

Second Paper Topic
Philosophy 102
Fall, 2008

Length should be approximately 5 pages. Please use a line spacing of 3 lines per inch and a left margin of 1½ inches, 1 inch elsewhere. Point size may be no less than 10. Please be sure the printing is clear and that the paper stock is of a type that does not make handwriting difficult. Papers will be evaluated on the basis of both content and quality of writing. You may if you wish cite the Web notes for this class, but this is not a research paper that would require other sources.

Note on plagiarism. If you use the ideas or words of other persons in your paper, you must cite their source; otherwise you are guilty of plagiarism. Citing your sources gives credit where credit is due, and it also makes clear what contributions are your own. On the practical side, the University of California has a strict policy forbidding plagiarism. The following statement is from the UC Code of Academic Conduct: “Know what plagiarism is and take steps to avoid it. When using the words or ideas of another, even if paraphrased in your own words, you must cite your source. Students who are confused about whether a particular act constitutes plagiarism should consult the instructor who gave the assignment.”

Due: Monday, December 1, in class.

Epistemological contextualists have claimed that the truth-value of an epistemic attribution (an attribution of knowledge or ignorance to an epistemic subject) varies with the context of attribution. Devise your own case (similar to Dretske’s zoo case) in which a single epistemic subject at a single time is attributed knowledge by an epistemic attributor in one context and ignorance in another context. In other words, devise a case in which attributor A attributes knowledge that p at t to an epistemic subject S in context of attribution C_1 but attributes ignorance that p at t to S in context of attribution C_2 . Be sure to explain what it is about the context that brings about the change in attribution.

Next, explain why you think the attributions vary with the context. (Hint: it would seem to involve the raising or lowering of epistemic standards on the part of A.) What do you think are the consequences of this phenomenon of variability in attribution? For example, do you think that there is no fixed standard of knowledge? That attributors mean different things in different contexts of attribution? That there is no fact of the matter about the truth or falsehood of sentences of the form ‘S knows that p’? That there is a fixed standard of knowledge and that when there is variation, there is an error in one of the epistemic attributions? That something else is going on? Whichever explanation you give, try to give good reasons to accept your diagnosis as the best.