSESSMENT

The final mark will be based on one major paper, which might be the reworking of a seminar presentation (about 20 pages, on a topic to be agreed upon individually). In marking the paper, I

shall take into consideration the extent to which it reflects active engagement in seminar discussion. I shall not accept a paper that might have been written in a different context altogether.

Late papers will be downgraded at a rate of 1/3 of a grade per day (e.g. from A- to B+, C to C-), including weekend days/holidays. Evidence of a consistent lack of preparation (including non-attendance without a medical excuse) results in a deduction of up to 5% from the course grade. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) only when requested at least 24 hours before the paper is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor's note documenting illness. Extensions will not be more than seven days.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

N.B. The below schedule is indicative only and may change during the semester.

1. Sceptical Arguments
2. Epistemic Contextualism
 - a. Cohen
 - b. Lewis
3. Knowledge and Presuppositions
4. PEC and the Sceptical Puzzle
5. Objections and Replies
6. Linguistic Issues
7. Transmission Failure 1
 - a. Wright
 - b. Pryor
8. Transmission Failure 2: PEC
9. The Lottery Puzzle 1
 - a. Vogel
 - b. Hawthorne
10. The Lottery Puzzle 2: PEC
11. Moral Knowledge and the Problem of Induction
12. Knowledge First Epistemology

WEBCT

The webpage for this course is located at <http://www.mcgill.ca/webct/>. It will be used to post the syllabus, readings, and periodic announcements. If you have technical problems with WebCT, contact ICT customer support at: <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/students/help/>.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. NB: In cases of doubt I will use the turnitin plagiarism detection software to determine whether submissions are plagiarized.
(see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.