

Alex Silk

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Specializations

Philosophy of Language • Metaethics • Ethics

Competencies

Nietzsche • Philosophy of Law • Logic • Epistemology

Academic Appointments

University of Birmingham, Department of Philosophy
Associate Professor, 2020–
Assistant Professor, 2013–2020

Education

PhD in Philosophy, University of Michigan, 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

MA in Philosophy, University of Michigan (Charles L. Stevenson Prize), 2010

Visiting Student in Philosophy and Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Spring 2012, Spring 2013

Visiting Student in Philosophy, Australia National University, Summer 2010

BA with Honors in Philosophy, Wheaton College (*Summa cum laude*, Best overall performance in graduating class), 2008

Monographs

1. *Semantics with Assignment Variables*. 2021. Cambridge University Press.
2. *Discourse Contextualism: A Framework for Contextualist Semantics and Pragmatics*. 2016. Oxford University Press.

Publications

Articles and Book Chapters

3. “Vagueness and the Comparative Form”
Forthcoming. *Mind*.

4. "Hybrid Theories: Cognitivist Expressivism"
Forthcoming. In D. Copp & C. Rosati (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Meta-Ethics*.
5. "Challenges for Independence-Driven and Context-Repair Responses to the Proviso Problem"
2022. *Natural Language Semantics* 30: 363–377.
6. "Weak and Strong Necessity Modals: On Linguistic Means of Expressing 'A Primitive Concept OUGHT'"
2022. In B. Dunaway & D. Plunkett (Eds.), *Meaning, Decision, and Norms: Themes from the Work of Allan Gibbard*, 203–245. Michigan Publishing. doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9948199
7. "Evaluational Adjectives"
2021. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 102: 127–161.
8. "Expectation Biases and Context Management with Negative Polar Questions"
2020. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 49: 51–92.
9. "Normativity in Language and Law"
2019. In D. Plunkett, S. Shapiro, K. Toh (Eds.), *Dimensions of Normativity: New Essays on Metaethics and Jurisprudence*, 287–313. Oxford University Press.
10. "Theories of Vagueness and Theories of Law"
2019. *Legal Theory* 25: 132–152.
11. "Commitment and States of Mind with Mood and Modality"
2018. *Natural Language Semantics* 26: 125–166.
12. "Nietzsche and Contemporary Metaethics"
2018. In P. Katsafanas (Ed.), *The Nietzschean Mind*, 247–263. Routledge.
13. "Normative Language in Context"
2017. In R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 12*, 206–243.
Winner of the 2015 Sanders Prize in Metaethics
14. "How to Embed an Epistemic Modal: Attitude Problems and Other Defects of Character"
2017. *Philosophical Studies* 174: 1773–1799.
15. "Modality, Weights, and Inconsistent Premise Sets"
2017. *Journal of Semantics* 34: 683–707.
16. "Contextualism in Metaethics"
2017. In T. McPherson and D. Plunkett (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, 102–118.
17. "The Progressive and Verbs of Creation"
2016. *Journal of Semantics* 33: 19–48.
18. "Update Semantics for Weak Necessity Modals"
2016. In O. Roy, A. Tamminga, M. Willer (Eds.), *Deontic Logic and Normative Systems (DEON)* 13, 237–255. College Publications.
19. "How to Be an Ethical Expressivist"
2015. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91: 47–81.
20. "Nietzschean Constructivism: Ethics and Metaethics for All and None"
2015. *Inquiry*, Special Issue: Nietzsche's Moral Psychology, 58: 244–280.

21. “What Normative Terms Mean and Why It Matters for Ethical Theory”
2015. In M. Timmons (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, Vol. 5, 296–325.
22. “Accommodation and Negotiation with Context-Sensitive Expressions”
2014. *Thought* 3: 115–123.
23. “Evidence-Sensitivity in Weak Necessity Deontic Modals”
2014. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 43: 691–723.
24. “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.
25. “Wither Anankastics?” (with Billy Dunaway)
2014. *Philosophical Perspectives* 28: *Ethics*, 75–94.
26. “Truth-Conditions and the Meanings of Ethical Terms”
2013. In R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 8, 195–222.
27. “Deontic Conditionals: Weak and Strong”
2013. In *Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Linguists*, University of Geneva.
28. “Modality, Weights, and Inconsistent Premise Sets”
2012. In A. Chereches (Ed.), *Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT)* 22, 43–64.

Book Reviews

29. Review of J. Richardson, *Nietzsche’s Values*, 2020, Oxford University Press.
2021. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/nietzsches-values
30. Critical Notice of G. Fletcher & M. Ridge (Eds.), *Having it Both Ways: Hybrid Theories and Modern Metaethics*, 2014, Oxford University Press.
2017. *Analysis* 77: 197–211.
31. Review of P. Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 2013, Oxford University Press.
2013. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, ndpr.nd.edu/news/43499-agency-and-the-foundations-of-ethics-nietzschean-constitutivism
32. Review of R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 6, 2011, Oxford University Press.
2012. *Ethics* 122: 622–627.

