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AOS Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind & Language, Philosophy of Mathematics

AOC Logic, Metaethics, Philosophy of Science, Formal Semantics & Pragmatics

Employment

University of Southern California (2011 – present)
Provost Post-Doctoral Scholar in the Humanities, School of Philosophy

University of Sydney (May 2012 – August 2012)
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Center for Time

Education

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2005 – 2011)
PhD in Philosophy, with a minor in Linguistics
Dissertation: *Rationality without representation*
Committee: Robert Stalnaker, Stephen Yablo (co-chairs); Alex Byrne, Agustín Rayo

Université de Paris 7 (2004 – 2005)
Master (M2) in Logic and Foundations of Computer Science (track: Mathematical Logic)
Thesis: *Large cardinals and regularity properties of sets of reals in* $L(\mathbb{R})$
Advisor: Stevo Todorčević
Mention très bien (highest honors)

Institut d'Histoire et Philosophie des Sciences (IHPST) (2004 – 2005)
Enrolled in the DEA in Philosophy of Science

Université de Paris 1 (2002 – 2004)
Maîtrise in Philosophy (*mention très bien*)
Thesis: *Indexicality and Belief*
Advisor: François Récanati (Institut Jean Nicod)
Maîtrise in Logic (*mention très bien*)
Licence in Logic (*mention très bien*)

Université de Paris 4 (2001 – 2003)
DEUG in Musicology (*mention bien*)

Universidad Simón Bolívar (1998 – 2001)
Enrolled in a 5 year undergraduate program (*Licenciatura*) in Pure Mathematics

Awards MIT Kenan Sahin Presidential Fellowship (2005)

Presentations

Comments on B. Molyneux, 'On the Infinite Richness of Seeming and its Relevance to the Hard Problem of Consciousness'
Pacific APA, April 2012

Comments on M. Fernández Vargas, 'An Incoherence in Epistemic Internalism'
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, May 2011

'Questions and models'
Philosophy and Model Theory, Université de Paris X (Nanterre)–IHPST, June 2010

'An account of mathematical practice'
EFA, Universidad de Buenos Aires, September 2009

'Communication for expressivists' (with Paolo Santorio)
Eminees group, Harvard University, November 2008

'What expressivism could not be' (with Paolo Santorio)
MIT Work in Progress seminar, May 2008

'Projection, accommodation, and the Proviso Problem'
MIT-Paris workshop on Presuppositions and Implicatures, ENS, May 2007
Revised as 'Toward a dissolution of the Proviso Problem' in *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics*, Vol. 60

Service

Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference, Chair (Summer 2011)

Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, Chair (Summer 2011)

Guest co-editor of a *Philosophical Studies* special issue celebrating the 30th anniversary of Robert Stalnaker's 'Assertion'

Co-organizer of a conference celebrating the 30th anniversary of Robert Stalnaker's 'Assertion', December 2008

Department librarian, MIT Linguistics and Philosophy, 2006–2009

Editorial assistant for the volume *Absolute Generality* (Oxford University Press), edited by A. Rayo and G. Uzquiano, July 2006

Harvard–MIT Graduate Philosophy conference
Reviewer, 2005 – 2009
Co-organizer, 2005 – 2007
Website designer, 2005 – 2006

Courses taken

at MIT, unless otherwise noted

('†': audited)

Formal epistemology† (Robert Stalnaker)
Ontology and its discontents† (Stephen Yablo)
Modeling a representational system† (Agustín Rayo)
The history of the free will debate (Richard Holton)
Explanation and defeat† (Roger White)
Possibility and content† (Agustín Rayo)
Aboutness, with applications† (Stephen Yablo)
Foundational aspects of set theory (Peter Koellner, HARVARD)
Truth† (Vann McGee)
Mathematical thought and its objects† (Charles Parsons, HARVARD)
Metaethics (Richard Holton)
The metaphysics of modality (Robert Stalnaker)
Kant's philosophy of mathematics (Daniel Sutherland, HARVARD)
Mathematical realism (Vann McGee)
Proseminar II (Richard Holton and Robert Stalnaker)
Modal logic† (Robert Stalnaker)
Vagueness (Agustín Rayo)
Proseminar I (Alex Byrne and Rae Langton)
Truth in mathematics (Jean Mosconi), IHPST
Cognitive perspectives on the philosophy of science (Jacques Dubucs, IHPST)
The notion of logical consequence (Philippe de Rouilhan, IHPST)
Pragmatics† (Danny Fox)
Conditionals (Kai von Fintel)
Advanced semantics (Danny Fox and Irene Heim)
Pragmatics (Irene Heim)
Inner model theory for large cardinals† (Peter Koellner, HARVARD)
Introduction to inner model theory† (Peter Koellner: informal seminar)
Descriptive set theory (Alain Louveau, PARIS 7)
Forcing (Ramez Labib–Sami, PARIS 7)
Model theory and set theory (Gabriel Sabbagh, PARIS 7)
Computability and incompleteness (Paul Rozière, PARIS 7)

Teaching

Anglo-American Philosophy since 1950, Spring 2012
Minds, Machines, & Language, Spring 2012
Paradox and infinity, Spring 2011 (at MIT)

Teaching assitantships

Making sense: Language, Thought and Logic (B. Nickel, G. Chierchia and S. Shieber), Harvard, Spring 2010
Philosophical issues in brain science (A. Byrne and P. Sinha), Spring 2009
Paradox and infinity (A. Rayo), Fall 2008
Logic I (V. McGee), Fall 2007
Minds and machines (A. Byrne), Spring 2007
Moral problems and the good life (S. Haslanger), Fall 2006

Languages Spanish (native), English (fluent), French (fluent), Italian (intermediate)

References

Alex Byrne
Professor of Philosophy
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Dissertation summary

Rationality without Representation

The goal of my dissertation is to make room for our moral and mathematical practices within an independently attractive picture of our cognitive lives. On this picture, mental states represent by standing in relations of counterfactual dependence with the things they represent (much like thermometers carry information about the surrounding air). A well-known problem for this picture is that it does not seem to carry over to our moral and mathematical thought. Rather than discard this picture, I suggest we opt for a form of *nonfactualism* on which our moral and mathematical thought does not aim to describe facts. I develop a novel account of mathematical practice along these lines, and defend a well-known variety of nonfactualism about morality. I show how denying that these practices aim to describe facts is compatible with substantial rationality constraints on our moral and mathematical theorizing.

In Chapter 1 ('Negation, expressivism, and intentionality') I argue that the best explanation for why two mental states are inconsistent need not presuppose that such states are representational—that they have, in the jargon, *truth-conditions*. I use this to provide a solution to the 'negation problem' for metaethical expressivism, and show how both factualists and nonfactualists are equally well-placed to account for synchronic rationality constraints. In Chapter 2 ('Structuring logical space') I sketch an account of mathematical practice along non-representational lines. I show how it can do justice to the applicability of mathematics, and propose ways in which one's epistemic goals can impose substantial constraints on which mathematical theories to accept. Chapter 3 ('Good questions') provides a general account of the way in which rationality constrains changes in our hypothesis space. In particular, I show how some such changes can be better than others by placing the discussion within a general framework of rational dynamics, on which rational epistemic change involves maximizing expected *epistemic* utility.

What emerges is a middle ground between a straightforward factualist treatment of morality and mathematics and the implausible view that, when it comes to morality or mathematics, 'anything goes'.