

Title: Syntactic Arguments in the Contextualism/Relativism Debate

Abstract: In the contemporary semantic debate between contextualism and relativism about various expressions (predicates of personal taste, epistemic modals, “know” and its kin, aesthetic and moral terms etc.), most relativists have stressed the need to account for the intuitions people are said to have in various situations such as disagreement, retraction or eavesdropping. On their part, contextualists have responded by pointing to a number of phenomena of a more syntactic nature, such as binding, licensing, control etc., thought to favor their view over relativism. Using as a working example predicates of personal taste, in this talk I will focus on such arguments with the aim of assessing their dialectical efficacy. After presenting each argument, I will point to ways in which the relativist can accommodate it and, in some cases, even turn it around for her advantage. In the end, I will explore whether the ways to answer to the contextualist arguments considered can be turned into a unitary view about the expressions involved that is compatible with relativism and briefly sketch such a view based on the notion of “variadic operators”.