Other Invited Shorter Pieces

33. “Nietzsche and Overcoming Nihilism”
2024. *Institute for Art and Ideas (IAI) News* (June 10), iai.tv/articles/endorsing-desires-is-the-answer-to-nihilism-auid-2856
34. “Ethics and Values” (with Peter Railton)
2015. In *International Encyclopedia for the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edn., 71–77. Elsevier.

Awards, Grants, Honors

The British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship, *Conditional Predicates in Context*, 2025–2027 (£169,029)

Top Scholar in Semantics ranking, ScholarGPS, 2024

Linguistic Society of America Leonard Bloomfield Book Award Nomination for *Semantics with Assignment Variables*, 2022

Leverhulme Research Fellowship, *Context-Sensitivity in Normative Language and Discourse*, 2019–2020 (£50,740)

Top Downloaded Paper 2018–2019 certificate for “Evaluational Adjectives”

Arts and Humanities Research Council Early Career Research Grant, *Context-Sensitivity in Natural Language*, Principal Investigator (Co-I Daniel Rothschild), 2016–2018 (£244,885)

Sanders Prize in Metaethics for “Normative Language in Context,” Biennial essay competition open to scholars within 15 years of PhD, Marc Sanders Foundation, 2015 (\$10,000)

Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship, Dissertation award, University of Michigan, 2012–2013 (\$28,800)

Rackham International Research Award, University of Michigan, 2012 (\$3,000)

APA Graduate Student Travel Stipend, APA Eastern Division Meetings, 2011, 2013 (\$300)

Best Paper Prize, European Summer School in Logic, Language and Information, 2011 (€ 500)

Charles L. Stevenson Prize, Best graduate philosophy dossier, University of Michigan, 2011 (\$3,000)

NEH Summer Seminar in 20th Century American Philosophy: Quine and Davidson, One of two graduate students selected, Princeton University, 2011 (\$4,500)

The Philosopher’s Annual, Co-editor, 2011 (\$2,500)

Rackham Candidate Graduate Student Research Grant, University of Michigan, 2011

Indiana Philosophical Association Graduate Student Essay Prize Winner, April 2011

Fellow of the Center for Ethics and Public Life, Competitively awarded fellowship, University of Michigan, 2010 (\$4,000)

Rackham Pre-Candidate Graduate Student Research Grant, University of Michigan, 2010

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

Weinberg Summer Fellowship, Distinction in philosophy, University of Michigan, 2009 (\$3,500)

Illinois Philosophical Association Essay Contest Winner, 2008

Rackham Conference Travel Grants, University of Michigan, 2009–2012

Senior Scholarship Award, Outstanding senior undergraduate prize, Wheaton College Alumni Association, 2007–2008

Presentations (selected)

“Hybrid Theories in Metaethics and Jurisprudence”
Oxford Jurisprudence Discussion Group, 2025

- “Cognitivist Expressivism: *Why?* Or *Why Not?*”
Oxford University, 2024
- “Meaningless Suffering: Nietzsche on ‘The Ascetic Ideal’”
Frankfurt School of Finance & Management, 2023
University of Manchester, 2021
- “Semantics with Assignment Variables”
Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy, 2021
APA Pacific Division Meeting Symposium, 2018
- “Evaluational Adjectives”
University of St. Andrews, 2017
3rd Varieties of Normativity Workshop, Uppsala University, 2017
University College London, 2015
- “Theories of Vagueness and Theories of Law”
Edinburgh Legal Theory Seminar Series, 2017
- “How to Embed an Epistemic Modal”
APA Pacific Division Meeting Symposium, 2016
2nd Logic and Language Conference, Institute of Philosophy, London, 2014
- “Update Semantics for Weak Necessity Modals”
13th International Conference on Deontic Logic and Normative Systems (DEON), 2016
- “Normative Language in Context”
1st Annual UNC Metaethics Workshop, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, 2015
- “Normativity in Language and Law”
Yale Workshop in Metaethics and Philosophy of Law, 2015
- “Deontic Modals”
Invited Guest Lecture, University of Edinburgh, 2014
- “Discourse Contextualism”
Semantic Content Workshop, Barcelona, 2014
Tilburg University, 2014
Eidyn Conference on Normativity and Modality, University of Edinburgh, 2014
Oxford Moral Philosophy Seminar, 2014
Centre for Metaphysics and Mind, University of Leeds, 2013
- “How to Be an Ethical Expressivist”
APA Central Division Meeting Symposium, 2014
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013
- “Modality, Weights, and Inconsistent Premise Sets”
12th International Conference on Deontic Logic and Normative Systems (DEON), 2014
Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 22, 2012
- “Vagueness as Contextual Indecision”

