

Michael Rubin

Curriculum Vitae

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Department of Philosophy
352 Bartlett Hall
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Areas of Specialization

Metaethics, Normative Ethics

Areas of Competence

Social and Political Philosophy, History of Ethics, Applied Ethics, Existentialism,
Logic, Philosophy of Language

Education

Ph.D. University of Massachusetts, Amherst; expected July 2008.
M.A. New York University; 1998
B.A. Boston University; 1996 (*Magna Cum Laude*)

Dissertation

“Synthetic Ethical Naturalism” (dissertation abstract on last page)
Committee: Fred Feldman (chair), Hilary Kornblith, Phillip Bricker, Christopher
Potts.

Publications

“Is Goodness a Homeostatic Property Cluster?”, *Ethics*, forthcoming.

“Sound Intuitions on Moral Twin Earth”, *Philosophical Studies*, forthcoming.

Papers in Progress

“Is ‘Gold’ a Rigid Applier?”

“Brink’s Moral Semantics”

Presentations

“Brink’s Moral Semantics”
Graduate Student Colloquium, UMass Amherst 11/16/07

“Sound Intuitions on Moral Twin Earth”
Graduate Student Colloquium, UMass Amherst 10/13/06

“Cornell Realism”
Graduate Student Colloquium, UMass Amherst 11/21/03

Awards

Heidelberger Prize for “Ignorance and Involuntary Action in the *Nicomachean Ethics*”, University of Massachusetts, 2001

John N. Findlay Award in Philosophy, Boston University, 1996

Courses Taught

As Teaching Associate (full teaching responsibilities)

PHIL 164: Medical Ethics (Fall 2003, Spring 2005; Spring 2007 [Online])

PHIL 160: Introduction to Ethics (Summer 2003; Spring 2006)

PHIL 110: Introduction to Logic (Online) (Fall 2005; Fall 2006)

PHIL 396: Independent Study (Metaethics, Spring 2005)

PHIL 336: Existential Philosophy (Spring 2004, Fall 2004)

PHIL 362: Philosophical Approaches to Politics (Spring 2003)

As Teaching Assistant

PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy (Fall 2002)

Prof. Vere Chappell

PHIL 160: Introduction to Ethics (Spring 2001, Spring 2002)

Prof. Fred Feldman

PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy (Fall, 2001)

Prof. Kevin Klement

PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy (Spring 2000)

Prof. Michael Jacovides

Service

Member, Baystate Franklin Medical Center Ethics Service, 2005-Present.

Ph.D. Qualifying Work

Oral Exam: “Moral Properties” Passed 8/03
Committee: Fred Feldman, Phillip Bricker, Nishitan Shah

Paper: “Skepticism, Contextualism, and Non-Closure” Passed 11/02
Committee: Phillip Bricker, Jonathan Schaffer, Casey Perin

Paper: “Ignorance and Involuntary Action in the *Nicomachean Ethics*” Passed 4/01
Committee: Bruce Aune, Kevin Klement, Gareth Matthews

Graduate Coursework (* indicates audit)

Ethics

Applied Ethics	Peter Unger, NYU
Contemporary Political Philosophy	Thomas Nagel, NYU
Consequentialism and Implementability*	Fred Feldman, UMass
Ethical Intuitionism*	Fred Feldman, UMass
The Good Life	Fred Feldman, UMass
Life and Death	John Richardson and William Ruddick, NYU
Moral Epistemology*	Fred Feldman, UMass
Moral Psychology	Garrett Deckel, NYU
Metaethics*	Fred Feldman, UMass
Metaethics	Sigrun Svavarsdottir, NYU
Normative Ethics	Fred Feldman, UMass
Philosophy of Law	Liam Murphy, NYU

History of Philosophy

Aristotle	Gareth Matthews, UMass
Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	Gareth Matthews, UMass
Early Modern Theories of Action	Vere Chappell, UMass
Hume's <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i>	Vere Chappell, UMass
Philosophy of Roderick Chisholm*	Fred Feldman, UMass

