

Stan Husi

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EMPLOYMENT

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Assistant Professor of Philosophy, 2012-present
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Visiting Assistant Professor, 2011-2012

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Rice University, May 2011
Dissertation: *Building Reasons Without Authority*
Advisor: George Sher
M.A., Philosophy & Linguistics, University of Tübingen,
Germany, 2005. Thesis: *Can We Imagine the Mind to Be
Massively Modular?*
Visiting Graduate Student, Washington University in Saint
Louis, 2003-2004

SPECIALIZATION

Ethics, Social & Political Philosophy, Meta-Ethics &
Practical Reasons

COMPETENCE

Logic, Early Modern, Philosophy of Mind

HONORS

John W. Gardner Award, Best Dissertation in the Schools
of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rice University, 2011
*The Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation
Fellowship*, 2009-2010
Mellon Foundation Summer Research Grant, 2010 & 2007
Scholarship of the National German Merit Foundation 2001-2005

PUBLICATIONS

‘Against Moral Fictionalism’
Journal of Moral Philosophy, forthcoming
‘Why Reasons Skepticism is Not Self-Defeating’
European Journal of Philosophy, 2011
‘Promising – A Practice and Nothing More?’
in: *Understanding Promises and Agreements: Philosophical Essays*,
edited by Hanoeh Sheinman, Oxford University Press 2011.

PRESENTATIONS

‘Why do what I have reasons to do? In Search of an
Interpretation for the Normative Question’
Special Session on Derek Parfit’s *On What Matters*, The
Fourth Annual Rocky Mountain Ethics Conference
(RoME), University of Colorado, Boulder, 2012

PRESENTATIONS (cont'd)

‘Against Moral Fictionalism’
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee 2012, UNC Chapel Hill 2011, The Fourth Annual Rocky Mountain Ethics Conference (RoME), University of Colorado, Boulder, 2011

‘Subjectivism, the Problem of Appraisal, and the Concern-Cluster Theory’
Joint Meeting of the North & South Carolina Philosophical Society, Elon University, 2012

‘Inescapability and Authority’
Colloquium Presentation, Pacific APA, San Diego, 2011

‘Against Naturalistic Accounts of Normative Reasons’
University of Cologne, Germany & Humboldt University Berlin, Germany, 2011

‘Desire and Desirability for Subjectivists’
University of Graz, Austria, 2011

‘Why Reasons Skepticism is Not Self-Defeating’
The Third Annual Rocky Mountain Ethics Conference (RoME), University of Colorado, Boulder, 2010

‘Promising – A Practice and Nothing More?’
The Second Annual Rocky Mountain Ethics Conference (RoME), University of Colorado, Boulder, 2009

‘Explanation, Justification, and Motivating Reasons.’
Colloquium Presentation, Eastern APA, Philadelphia, 2008

‘Desire Satisfaction Accounts of Value: Actual Versus Informed.’ Colloquium Presentation, Pacific APA, Pasadena, 2008

‘New Wave, Arbitrary Moral Facts, and Radical Error.’
Thirtieth Annual Midsouth Philosophy Conference, Memphis, 2006

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Great Moral Philosophers (Plato, Hobbes, Kant, Mill) at UWM, F’2012

Morality and Business at UNC Chapel Hill, S’2012

Introduction to Ethics at UNC Chapel Hill, F’2011 & S’2012

Social Justice at UNC Chapel Hill, F’2011

Introduction into Philosophy at Rice University, S’2010

Introduction into Logic at Rice University, S’2009 & Summer 2008

Teaching Assistant for Mathematical Logic (Richard Grandy) at Rice University, Fall 2007, 2008

COURSES PREPARED TO TEACH

Introductory courses in the *Ethics & Moral Theory, Social & Political Philosophy, Business Ethics, Environmental Ethics, Bioethics, Logic, History from Descartes to Kant, History of Analytic Philosophy, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy & The Emotions*

Advanced courses in *Ethics & Moral Theory, Social & Political Philosophy, Meta-Ethics, Practical Reasons, Logic (incl. Modal Logic)*

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Academic Assistant for Philosophy Conference ‘Promise and Agreement’ at Rice University 2008.

