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SUNY Binghamton
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Areas of Specialization

Moral and Political Philosophy; Philosophy of Law

Areas of Competence

Logic; Applied Ethics; History of Ethics; History of Philosophy (Modern and 19th Century)

Academic Appointments

Visiting Assistant Professor. SUNY Binghamton, Department of Philosophy, 2009 – 2011;

Visiting Assistant Professor. Xavier University, Department of Philosophy, 2008 – 2009.

Education

Ph.D., Philosophy, Boston University, January 2009

Dissertation Title: “How Ought Judges Decide?: A Moral Theory of Adjudication”

Director: David Lyons; Committee: Hugh Baxter, Simon Keller

B.A., Philosophy, University of Portland, 2002

Magna cum laude

Publications

“Do Judges Have an Obligation to Enforce the Law?: Moral Responsibility and Adjudication”
Law and Philosophy Vol. 29: 2 (March 2010).

Writing In Progress or Under Review:

“Judicial Practical Reason: Judges in Morally Imperfect Legal Orders”

“Strict Liability as a Framework for Environmental Injury: A Moral Argument”

“Autonomy-Dependent Reasons and Democracy”

“The Authority of International Law”

“Public Reason Beyond Justice: On the Possibility of Morally Saturated Public Discourse”

Conferences, Talks and Paper Presentations

Faculty Participant in NEH Summer Seminar “Philosophical Perspectives on Democracy and the Global Order,” June 2010.

“Moral Dilemmas and Judicial Duties,” Keynote Address for the *Phi Sigma Tau* Honor Society inauguration ceremony at CUNY Lehman, April 2010.

“Epistemology and Legal Theory,” interview in NEH video series on Epistemological Foundations, May 2009;

“Natural Duties, Public Reason and Civil Disobedience,” presented to the University of Montana *Philosophy Forum*, April 2007;

“Civil Disobedience as Public Address: The Limits and Scope of Forceful Appeal,” presented at the 58th Annual Northwest Philosophy Conference, November 2006;

Commentator on Lori Gruen’s “Toxic Responsibility, Causation, and Luck” at the Karbank Symposium of Environmental Ethics, hosted by Boston University, April 2004;

“Civil Disobedience in Rawls and Singer,” presented to the Boston University Philosophy Department, February 2004.

Academic Honors and Awards

Angela J. and James J. Rallis Memorial Award for Academic Excellence (2008), Boston University Humanities Foundation;

Dissertation Fellowship (2005-2006, Spring 2007, Spring 2008), Boston University;

Matchette Prize for Best Philosophy Graduate Paper in Past Year (2004), Boston University;

Karbank Grant in Environmental Ethics (2003), Boston University;

Teaching Fellowship (2002-2005), Boston University;

Andrews Fellowship (Declined, 2002), Purdue University;

Franz Mayr Award for Most Outstanding Philosophy Graduate (2002), University of Portland;

Best Paper (2001), Northwest Regional Conference for Undergraduate Philosophers;

Holy Cross Scholarship (1998-2002), University of Portland;

Dean’s List (1998-2002), University of Portland College of Arts and Sciences.

Teaching Experience

Fall 2010

International Law and Justice, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton

Liberty and Distributive Justice, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton

Advanced Philosophy of Law, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton

Spring 2010

Philosophy of Law, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton

Liberty and Distributive Justice, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton

Elementary Logic, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton

Fall 2009

Advanced Philosophy of Law, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton
Liberty and Distributive Justice, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton
Methods of Reasoning, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Binghamton

Spring 2009

Theory of Knowledge – Three Sections, Department of Philosophy, Xavier University
Philosophy of Law, Department of Philosophy, Xavier University

Fall 2008

Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy – Three Sections, Department of
Philosophy, Xavier University
John Stuart Mill, Department of Philosophy, Xavier University

Professional Service

Committee Member, Program in Philosophy, Politics, and Law, 2009-2010;
Reviewer, Undergraduate Journal *Arche*, Spring 2008;
Assistant Organizer, Karbank Symposium on Environmental Philosophy, Spring 2004;
Reviewer, Boston University Graduate Student Conference: Immanuel Kant, 2004.

Languages

German (reading).

Professional Memberships

American Philosophical Association
American Section of the International Association for Philosophy of Law and Social
Philosophy (AMINTAPHIL)
The American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy

References

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Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation is a philosophical investigation of judicial responsibility in adjudication. Recent work in political and legal philosophy has tended to assume that the primary problem for determining a judge's official responsibilities is providing an accurate theory of law. Questions concerning how a judge should behave, then, are frequently reduced to questions of legal interpretation or of the viability of some form of legal positivism, natural law, or other theory of the character of human law. Once we acknowledge, however, that valid law only contingently meets conditions that would justify its enforcement (as even most natural law theorists do), the notion that fidelity to the law is the proper starting point for judicial ethics becomes suspect. Actual legal systems suffer from considerable (and sometimes profound) moral deficiencies, and we need a philosophical account of the foundations of judicial responsibility in order to understand the significance of these deficiencies for real world judicial decision-making.

In attempting to provide such a philosophical account, two questions guide my investigation. First, what is the nature of the judge's relationship to the law? In particular, what is the character of the moral requirements that bind the responsible judge to standing law and legal practice? Second, what form should judicial-reasoning take in light of these moral requirements and the particular circumstances of adjudication? Some existing states are clearly imperfect polities; in terms of their institutional arrangements and policies, they suffer from serious and substantial moral shortcomings. To what extent and in what ways are these deficiencies relevant to responsible adjudication? Once we have a good sense of the type of moral principles that are relevant to the judicial office, we can look at the implications of those principles for judicial reasoning in an imperfect polity.

I begin by considering the suggestion that judges always have *prima facie* reason to enforce standing law. For example, we might think that the judicial oath of office, the occupation of the judicial role, or administrative fairness always give the judge some, even if limited, obligation to adjudicate strictly in accordance with legal requirements. I show how these rationales fail to establish such a general obligation – they do not give judges significant reason for fidelity in cases of morally deficient law. My argument is not that judges should typically be inconsiderate of legal requirements, but rather that they must continually countenance those demands in light of certain kinds of ethical considerations and political and social realities.

Next, I argue that judges must be concerned that their decisions meet basic requirements of political legitimacy. That is, given their *de facto* control over state power, they need be concerned that their decisions do not demand what the state has no right to enforce. Judicial reasoning can be sensitive to this requirement by employing the justification of the law and legal practice of a particular jurisdiction in the construction of that law. To make sense of what this means in practice, I discuss recent work on legal interpretation, focusing especially on that of Ronald Dworkin. I do not endorse Dworkin's theory of law, but instead argue that certain features of his interpretive method offer morally defensible adjudicative advice to the judge.