

Course Description: Phil 9406 “Contemporary Externalism about Mental Content”

The University of Western Ontario

Prof. Benjamin Hill

Fall 2010

Tues. 8:30-11:30

Prof. Benjamin Hill (4147 StH)

Content or semantic externalism is one of the largest and most significant current philosophical trends. For the past 35+ years it has revolutionized the philosophies of mind and language. This course will be a graduate level introduction to content externalism (with an emphasis the philosophy of mind side) and an examination of new directions in the externalist research program. The new direction is the exploration of the conceptual connections between content externalism and justification or epistemological externalism, which has recently be pushed most notably by Sanford Goldberg.

The course will begin with the re-emergence of content externalism in the 1970s, focusing on Kripke’s, Putnam’s, and Burge’s developments. Next we shall consider what philosophical consequences are supposed to follow from this externalist revolution regarding other topics, including mental causation, representationalism, and self-knowledge. Finally we shall end with Goldberg’s (et al.) exploration(s) of conceptually connections between content externalism and the justification externalism that emerged in epistemology around the same time as content externalism emerged.

My interests in contemporary forms of externalism are informed by (a) my historical interests and concerns and (b) my concern that in the externalist-internalist debates antagonists are completely talking past one another. Historically I am most interested in the contrasts between contemporary content externalism and medieval and early modern versions of it. These contrasts are substantial and deep, ranging from the motivations for the externalist analysis, the arguments proffered for it, the conceptual connections it has for phenomenological analysis, and its consequences for skepticism and self-knowledge. In addition, I am professionally interested in contemporary externalism because I want to make a rational choice regarding which paradigm to adopt, externalist or internalist, and so I want to find some common ground on which to adjudicate the externalism-internalism debate. My hope is that by systematically re-exploring contemporary externalism I can discover some such common ground. These contrasts and questions will no doubt arise in classroom discussions, but it will not be assumed that students know of these historical antecedents to contemporary forms of externalism nor that they share my two primary concerns. Indeed, it is assumed that like in all graduate level seminars students will bring (or quickly develop) their own concerns with and approaches to the material and that those interests will work their ways into classroom discussion and inform their contributions to it.

Texts studied will include:

Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*;

Pessin and Goldberg, eds., *The Twin Earth Chronicles*;

Goldberg, *Anti-individualism*.

(Additional articles and supplementary materials will be added as the course progresses on an “as needed” basis.)

Requirements:

Term Paper (60%): Students are required to write a 7500-9000 word paper. The paper will be due on Friday December 17th. No late papers will be accepted. The ideal paper will be suitable for publication in any of the professional journals of analytic philosophy.

Oral Presentation (20%): All students will be required to present a 30 minute oral report on one of the courses “additional articles and supplementary materials”. These reports should be primarily expository, but avenues for critical exploration should also be mentioned (though not developed).

Philosophical Journal (10%): All students will be required to maintain a “philosophical journal” consisting of questions and reflections on the readings. Entries need to be no longer than a page or so and there is no expectation that they will be “polished.” Journals will be graded based on the philosophical content, insightfulness, and suggestiveness of the entries.

Class Participation (10%): It is expected that all students will positively contribute to all classroom discussions and any e-discussions conducted by the course.

This course will satisfy the “Mind and Language” distribution requirement for UWO’s Ph. D. program.

This course is part of UWO’s program in the philosophy of mind and language: “Mind and Language: Contemporary Core, Foundations, and Connections”. This is a course in the “Contemporary Core” component of the program.

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Tentative Readings Schedule

Date	Topic	Required Reading	Suggested Readings	Supplemental Readings
Sept. 14	Introduction: Contemporary Internalism		Frege, “On Sense and Reference” Russell, “On Denoting”	
Sept. 21	Rigid Designation	Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , 22-105		
Sept. 28	Essentialism	Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , 106-155		
Oct. 5	Twin Earth	Putnam, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’,” [PG, 3-52]		Mellor, “Natural Kinds,” [PG, 69-80] Searle, “Are Meanings in the Head?” [PG, 89-97] Sterelny, “Natural-Kind Terms,” [PG, 98-114]
Oct. 12	Anti-Individualism	Burge, “Individualism and the Mental,” [PG, 125-141] Burge, “Other Bodies,” [PG, 142-160]		
Oct. 19	Deflationary Responses to Putnam and Burge	Jerry Fodor, “From <i>Psychosemantics: Individualism and Supervenience</i> ,” [PG 192-218]; Jerry Fodor, “A Modal Argument for Narrow Content,” [PG, 264-283]; Tim Crane, “All the Difference in the World,” [PG, 284-304]		Derek Ball, “Twin-earth Externalism and Concept Possession,” <i>Australasian Journal of Philosophy</i> 85 (2007): 457-472;
Oct. 26	Propositions, Intentional Contents, and Externalism	Brian Loar, “Social Content and Psychological Content,” [PG, 180-191] Robert Stalnaker, “On What’s in the Head,” [PG, 238-260] Crane		John McDowell, “Putnam on Mind and Meaning,” [PG, 305-317]
Nov. 2	Externalist Self-Knowledge	Tyler Burge, “Individualism and Self-Knowledge,” [PG, 342-354]; Akeel Bilgrami, “Can		Donald Davidson, “Knowing One’s Own Mind,” [PG 323-341]

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		Externalism be Reconciled with Self-Knowledge?” [PG, 362-393]		
Nov. 9	Arg. from Communication	Goldberg [A-I] 11-82		Henderson, “Testimonial Beliefs and Epistemic Competence,” <i>Nous</i>
Nov. 16	Arg. from Misunderstanding	Goldberg [A-I] 83-101		Goldberg, “Semantic Externalism and Epistemic Illusion,” in <i>Internalism and Externalism in Semantics and Epistemology</i> , ed. Goldberg 235-252
Nov. 23	Semantic Anti-Individualism	Goldberg [A-I] 102-130		
Nov. 30	Epistemic Anti-Individualism	Goldberg [A-I] 133-155 and 200-238		Goldberg [A-I] 156-173; Goldberg [A-I] 174-199; Asa Wikforss, <i>Philosophy Compass</i> 3 (2008):151-181; Mikkel Gerken, “Is Internalism about Knowledge Consistent with Content Externalism?” <i>Philosophia</i> 26 (2008): 87-96
Dec. 7	Assessment – Round Table Discussion	none		