

PHILOSOPHY 55000
CONTEXTUALISM
University of Chicago, spring 2009

Course Instructor: Jason Bridges
Office hours: Monday 3:00-4:30, Stuart 231C

DESCRIPTION

This seminar examines contextualism, understood as the thesis that the content of an utterance is shaped in far-reaching and unobvious ways by the context in which it is uttered. Contextualism has recently become one of the most widely discussed views in contemporary philosophy of language, as well as in the philosophy of mind and epistemology. Among other things, contextualists have argued: that contextualism spells the doom of truth-conditional semantics (as exemplified by Davidsonian theories of meaning and related formal approaches such as Montague semantics), that demonstrating the truth of contextualism was one of the central preoccupations of the later Wittgenstein, and that contextualism resolves, or at least sheds significant light on, fundamental and long-standing metaphysical and epistemological puzzles. We will discuss all three of these claims.

READINGS

The following texts are required and will be available for purchase at the Seminary Cooperative Bookstore:

Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford University Press, 1999).
Charles Travis, *Thought's Footing* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

The remaining course readings will be available through the course's Chalk website.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be a fifteen page paper due on June 10th, in Professor Bridges's mailbox in the Philosophy Dept. Office (Stuart 202). The topic must be approved ahead of time. Topics must concern an issue discussed in the class and papers must make significant use of course readings.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

- This schedule may be subject to modification as the quarter unfolds.
- The readings marked "*further*" won't be a focus of class discussion but are worth reading, particularly if you're writing a paper on the topic at issue.

Part I: Skepticism, knowledge and ordinary use

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1	Course overview	
2	Skeptical vs. ordinary claims about knowledge I	Stanley Cavell, <i>The Claim of Reason</i> , chapters 6 and 8 Barry Stroud, "Reasonable claims: Cavell and the tradition" <i>Further:</i> Thompson Clarke, "The legacy of skepticism"
3	Skeptical vs. ordinary claims about knowledge II	John Austin, "Other Minds" Barry Stroud, <i>The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism</i> , chapter 2

4	Epistemic contextualism and 'ordinary use'	Keith DeRose, "Contextualism and knowledge attributions" Keith DeRose, "The ordinary language basis for contextualism, and the new invariantism" Jason Bridges, "Corralling context-sensitivity," excerpt a <i>Further:</i> Keith DeRose, <i>The Case for Contextualism</i> , chapters 1-3
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Part II: Context shifting arguments

5	Pia's leaves, etc.	Charles Travis, "Pragmatics" Anne Bezuidenhout, "Truth-conditional pragmatics"
6	Point and content	Charles Travis, <i>Thought's Footing</i> , chapter 1, pp. 32-35 Mark Richard, "Contextualism and relativism" Jason Bridges, "Corralling context-sensitivity," excerpt b <i>Further:</i> Timothy Williamson, "Contextualism, subject-sensitive invariantism, and knowledge of knowledge"

Part III: Saying

7	What is said?	John MacFarlane, "Semantics, pragmatics and all that" Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore, "On an alleged connection between indirect speech and the theory of meaning" Jason Stanley, "Modality and what is said" <i>Further:</i> Elizabeth Camp, "Contextualism, metaphor and what is said"
8	Is contextualism a semantic doctrine?	Jason Stanley, "On the linguistic basis for contextualism" Robert Stainton, "Contextualism in epistemology and the context sensitivity of 'knows'"

Part IV: Truth-conditional semantics and linguistic understanding

9	What does a Davidsonian theory of meaning claim about the nature of language mastery?	Charles Travis, <i>Thought's Footing</i> , chapter 1, remainder John McDowell "In defense of modesty" Jason Bridges, "Wittgenstein vs. semantic contextualism," pp. 20-25 <i>Further:</i> John McDowell, "Another plea for modesty"
10	Family resemblances and understanding	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§66-88 Charles Travis, <i>Thought's Footing</i> , chapter 2 Jason Bridges, "Wittgenstein vs. semantic contextualism," remainder

Part V: Relativism

11	Relativism as an alternative to contextualism	John MacFarlane, "Relativism and disagreement" Niko Kolodny and John MacFarlane, "Ifs and oughts" <i>Further:</i> John MacFarlane, "Non-indexical contextualism"
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