

LUKE ELSON

Curriculum Vitae and Dissertation Abstract

Department of Philosophy,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Caldwell Hall CB# 3125,
NC 27599, United States of America.

sites.google.com/site/lukeelson
elson@live.unc.edu
+1 (919) 339-1115
British Citizen; U.S. Legal Resident

Area of Specialization: Moral Philosophy.

Areas of Competence: Epistemology, Logic, Medieval Philosophy, Metaphysics, Philosophy of Science.

Education

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:

PhD in Philosophy, 2014 (expected): 'Vagueness in Action'
Committee: Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (chair), Keith Simmons, Ram Neta, Simon Blackburn, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Duke University).

MA in Philosophy, 2009: 'Vagueness, Truth, and Nothing Else'
Committee: Keith Simmons (chair), Thomas Hofweber, Marc Lange.

Oxford University: Exeter College. BA in Mathematics and Philosophy, 2005.

Publications

'Heaps and Chains: is the Chaining Argument for Parity a Sorites?' in *Ethics* (forthcoming).

'Borderline Cases and the Collapsing Principle' in *Utilitas* (forthcoming; available online).

Presentations outside UNC

1. 'Satisficing, Arbitrariness, and Indeterminacy' at the Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (RoME). University of Colorado, Boulder. August 2013. Commenter: Preston Werner.
2. 'Self-Torture as Practical Sorites'
 - (a) Harvard-MIT Graduate Conference. Cambridge, MA. April 2013. Commenter: Ryan Doody. (This conference was canceled due to the Boston bombings.)
 - (b) North Carolina Philosophical Society. East Carolina University. February 2013.
3. 'Incommensurability as Comparative Borderlineness'
 - (a) South Carolina Society for Philosophy. College of Charleston. March 2013;
 - (b) Fourth Dutch Conference on Practical Philosophy. TU/Eindhoven. Nov. 2012.

Conference Commentaries:

1. Stewart Eskew, 'Moral Supervenience and Moral Knowledge: How Not to Defend Moral Perception' at APA Eastern Division. Baltimore, MD. December 2013.
2. Shane George, 'Why Hard Cases are Incommensurable' at Central States Philosophical Association. Oklahoma State University, Tulsa. October 2013.
3. Carl Posy, 'Kantian Discipline and the Paradoxes of Knowledge' at UNC/Hebrew University Workshop. Jerusalem. May 2013. (My comments were delivered by proxy.)
4. Ayca Boylu, 'Thick Concepts and Intrinsic Goodness Attributions' at APA Pacific Division. San Francisco, CA. March 2013.

Teaching

With full responsibility at UNC Chapel Hill:

1. Introduction to Mathematical Logic. Fall 2013.
2. Introduction to Medieval Philosophy. Summer 2013.
3. Experience and Reality (Metaphysics). Summer 2012.
4. Making Sense of Ourselves. Summer 2011, Summer 2009.
5. Introduction to Ethics. Spring 2010.

As Teaching Assistant or equivalent:

1. Introduction to Philosophy, for Carolina Courses Online. Scheduled Summer 2014.
2. Mathematical Logic for Thomas Hofweber. Spring 2013.
3. Introduction to Bioethics, for Carolina Courses Online. Summer 2010.
4. Philosophy of Science for Marc Lange. Spring 2009.
5. Making Sense of Ourselves for C.D.C. Reeve. Fall 2008.

Professional Activities and Service

Reviewer for *Utilitas*. 2013.

Editor, 'Incommensurability of Value' category on PhilPapers.org. 2012–present.

Organiser, UNC Philosophy Work in Progress Series. 2008–09 and 2013–14.

External Advisor, Southern Alamance County High School Ethics Bowl Team. 2011–13.

Graduate Assistant, UNC Philosophy Colloquium. 2008–09 and 2011.

Philosophy Representative, UNC Graduate and Professional Student Federation. 2011–12.

Honours and Awards

Prize for best graduate student paper. North Carolina Philosophical Society. February 2013.
Non-teaching Fellowships. UNC Philosophy Department. 2007–2008, Fall 2012, Spring 2014.
Richard Brooke Scholarship. 2008–2010 and 2011–2012.
Travel Award (x9). UNC Department of Philosophy and graduate school. 2012–13.

References

Letters of reference are on file with Rebecca Farris (rebecca1@unc.edu).

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord UNC Chapel Hill +1 (919) 627-1403 sayre-mccord@unc.edu	Keith Simmons UNC Chapel Hill +1 (919) 660-3172 ksimmons@email.unc.edu	John Broome University of Oxford + 44 (0)1865 276731 john.broome@philosophy.ox.ac.uk
Ram Neta UNC Chapel Hill +1 (919) 962-3314 neta@email.unc.edu	Walter Sinnott-Armstrong Duke University +1 (919) 962-3327 ws66@duke.edu	Marc Lange (teaching reference) UNC Chapel Hill +1 (919) 962-3324 mlange@email.unc.edu

Dissertation Abstract: ‘Vagueness in Action’

I defend a distinctive role for evaluative vagueness. I show that two longstanding puzzles of rationality are best explained in terms of vagueness, and that the ought-reasons platitude must be modified to cope with indeterminacy.

Two options are *incommensurate* when neither is better, but they are not equally good. Suppose that you are buying a house, and have narrowed your choices down to two. The urban property is closer to your workplace and cheaper to maintain. The rural property is bigger, cheaper, and offers more privacy. You have no clear preference between them. Each is better in some ways, but there is no clear way of weighting those virtues for comparison. I argue that incommensurability is vagueness: your preferences are vague, and so it is vague which of the two houses is better for you.

But all other options, including purchasing neither, are clearly worse, and so you must decide between them. When we choose between incommensurate options, as we often do, we choose in the face of vagueness. I develop an account of rational choice in such situations. The ought-reasons platitude—that one ought to do what one has most reason to do—is false. I vindicate the intuition that in some cases of incommensurability, it is permissible to simply flip a coin. Warren Quinn’s notorious Puzzle of the Self-Torturer is merely a disguised instance of incommensurability and does not, as many have argued, undermine orthodox rational choice theory. Incommensurability is vagueness, and the Self-Torturer is a paradox of vagueness.