Homepage: <http://promises.rice.edu>

Organizer of *Work in Progress* at Rice University, where faculty and graduate students present their work

LANGUAGE COMPETENCY

German (native), Latin (degree of *Latinum*), Ancient Greek (degree of *Gaecum*)

& TRANSLATIONS

Klaus Döring, *The Students of Socrates*, in: The Cambridge Companion to Socrates, edited by Donald R. Morrison, Cambridge University Press 2010. (*Original in German*)

GRADUATE COURSES RICE (GPA 4.04)

Social & Political Philosophy (George Sher)

Liberalism (Sher)

Moral Psychology (Sher)

Equality (Sher)

Metaethics (Alastair Norcross)

Utilitarianism (Norcross)

Free Will (Robert Bishop)

Philosophy of Law (Hanoch Sheinman)

Ethics (Sheinman)

Mellon-Seminar (yearlong) on Promises and Agreements (Sheinman)

Research Paper in Practical Reason (Richard Grandy)

Mathematical Logic (Grandy)

Advanced Logic: Alternative Logics (Grandy)

Advanced Logic: Incompleteness, Undecidability & Gödel (Grandy)

History of Analytic Philosophy (Grandy)

Mind & Language (Casey O’Callaghan)

Mind & Intentions (Robert Thompson)

Philosophy of Language (Thompson)

Mellon Seminar (year long) in Leibniz and Spinoza (Mark Kulstad & John Zammito)

(Early) Modern Philosophy (Kulstad)

Ancient Philosophy (Audit) (Donald Morrison)

Mellon Seminar in Emotions (Meredith Skura)

Continental Philosophy (Richard Moran)

**GRADUATE COURSES
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
& TÜBINGEN (SELECTION)**

Philosophy of Psychology (Jose Bermudez)
 Autonomy and Well-Being (Marylin Friedman)
 Normative Ethical Theory (Joel Anderson)
 Current Controversies in Cognitive Science (Philip Robbins)
 Cognitive Psychology (Larry Jacoby)
 Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (yearlong) (Manfred Frank)
 The Early Plato (yearlong) (Reiner Wimmer)
 The Late Plato (yearlong) (Anton Koch)
 Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Ottfried Höffe)
 Popper's *Logic of Discovery* (Herbert Keuth)
 Kripke's Modal Argument (Kai Wehmaier)
 Causation and Time (Frank Hofmann)
 Aesthetical Theory (Marcus Düwell)
 The Aesthetical Theory of Adorno (Düwell)
 Free Will (Thomas Grundmann)
 Modal and Temporal Logic (Peter Schroeder-Heister)
 Modal Calculus (Schroeder-Heister)
 Mathematical Logic (*Department of Mathematics*) (Ulrich Felgner)

REFERENCES

George Sher
 Herbert S. Autrey Professor of Philosophy
 Department of Philosophy, Rice University
 gsher@rice.edu

Richard Grandy
 McManis Professor of Philosophy
 Department of Philosophy, Rice University
 rgrandy@rice.edu

Alastair Norcross
 Associate Professor of Philosophy
 Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado, Boulder
 alastair.norcross@colorado.edu

Mark Kulstad
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 Department of Philosophy, Rice University
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David Phillips
 Associate Professor of Philosophy
 Department of Philosophy, University of Houston
 dphillips@uh.edu

DISSERTATION (SHORT)

