

Plexology 101: Back to Basics

Fall 2025

Karen Bennett

Tuesdays 12:15-3:15

106 Somerset St, 534b

(we can discuss having a zoom option for when students are ill or away at a conference)

Everybody knows about the grounding revolution. But somewhere along the way, some important questions got blurred together, and maybe certain assumptions got unwittingly made. I don't like the current state of the grounding literature, and it's not because I don't like grounding. I do like grounding. Sort of. I think. Depending on what it means to "like grounding". The fact that it is not obvious what it means is part of the problem.

The seminar starts with the following two thoughts:

- We should theorize in a unified way about a subject matter that I call the 'plexic', not *just* in a one-by-one way about particular notions belonging to the subject matter, like grounding (or building more generally). If we keep an eye on the whole package, we can theorize more clearly about which plexic notions are more fundamental than which, whether any are fundamental full-stop, and which ones, and why those, etc. It also permits a better taxonomy of views.
- The immediate lesson of the important arguments that launched the revolution is not that we need a fundamental grounding relation in particular—nor even that we need *some or other* fundamental plexicity. It's rather that we have certain ways of thinking and talking that seem both legitimate and important (even indispensable), but which cannot be given straightforward modal truth-conditions. There are other options for dealing with this kind of phenomenon. Are they plausible? Well, no one has been investigating them. Let's start.

The first 2/3 of the semester will be devoted to unpacking these ideas, their consequences, and the terrain of positions and disputes that opens up. Sometimes we will take a bird's eye view, and sometimes we will get our hands dirty with the details. I have currently left the final third of the semester open, so we can see where we wind up.

Guiding principles for class:

- Aim for constructive discussion, and treat other participants with respect.
- Remember that not everyone has a deep background in the literature. If you are referencing something not in the assigned reading, try to sketch enough background so that everyone can follow.

Requirements: The semester will be divided roughly in half, each beginning with several weeks of instructor-led discussion, and culminating in two weeks of student-led presentations structured like APA colloquia. All students taking the course for credit will do some writing and at least one presentation, but the details will vary among types of students.

For everyone, the two goals are i) working on giving talks *and incorporating feedback*, and ii) practice writing short, tightly argued pieces.

Grad students taking for research credit: You will give two 25 minute presentations followed by 25 minutes of Q&A. Each of these presentations will then be polished into a 3000 word paper, taking into account the feedback from the Q&A. At the end of term, you will revise one of the short papers into a 5000 word paper. Each short paper and presentation will be worth 15% of your grade, for a total of 60%. Your longer paper will be worth the remaining 40% of your grade.

Rutgers grad students taking for “non-research credit”: you are expected to do the readings and fully participate in the course—you’re not auditing—but will only do one of the two presentations & short papers. At the end of term, you will revise the short paper in light of feedback; this revision can but need not involve expanding it into a longer paper.

Undergraduates: you will do one somewhat shorter presentation, write two 3000 word papers, and revise one of them in response to feedback. The default will be that you will present in the second round rather than the first, but talk to us if you’d rather do one in the first round. You must revise and resubmit one paper, but you may choose which. Your overall course grade will be determined as follows: presentation 20%, unrevised short paper 25%, revised short paper 40%, participation/preparedness 15%.

Due dates: The first short paper is due 10/28. The second short paper is due 12/15. The final revised/expanded paper is due January 15. Please be in touch with me if you need adjustments to these deadlines.

Readings: will be made available on my webpage: www.karenbennett.org

Preliminary schedule

Introduction: the term 'plexic', and a potted history of the hyperintensional revolution

- 9/2 Kim, "Concepts of Supervenience," (1984), p 67 only
Kim, "Supervenience as a Philosophical Concept," (1990), from 139 at "in any event, these two ideas...", skip §3, and read §4
Kim, "Postscripts on Supervenience," §2
Rosen, "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction" (2010), §§1-3 and 14
Bennett, "Finding Dry Ground," in progress, sect. 1-4

Other optional background: Fine, "Guide to Ground" (2012)

Seeing new options I: different choices of starting point

- 9/9 Wilson, "The Fundamentality First Approach to Metaphysical Structure" (forthcoming)

9/16 Bennett, "The Determination First Approach to Plexology" (forthcoming)
Schaffer, "Questions of Content for Wilson's Fundamentality First" (forthcoming)

Seeing new options II: non-robust-realist interpretations

- 9/23 Bennett, "Finding Dry Ground" §7 (in progress)
Thompson, "Fictionalism About Grounding" (2021)

9/30 Hall, "The Epistemic Approach to Ground" (2023)
Thompson, "How to be an Antirealist about Metaphysical Explanation" (2023)
Sider, "Reductionism about Modality" §4 (2003)

10/7 **no class**

10/14 **presentations**

10/21 **presentations**

10/28 **Paper 1 due**

van Roojen, "Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism"
Thomasson, "Precis of *Norms and Necessity*"

11/4 continued, reading TBA

Towards plexic epistemology?

11/11 TBA

11/18 TBA

11/25 no class (Rutgers runs *Thursday* classes on the Tuesday of Thanksgiving week)

12/2 presentations

12/9 presentations