Logic and Philosophy of Language

Kripke's Naming and Necessity*	Lynne Rudder Baker, UMass
Modal Logic	Edmund Gettier, UMass
Philosophy and Logic	Gary Hardegree, UMass
Philosophy of Language	Edmund Gettier, UMass
Vagueness and Indeterminacy	Hartry Field and

Stephen Schiffer, NYU

Metaphysics and Epistemology

Epistemic Contextualism

Epistemology

Free Will

Intuition*

Material Constitution

Philosophy of Religion*

Properties

Proseminar

Truth

Jonathan Schaffer, UMass

Bruce Aune, UMass

Lynne Rudder Baker, UMass

Hilary Kornblith, UMass

Lynne Rudder Baker, UMass

Lynne Rudder Baker, UMass

Jonathan Schaffer, UMass

William Ruddick, NYU

Phillip Bricker, UMass

References

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Hilary Kornblith, Department of Philosophy, University of Massachusetts,
Amherst
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Vere Chappell, Department of Philosophy, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
email: chappell@philos.umass.edu phone: 413-253-7838

Lynne Rudder Baker, Department of Philosophy, University of Massachusetts,
Amherst
email: lrbaker@philos.umass.edu phone: 413-545-4224

Marla Killough, Ethics Service, Baystate Franklin Medical Center
email: Marla.Killough@bhs.org phone: 413-773-2303

Dissertation Abstract

Synthetic Ethical Naturalism

My dissertation is a critique of the influential metaethical view known as ‘synthetic ethical naturalism’ (SEN) or, alternatively, ‘Cornell Realism’. This view is associated with the work of Richard Boyd, David Brink, Peter Railton, and Nicholas Sturgeon, among others. SEN comprises three key theses: first, there are moral properties and facts that are independent of the beliefs and attitudes of moral appraisers (moral realism); second, moral properties and facts are identical to (or constituted by) natural properties and facts (ethical naturalism); and third, sentences used to assert identity or constitution relations between moral and natural properties are expressions of synthetic, *a posteriori* necessities. The last of these theses, which distinguishes SEN from other forms of ethical naturalism, is supported by a fourth: the semantic contents of the central moral predicates such as ‘morally right’ and ‘morally good’ are fixed in part by features external to the minds of speakers (moral semantic externalism).

The first chapter introduces SEN and discusses the most common motivations for accepting it.

The next three chapters are a discussion of the influential “Moral Twin Earth” argument against moral semantic externalism. First, I defend this argument from the charge that the thought experiment upon which it depends is misleading and likely to yield faulty intuitions. I then consider two attempts to amend SEN so as to render it immune to the Moral Twin Earth argument. I show that each of these proposed amendments amounts to an abandonment of SEN. One chapter from this group is forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies* under the title “Sound Intuitions on Moral Twin Earth.”

Chapter Five explores Richard Boyd’s proposal that moral goodness is a “homeostatic property cluster”. If true, Boyd’s hypothesis could be used to support several metaphysical, epistemological, and semantic claims made on behalf of SEN. I advance three arguments against the homeostatic property cluster account of moral goodness. A version of this chapter has been accepted for publication by *Ethics* under the title “Is Goodness a Homeostatic Property Cluster?”

In the sixth chapter, I argue that, unlike our best scientific theories, moral theories are not instrumentally reliable in any interesting way; they do not, for instance, yield novel predictions. I argue, further, that this fact constitutes evidence either against moral realism or else against the claim, constitutive of SEN, that moral knowledge is a species of scientific (or more broadly, *a posteriori*) knowledge.

In Chapter Seven, I argue, first, that moral obligations entail the existence of desire-independent reasons for acting, and second, that such reasons cannot be accommodated within a naturalistic metaphysics of the kind embraced by proponents of SEN.