Do any norms have an authority over us that is not simply due to our acceptance of practices that embody them? Many believe such practice-transcendent authority is required if we are to make sense of our normative practices, including moral and political philosophy. I disagree, and argue that while there are no norms with practice-transcendent authority, none are needed. I lay out in detail why practice-transcendent normativity cannot be accommodated within the world as we know it. The chief goal of my dissertation, however, is to articulate an interpretation of normative practices that dispenses with externally authoritative facts directing us what to do. Practical questions, I argue, retain their significance only when pursued from an engaged rather than detached perspective; a perspective we adopt when, driven by our concerns and commitments, we actively participate in the resolution of practical problems, including the selection and development of which norms to live by, and are searching for common ground for how to coordinate our individual and joint endeavors. The deliberative enterprise is not unconstrained and is answerable to standards of correctness as it is carried out within a tight web of norms that we do already accept, a web we continuously spin and expand.

DISSERTATION (LONG)

My dissertation defends a comprehensive version of meta-normative skepticism holding that no standard, norm, or principle has objective authority or normative force. The view does not deny either that there are norms, standards of correctness, and principles of various kinds or that it is possible both to succeed or fail in measuring up to their prerogatives. What it does deny is that any norm has the status of commanding with objective authority, the status of giving rise to objective normative reasons to take seriously and follow its demands. Many believe objective authority is required if we are to make sense of and explain the significance of our normative practices. Without authority, they fear, any critical standpoint vis-à-vis our practices would evaporate, even when we have reached a consensus regarding critical matters, which, without correctness, appears to reflect nothing but an ultimately arbitrary choice. I disagree, and argue that while authority cannot be accommodated within the world as we know it, we don't need it either. A chief goal of my dissertation is to propose a positive interpretation of our normative practices that dispenses with authoritative facts directing us what to do. The practical question of what to make of our practices and our involvement with them, I counter, retains significance only when pursued from an engaged rather than a detached perspective – one that we adopt when, driven by our concerns and commitments, we actively participate in the resolution of practical problems, including the selection and development of which norms

to live by, searching for common ground for how to coordinate our individual and joint endeavors. Even though there are no definitive answers, this deliberative enterprise is not unconstrained; it is carried out within a tight web of norms that we do already accept, a web we continuously spin and expand.

The first chapter *Two Concepts of Normativity* introduces the problematic of normative authority by insisting on the important distinction between norms and their status, between the formal feature of being directive in character and the substantive feature of directing with authority. The first distinguishes norms as norms, including their implicit standards of correctness, but it is the second that prompts the entire meta-normative problematic in the first place. There is a common tendency to under-appreciate the meta-normative problematic, and it is partly to blame on our lack of an established vocabulary to express it. The term *normative* itself is ambiguously used, at times denoting the directive element in norms, setting them apart from historical treatises and medical records, at other times denoting their authoritative standing, setting them apart from illegitimate norms. Presumably we are all realists about norms. The public arena in which we debate how to manage our individual and joint affairs is evidently characterized by a great plurality and diversity of norms and standards directing us what to do. Undoubtedly there are plenty of oughts and shoulds *according-to-norm-such-and-such*, plenty of opportunities to commit mistakes *according-to-norm-such-and-such*, and so forth. Language and the law exemplify that indisputable fact best. Whenever we open our mouths to form a sentence we engage in a norm-guided activity. And grammaticality is but one witness for our thoroughgoing involvement with norms. Another is the law. It is unlawful in the United States to hoist any flag higher than the Stars and Stripes. Yet whether authoritative reasons, not just officials, decree that I must comply in my own enclosed yard is unclear and represents a matter wholly distinct from the recognition that I would act contrary to the law if I do not. The normative problematic as I envision it cannot be appreciated solely in terms of standards of correctness, but only in terms of the authority of standard of correctness. Norms are not the solution, but the problem.

