

PHI 534/LIN 534. Philosophy of Language: Context and Content

Philosophers often exploit context-sensitivity of theoretically interesting expressions such as “know”, “good”, “truth”, “necessary”, “ought”, or vague expressions, to support theories about knowledge, goodness, truth, modality, obligation, vagueness. They also appeal to context in explaining various social practices. The details of such arguments rely on particular assumptions about what context is, and how it interacts with meaning. In this course we will examine these assumptions by drawing on research in philosophy, linguistics and cognitive science, questioning how such accounts inform or constrain philosophers’ exploitation of context-sensitivity. We will also examine a set of formal tools that will help us demarcate and model different conceptions of context, thus allowing us to be precise about their theoretical role, and their relative merits and limitations.