

Alex Silk

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Specializations

Philosophy of Language • Metaethics • Ethics • Formal Semantics & Pragmatics

Competencies

Nietzsche • Philosophy of Law • Logic • Epistemology

Employment

University of Birmingham, Lecturer in Philosophy, since 2013

Education

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: Ph.D. in Philosophy, 2013

Dissertation: *What Normative Terms Mean and Why It Matters for Ethical Theory*

Committee: Allan Gibbard (co-chair), Peter Railton (co-chair), Eric Swanson, Ezra Keshet

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: M.A. in Philosophy, 2010

Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Visiting Researcher in Philosophy & Linguistics, Spring 2012, Spring 2013

Australia National University: Visiting Student in Philosophy, Summer 2010

Wheaton College: B.A. with Honors in Philosophy, *Summa cum laude*, 2008

Monographs

Discourse Contextualism: A Framework for Contextualist Semantics and Pragmatics. 2016. Oxford University Press UK.

Semantics with Assignment Variables. In preparation. (current draft: goo.gl/kFVhw3)

Publications

- “Expectation Biases and Context Management with Negative Polar Questions”
Forthcoming. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*.
- “Weak and Strong Necessity Modals: On Linguistic Means of Expressing ‘A Primitive Concept OUGHT’”
Forthcoming. In B. Dunaway & D. Plunkett (Eds.), *Meaning, Decision, and Norms: Themes from the Work of Allan Gibbard*.
- “Normativity in Language and Law”
2019. In D. Plunkett, S. Shapiro, K. Toh (Eds.), *Dimensions of Normativity: New Essays on Metaethics and Jurisprudence*, pp. 287–313.
- “Theories of Vagueness and Theories of Law”
2019. *Legal Theory*.
- “Commitment and States of Mind with Mood and Modality”
2018. *Natural Language Semantics* 26(2): 125–166.
- “Nietzsche and Contemporary Metaethics”
2018. In P. Katsafanas (Ed.), *The Nietzschean Mind*, pp. 247–263.
- “Normative Language in Context”
Winner of the 2015 Sanders Prize in Metaethics
2017. In R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 12*, pp. 206–243.
- “How to Embed an Epistemic Modal: Attitude Problems and Other Defects of Character”
2017. *Philosophical Studies* 174: 1773–1799.
- “Modality, Weights, and Inconsistent Premise Sets”
2017. *Journal of Semantics* 34(4): 683–707.
- “Contextualism in Metaethics”
2017. In T. McPherson and D. Plunkett (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, pp. 102–118.
- “The Progressive and Verbs of Creation”
2016. *Journal of Semantics* 33(1): 19–48.
- “Update Semantics for Weak Necessity Modals”
2016. In O. Roy, A. Tamminga, M. Willer (Eds.), *Deontic Logic and Normative Systems (DEON 2016)*, pp. 237–255.
- “How to Be an Ethical Expressivist”
2015. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91(1): 47–81.
- “Nietzschean Constructivism: Ethics and Metaethics for All and None”
2015. *Inquiry*, Special Issue: Nietzsche’s Moral Psychology, 58(3): 244–280.
- “What Normative Terms Mean and Why It Matters for Ethical Theory”
2015. In M. Timmons (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics, Vol. 5*, pp. 296–325.
- “Accommodation and Negotiation with Context-Sensitive Expressions”

2014. *Thought* 3(2): 115–123.
- “Evidence-Sensitivity in Weak Necessity Deontic Modals”
2014. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 43(4): 691–723.
- “Why ‘Ought’ Detaches: Or, Why You Ought to Get With My Friends (If You Want to Be My Lover)”
2014. *Philosophers’ Imprint* 14(7): 1–16.
- “Wither Anankastics?” (with Billy Dunaway)
2014. *Philosophical Perspectives* 28: *Ethics*, 75–94.
- “Truth-Conditions and the Meanings of Ethical Terms”
2013. In R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 8*, pp. 195–222.
- “Deontic Conditionals: Weak and Strong”
2013. In *Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Linguists*, University of Geneva.
- “Modality, Weights, and Inconsistent Premise Sets”
2012. In A. Chereches (Ed.), *Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT)* 22, pp. 43–64.
- “Ethics and Values” (with Peter Railton)
2015. In *International Encyclopedia for the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edn., pp. 71–77.
- Critical Notice, G. Fletcher & M. Ridge (Eds.), *Having it Both Ways: Hybrid Theories and Modern Metaethics*. 2017. *Analysis* 77(1): 197–211.
- Review, P. Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*. In *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*. 2013. ndpr.nd.edu/news/43499-agency-and-the-foundations-of-ethics-nietzschean-constitutivism/
- Review, R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 6*. In *Ethics* 122 (2012): 622–627.