The second chapter, *Against Non-reductive Realism*, challenges the idea that some norms just are authoritative practice-independently, even though there is no explanation why. This form of non-reductive normative realism has recently gained considerable support, and holds, in David Enoch's succinct summary, that *there are response-independent, non-natural, irreducibly normative truths, perfectly objective and universal ones, that when successful in our normative inquires we discover rather than create or construct*. Yet to postulate an independent normative realm, I argue, provokes a metaphysics that systematically undermines all epistemic access to normative truths and renders it mysterious why once detached from our concerns they should practically matter to us in the first place. If certain norms were authorized in practice-independent Platonic heaven, how should we ever find out which, and why should we obsequiously follow *them* rather than those that reflect our *own* concerns?

Moreover, the strategy most prominently cited in support of non-reductive normative realism, namely transcendental argumentation, is unsuccessful, even if rhetorically quite impressive. Settling what to accept appears a norm-driven enterprise, the argument goes, in particular whether to accept a skeptical position such as my own. Yet, it continues, skeptics cannot coherently view as authoritative the norms *they* need to rely upon in advancing their case without also relinquishing their very skeptical denial. How, then, can they coherently recommend their view? In response, I admit that making the case for and against any hypothesis does essentially involve norms: we need criteria of argumentative correctness and success. Yet what we do not need is to presume that the norms underwriting philosophical argumentation are equipped with practice-external authority. We only need norms that in fact facilitate our epistemic and dialectical ends, and their employment is not bound up with or contingent upon the metaphysics of Platonic realism.

The third chapter, *Against Reductive Realism*, rejects the proposal that normative authority can be explained on the basis of our desires and endorsements. Initially, desire-based accounts have a lot going for them. The issue of a norm's authority arises in connection with agents, the unique consumers of standards and reasons. They are the ones to whom norms must be addressed, and it is they who must determine whether to take seriously what is so addressed. This naturally leads to the thought that a norm's authority consists in its voluntary endorsement and endorsement, the proposal must say, is a complex form of desire, a disposition to do something, instead of a judgment on the norm's authority (if it were such a judgment, the proposal would move in a circle). Yet desire-based accounts face a fatal dilemma. If the relationship between agents, their desires, and their choices is understood purely descriptively, as a complex natural-psychological phenomenon, it is clear nothing normative can fall out of it. If, however, we appeal to additional normative principles, which asserts that agents ought or have reasons to further their desired ends to explain the normative significance of desire, then we have essentially introduced a principle whose authority cannot itself be accounted for in terms of desire. And this, I argue involves costs for desire-based accounts that far exceed the mere admission of a gap in explanation. It amounts to no less than the rejection of the very rationale that motivates desire-based accounts in the first place.

The fourth chapter, *Against Agency-Based Accounts*, introduces and rejects agency-based accounts of authority. The basic idea is this: For a norm to be authoritative is for it to be constitutive of our own agency and capacity to make practical choices. A norm that enables you to be who you are and that empowers you to ponder what to do must represent a standard you cannot escape. This quintessential Kantian strategy concurs with my own approach in its emphasis on the vantage point of the deliberating agent. The problem, however, is that constitution and authority represent rather distinct phenomena, and to equate them is to equate apples and oranges. At the very least, constitution cannot be the whole story on authority even if it was part of it,

becoming apparent once we realize that many norms held authoritative are not constitutive of anything, without threatening the corresponding status just by itself. More importantly, though, the kind of necessity that underwrites constitution is not the same as that underwriting normative authority. Constitution concerns what we can't help doing more than what we should be doing. It belongs more to the purview of the engineer who designs complex norm-consuming systems than to that of the ethicist and practical philosopher. Suppose acceptance of norm N turns out to be constitutive for doing X. In that case you cannot do X while disrespecting N. Should you also care about doing X, then you would only achieve what you care about so long as you implement N. *You gotta do what you gotta do*. Yet nothing more seems to follow. In particular, nothing of the kind follows that you normatively must comply with N or that you have any reasons to do so. The impossibility of *doing-X-while-disregarding-N* could reflect some basic constraints in design-space akin to that one cannot build stable bridges while disrespecting the laws of gravity. Moreover, the inescapability of doing X itself would not change the normative situation either, but solely place yet another constraint on your practical options. Thus, even if you absolutely had to do X – a choice you simply could not evade – and further that doing X was required for complying with N, this hardly would entail any reasons to comply with N on your part. One constraint would lead to another, but the fact remains that being constrained is not the same as having reasons. You merely would find yourself trapped in a tight corner. Might does not make right, as normative force evidently differs from brute force.