University of Leeds, Workshop in Semantics & Philosophy of Language, 2014

“What Normative Terms Mean and Why It Matters for Ethical Theory”

5th Annual Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics, 2014

“Deontic Conditionals: Weak and Strong”

International Congress of Linguists (ICL) 19, 2013

“‘Ought’ and ‘Must’: Some Philosophical Therapy”

University of Glasgow, 2013

Deontic Modality Workshop, University of Southern California, 2013

Northwestern Workshop on Deontic Modals, 2013

“Evidence Sensitivity in Weak Necessity Deontic Modals”

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012

European Summer School in Logic, Language and Information (ESSLLI) 16, 2011

“Truth-Conditions and the Meanings of Ethical Terms”

8th Annual Metaethics Workshop, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2011

“Why ‘Ought’ Detaches”

Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, 2011

Australian Association of Philosophy Conference, 2010

Comments on “Dynamic Thoughts on Ifs and Oughts” by Malte Willer

Workshop in Philosophy and Linguistics, University of Michigan, 2012

Comments on “The Subjective/Objective Distinction” by Fabrizio Cariani

APA Central Division Meeting (Invited session on deontic modals), 2012

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

Professional Service (external)

Regular refereeing for journals, conferences, academic presses, and funding bodies

*Analysis**, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), *Australasian Journal of Philosophy**, Austrian Science Fund (ASF), *Canadian Journal of Philosophy**, *Dialectica*, *Ergo**, *Erkenntnis*, *Ethics**, *European Journal of Philosophy**, European Research Council (ERC), German Academic Exchange Service, German Research Foundation, Humboldt Foundation, *Inquiry**, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies**, *Journal of Philosophical Logic**, *Journal of Philosophy*, *Journal of Semantics**, *Law and Philosophy*, *Linguistics and Philosophy**, *Mind**, *Natural Language Semantics*, North American Summer School in Logic, Language and Information (NASSLLI), *Noûs**, Oxford University Press*, *Philosophers’ Imprint*, *Philosophical Psychology*, *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)

Mentoring for former students

1 undergraduate, 2023–2024

1 undergraduate, 2022–2023
1 undergraduate, 2020–2021

External PhD Examiner, Tilburg University, 2019

Conference organization

“Bayesian Approaches to Pragmatics,” Co-organizer, UCL, 2018

“Context and Variables,” Co-organizer, Oxford University, 2017

Expert community resource mentor in philosophy for local teen students, 2011

Professional Service (institutional)

Head of Postgraduate Research Admissions in Philosophy, University of Birmingham, 2020–

Event organization

Philosophy Society Seminar Series, University of Birmingham, 2016–2017

Center for Ethics and Public Life Speaker Series, University of Michigan, 2010–2011

Ethics Discussion Group, University of Michigan, 2010–2011

McDonnell Inter-University Consortium on Causal Learning, University of Michigan, 2010

Welfare Officer, Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham, 2014–2016

Undergraduate Senior Tutor, Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham, 2014

Representative to the Rackham Student Forum, University of Michigan, 2010–2013

Mentor for Graduate Student Instructors in Philosophy, University of Michigan, 2011

Postgraduate Research Assistant, L. Loeb, University of Michigan, 2009–2011

Reviewing, editing, and preparing indexes for Early Modern epistemology manuscripts

Teaching

Honors

Academic Tutor of the Year Award Nomination, University of Birmingham, 2023

Outstanding Teaching Award Nomination, University of Birmingham, 2018

Classes taught

Nietzsche, 2014–2018, 2020–2024

Research Skills and Methods – Distance Learning (graduate), 2020–2024

Global Justice – Distance Learning (graduate), 2024

Human Rights (graduate, co-taught), 2021

Moral and Political Philosophy (co-taught), 2021

Problems of Philosophy (co-taught), 2020–2021

Research Skills and Methods (graduate, co-taught), 2020–2021

Paradigms of Belief (co-taught), 2018

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

Postgraduate Research Seminar, 2015

Global Ethics – Distance Learning (graduate), 2014–2015

Global Ethics (graduate), 2013–2015

Metaethics, 2013

Introduction to Philosophy, 2011

Dissertation Supervision: 8 PhD, 1 MRes, 12 MA, 22 BA, 2013–

Internal PhD examiner, 2020

Peer Enrichment of Teaching, University of Birmingham, 2013–

Graduate Teacher Certificate, University of Michigan, 2012

Teaching and professional development certification program including courses on teaching, expert feedback sessions and evaluations, and a teaching mentorship