Awards, Grants, and Honors

Leverhulme Research Fellowship: *Context-Sensitivity in Normative Language and Discourse*, 2019–2020. Value: £50,740

AHRC Early Career Research Grant: *Context-Sensitivity in Natural Language*, 2016–2018
Principal Investigator on joint project with Daniel Rothschild. Value: £245,000

Winner, Sanders Prize in Metaethics, 2015 (for “Normative Language in Context”)
Annual essay competition open to scholars within 15 years of receiving a PhD

Outstanding Teaching Award, Nomination, University of Birmingham, 2017–2018

Invited discussant in the 2nd annual workshop of the International Society for Nietzsche Studies, hosted by the University of Chicago’s Center for Law, Philosophy & Human Values, March 2017

Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship, Spring 2012–Spring 2013
University-wide dissertation award: One-year non-teaching fellowship

Rackham Graduate School International Research Award, July 2012

APA Graduate Student Travel Stipend, APA Eastern Division Meetings, December 2011 & 2013

Invited participant to the Conference on Meaning in Context, NCSU Logic and Cognitive Science Initiative, September 2011

European Summer School in Logic, Language, and Information (ESLLI) Prize for the Best Paper Presentation, August 2011

NEH Summer Seminar in 20th Century American Philosophy: Quine and Davidson, Princeton University, June–July 2011
One of two graduate students selected

Co-Editor, *The Philosopher's Annual*, Summer 2011

Charles L. Stevenson Prize, 2011
Annual award by the Philosophy Department at the University of Michigan for the best Candidacy Dossier

Rackham Graduate School Candidate Graduate Student Research Grant, July 2011

Indiana Philosophical Association Graduate Student Essay Prize Winner, April 2011

University of Michigan Center for Ethics and Public Life Pre-Candidate Fellow, 2010

Rackham Graduate School Pre-Candidate Graduate Student Research Grant, March 2010

The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi Inductee, March 2010
All-discipline national honor society for top 10% of graduate students

University of Michigan Marshall M. Weinberg Summer Fellowship, May 2009
Prize for academic distinction during the early years of one's graduate education

Illinois Philosophical Association Essay Contest Winner, November 2008

Rackham Graduate School Conference Travel Grants, April 2009, July 2010, August 2011, July 2012

Wheaton College Scholastic Honor Society Inductee, April 2008

Wheaton College Alumni Senior Scholarship Award Winner, April 2007
Award for the student most deserving of recognition based on campus and community involvement, academic achievements, future goals, faculty recommendation, and cumulative GPA

Phi Sigma Tau Inductee (National Honor Society in Philosophy), April 2007

National Merit Scholarship, Fall 2004–Spring 2005

Selected Talks

“Semantics with Assignment Variables”
UC-San Diego, April 2018
APA Pacific Division Meeting, March 2018

- “Theories of Vagueness and Theories of Law”
Edinburgh Legal Theory Seminar Series, November 2017
- “Evaluational Adjectives”
University of St. Andrews, November 2017
The Third Varieties of Normativity Workshop, Uppsala University, April 2017
English Language Research Seminar Series, English Language & Applied Linguistics, University of Birmingham, October 2015
University College London, March 2015
- “Update Semantics for Weak Necessity Modals”
13th International Conference on Deontic Logic and Normative Systems, DEON 2016
- “How to Embed an Epistemic Modal”
APA Pacific Division Meeting, April 2016
2nd Logic and Language Conference, Institute of Philosophy, London, March 2014
- “Normative Language in Context”
1st Annual UNC Metaethics Workshop, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, October 2015 (Sanders Prize in Metaethics)
- “Normativity in Language and Law”
Yale Workshop in Metaethics and Philosophy of Law, April 2015
- “Discourse Contextualism: An Application to Normative Language”
Rio 2015 Metaethics Conference, January 2015
Tilburg University, October 2014
Eidyn Conference on Normativity and Modality, University of Edinburgh, May 2014
Oxford Moral Philosophy Seminar, January 2014
- “Vagueness as Contextual Indecision”
University of Leeds, Workshop in Semantics & Philosophy of Language, March 2014
- “Discourse Contextualism: A Framework for Contextualist Semantics and Pragmatics”
Semantic Content Workshop, Barcelona, November 2014
Birmingham Workshop in Semantics and Pragmatics, November 2013
Centre for Metaphysics and Mind, University of Leeds, November 2013
- “What Normative Terms Mean and Why It Matters for Ethical Theory”
Fifth Annual Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics, January 2014
- “Deontic Conditionals: Weak and Strong”
APA Eastern Division Meeting, December 2013
International Congress of Linguists (ICL) 19, July 2013
Eighth Barcelona Workshop in Issues in the Theory of Reference: Conditionals, June 2013
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Syntax and Semantics Group, March 2012
- “‘Ought’ and ‘Must’: Some Philosophical Therapy”
University of Glasgow, November 2013
Deontic Modality Workshop, University of Southern California, May 2013