The fifth chapter, “Reasoning without Authority,” develops my counterproposal explaining how norms and social practices can have significance for us without appealing to practice-independent authority. I call the resulting view “revisionary subjectivism” and present deliberation as a very sophisticated form of norm-guided motivation with the aim of accommodating core features of practical deliberation. The chapter starts out with a discussion of the fictionalist response to skepticism, the view that we may manage to retain the benefits of knowingly discredited practices by downgrading our epistemic attitudes towards them from *believing* to *making-believe*. Against this I show the fictionalist response to be inferior to the revisionist alternative, for once fully worked out, fictionalism is going to lead us right to the very doorsteps of revisionism. The benefit the fictional attitude is capable of affording is due to the retainable elements of the corresponding practice. If so, there always is an available revisionary alternative which “shrinks” the original practice to precisely those retainable elements, and which has the advantage of clear-headedly dispensing with the barely-stable fictionalist attitude. Because of this we should stop *making-believe* in what does not work and start *believing* in what does work.

The chapter then addresses the fundamental challenge that without a normative account there cannot be an adequate account of deliberation, the challenge, in particular, that revisionary subjectivism cannot

accommodate the notion of correct deliberation. To this I respond by aiming to show how the subjectivist can accommodate correctness-permitting deliberation from within by helping himself to norms underwriting the deliberative process. These are norms void of normative authority, yet they nonetheless generate formal correctness conditions which, in conjunction with motivational force acquired through our commitments, enable a form of practical deliberation incorporating internal correctness and incorrectness conditions. After this, the chapter turns to a close discussion of concerns, the core component engendering deliberation according to revisionary subjectivism. Attending to concerns more closely reveals an astonishing degree of complexity and richness, which, despite the long noticed importance of desires and concerns for practical deliberation, has not always received adequate treatment in the literature. Concerns are unruly fellows, displaying an intriguing set of properties including diversity, specificity, particularity, and synchronic and diachronic stability. Moreover, concerns appear to contain an element of appraisal, where there often seems, in the relevant object, an element of invitation *drawing in* the concern: concerns do not present themselves as a mere blind reaction aroused by certain aspects of their objects, but as a receptivity to their *attractiveness*. This sometimes enables us to construe a concern as *called-for by the attractiveness of the relevant feature*, as something that can be *appropriate or inappropriate* depending on whether the feature is in fact attractive. In light of this, one of my objectives in the chapter is accommodate the element of appraisal in a manner consistent with skepticism.

This final and positive part of the project supports the first and negative one by neutralizing the general worry that our practices would naturally falter without an external authority supporting them. The case for practice-independent authority rests on painting a grim picture of the alternative. Yet if a brighter picture of that alternative can be painted, the case for such authority loses one major column of support. This is exactly what I set out to do in the final chapter. The idea of normative practices without authority is intriguing because it liberates practical thought from all doubts about an authority transcending our practices. It allows us to grow content with thinking of practical thought and its object as fundamentally of our own making – the only way that makes sense to me. What I share with most of my opponents is the core belief that our practices and their internal standards are indispensable. The lesson I draw from this is different, however. What I wonder is how such a central piece of our lives could be held hostage to uncertain metaphysical truths. Rather than joining into the defense of our practices by defending authority, I maintain no such defense is needed to begin with. My opponents serve our practices poorly by rendering the very point of them contingent on normative metaphysics. By revising the interpretation I seek to conserve the practices.