- Northwestern Workshop on Deontic Modals, April 2013
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Work in Progress Seminar, March 2013
- “How to Be an Ethical Expressivist”
 APA Central Division Meeting, February 2014
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Graduate Student Working Group, March 2013
- “Truth-Conditions and the Meanings of Ethical Terms”
 Eighth Annual Metaethics Workshop, University of Wisconsin–Madison, September 2011
- “Modality, Weights, and Inconsistent Premise Sets”
 12th International Conference on Deontic Logic and Normative Systems, DEON 2014
 Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 22, May 2012
- “Evidence Sensitivity in Weak Necessity Deontic Modals”
 Australian Association of Philosophy Conference, July 2012
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Ethics Group, March 2012
 European Summer School in Logic, Language, and Information (ESSLLI) 16, August 2011
- “Why ‘Ought’ Detaches”
 APA Eastern Division Meeting, December 2011
 Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, August 2011
 Indiana Philosophical Association Spring Conference, April 2011
 Harvard-MIT Graduate Philosophy Conference, March 2011
 Australian Association of Philosophy Conference, July 2010
- “The Origins of Moral Judgment: Ethics Without (Deontological) Intuitions”
 Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference on Consciousness, April 2009
- “Expressivism and the Frege-Geach Problem: A Solution and Dilemma”
 Illinois Philosophical Association Conference, November 2008
 Pacific University Philosophy Conference, April 2008
 Intermountain West Student Philosophy Conference, March 2008
 Phi Sigma Tau Gamma Chapter Philosophy Conference, March 2008
- “Agent Causation: Luck and the Problem of Free Will”
 Intermountain West Student Philosophy Conference, March 2007
- Comments on “Dynamic Thoughts on Ifs and Oughts,” by Malte Willer
 Workshop in Philosophy and Linguistics, University of Michigan, December 2012
- Comments on “The Subjective/Objective Distinction,” by Fabrizio Cariani
 APA Central Division Meeting (Invited session on deontic modals), February 2012
- Comments on “The Equal Weight View and Moral Disagreement,” by Brian Besong
 Indiana Philosophical Association Spring Meeting, April 2011

Service

Member of the Editorial Board for *Semantics and Pragmatics*, since 2013

Reviewer for Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy**, *Dialectica*, *Ergo**, *Ethics**, *European Journal of Philosophy*, German Academic Exchange Service, *Inquiry*, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, *Journal of Philosophical Logic**, *Journal of Philosophy*, *Journal of Semantics**, *Linguistics and Philosophy**, *Mind**, *Natural Language Semantics*, North American Summer School in Logic, Language and Information (NASSLLI), *Noûs**, Oxford University Press*, *Philosophers' Imprint*, *Philosophical Quarterly**, *Philosophical Review**, *Philosophical Studies**, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Res Publica*, *Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT)**, *Semantics and Pragmatics**, *Synthese**, *Thought* (* Multiple submissions refereed)

PhD Examiner, Tilburg University, 2019

Context and Variables Conference Co-organizer, Oxford University, May 2017

Diversity in the Workplace Training Certificate, University of Birmingham, 2017

Philosophy Society Seminar Series Co-organizer, University of Birmingham, 2016–2017

Welfare Tutor, School of Philosophy, Theology & Religion, University of Birmingham, 2014–2016

Senior Tutor, School of Philosophy, Theology & Religion, University of Birmingham, 2014

Expert Community Resource Mentor in Philosophy for Local High School Students, Winter 2011

Center for Ethics & Public Life Speaker Series Co-organizer, Spring 2010–Spring 2011

Ethics Discussion Group Co-organizer, Winter 2010–Fall 2011

Metaethics and Philosophy of Language Reading Group Co-organizer, Winter 2010–Winter 2011

Philosophy Department Graduate Student Instructor Workshop Mentor, Fall 2011

McDonnell Inter-University Consortium on Causal Learning (Invited Participant & Volunteer), Spring 2010

Graduate Student Representative to the Rackham Student Forum, Spring 2010–Spring 2013

Teaching

University of Michigan Graduate Teacher Certificate, Fall 2012

Teaching and professional development, including courses on teaching, class feedback sessions and evaluations, and a teaching mentorship.

University of Birmingham

Nietzsche, Spring 2014–2016, Fall 2016–2018

Philosophy of Language and the Linguistic Study of Meaning, Spring 2015–2016, Fall 2016–2018

Paradigms of Belief, Fall 2018 (organized by Sophia Vasalou)

Postgraduate Research Seminar, Spring 2015

Global Ethics (Master's), Fall 2013, 2014, 2015

Global Ethics (Master's, Distance Learning), Fall 2014, 2015
Metaethics, Fall 2013

Philosophical Projects, 2013–
Dissertation Supervision (Master's & PhD), 2013–

Primary Instructor, University of Michigan
Introduction to Philosophy, Winter 2011

Graduate Student Instructor, University of Michigan
Problems of Philosophy (E. Curley), Fall 2009
Types of Philosophy (V. Caston), Winter 2010
Ethics (S. Buss), Fall 2011