

## LAUREN ASHWELL

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**Areas of Specialization:** Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind, Moral Psychology, Feminist Philosophy

**Areas of Competence:** Logic, Epistemology, Ethics

### Education

- 2003-2009 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, PhD candidate in Philosophy, degree expected 06/09  
Dissertation: *Dispositional Interference and the Mind: Desire, Perception and Rules*  
Committee: Richard Holton (chair), Alex Byrne, Rae Langton  
(see attached Dissertation Abstract for further details)
- 2003 University of Auckland, MA, Philosophy, with first class honours,  
Thesis: *Conceivability and Modal Error*  
Committee: Denis Robinson, Jonathan McKeown-Green
- 2002 University of Auckland, BA (Honours), Philosophy  
Thesis: *Hybrid Modal Interval Logics*  
Supervisor: Jeremy Seligman
- 1997-2001 University of Auckland, BA, Philosophy
- 1997-2001 University of Auckland, BSc, Mathematics

### Awards

- 2003-2008 Kenan Sahin Presidential Graduate Fellowship, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- 2002 University of Auckland Masters' Scholarship
- 2002 Freemasons' Postgraduate Research Scholarship
- 2001 Australian National University, Research School of Social Sciences, Summer Scholarship  
in Philosophy
- 2000 Australian National University, Research School of Information Sciences and  
Engineering, Summer Scholarship in Logic
- 2000 Montgomery Memorial Prize for Best Work in Logic
- 2000 Senior Prize in Philosophy
- 1999 Senior Prize in Mathematics

## **Presentations**

‘Superficial Dispositionalism’

(Metaphysics)

*Philosophy Department Seminar Series*, University of Bristol, United Kingdom 2008

‘Is all Wrong-Doing Self-Objectification?’

(Kant and Feminist Ethics)

*United Kingdom Kant Society Graduate Conference*, University of Manchester, United Kingdom 2008

*Australasian Association of Philosophy*, Sydney, Australia 2005

*Philosophy Department Seminar Series*, University of Auckland, New Zealand 2005

*Philosophy Department Seminar Series*, University of Waikato, New Zealand 2005

*Workshop on Gender and Philosophy*, MIT 2005

‘Masking Desire – and perhaps finking it too’

(Metaphysics and Moral Psychology)

*Australasian Association of Philosophy*, Armidale, Australia 2007

*Philosophy Department Seminar Series*, University of Auckland, New Zealand 2007

Reply to Alex Byrne’s ‘Possibility and Imagination’

(Philosophy of Mind, Modal Epistemology)

*MITing of the Minds conference*, MIT 2007

‘Feminine Responses: What Women Want in a Metaethical Theory’

(Feminism, Metaethics)

*Workshop on Gender and Philosophy*, MIT 2007

‘Admitting Defeat’

(Epistemology)

*Australasian Association of Philosophy, NZ division*, Dunedin, New Zealand 2005

‘Conception by Omission’

(Modal Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind and Epistemology)

*MITing of the Minds conference*, MIT 2005

‘Aristotelian Ends’

(Aristotle's Ethics)

*Philosophy Department Seminar Series*, University of Auckland, New Zealand 2004

‘Metaphysical Mix-ups’

(Modal Epistemology and Philosophy of Language)

*Philosophy Society*, Australian National University, Research School of Social Sciences, Australia 2002

*Australasian Association of Philosophy*, Christchurch, New Zealand 2002

## Teaching

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### Lecturing

- 2005 Lecturer and course coordinator – PHIL315: *Advanced Metalogic*, University of Auckland  
2003 Lecturer – PHIL105: *Critical Thinking*, University of Auckland

### Additional Invited Class Lectures

- ‘Liberty and its Limits: Moralism (Dworkin and Langton: Free Speech and Pornography)’  
*The Responsibilities of Public Action*, J.F.K School of Government, Harvard University 2006  
‘Possible Worlds’  
*Philosophical Logic*, University of Auckland 2005  
‘The Measurement Problem and the Mind’  
*Philosophy of Quantum Mechanics*, MIT 2005  
‘The Knowledge Argument’  
*Problems in Philosophy*, MIT 2004

### Teaching Assistant (MIT)

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|-----------|--|------------------------------|
| 2008      | Writing Tutor for 24.09, <i>Minds and Machines</i>             | Alex Byrne                   |
| 2007      | Writing Tutor for 24.01, <i>Classics of Western Philosophy</i> | Rae Langton                  |
| 2007      | TA for 24.01, <i>Classics of Western Philosophy</i>            | Rae Langton                  |
| 2006      | TA for 24.120, <i>Moral Psychology</i>                         | Richard Holton               |
| 2006      | TA for 24.09, <i>Minds and Machines</i>                        | Alex Byrne                   |
| 2005      | TA for 24.111, <i>Philosophy of Quantum Mechanics</i>          | Ned Hall                     |
| 2004-2005 | TA for 24.00, <i>Problems in Philosophy</i>                    | Sally Haslanger, Rae Langton |

### Teaching Assistant (Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government)

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|------|--|-----------------------|
| 2006 | TA for API-601, <i>The Responsibilities of Public Action</i> | Christopher Robichaud |
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### Teaching Assistant (University of Auckland)

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|-----------|---|---|
| 2005      | Grader for PHIL323, <i>Philosophical Logic</i>                  | Jonathan McKeown-Green                        |
| 2005      | Lecture assistant for PHIL 105, <i>Critical Thinking</i>        | Jonathan McKeown-Green                        |
| 2002-2005 | Grader for PHIL101, <i>Introduction to Logic</i>                | Rod Girle, Jeremy Seligman                    |
| 2001      | TA for PHIL100, <i>Introduction to Metaphysics</i>              | Denis Robinson,<br>Rosalind Hursthouse        |
| 2001      | TA for PHIL261/361, <i>Metaphysical Structures of the World</i> | Denis Robinson, Peter<br>Forrest, Robert Nola |
| 2000-2001 | TA for PHIL201, <i>Introduction to Metalogic</i>                | Jeremy Seligman                               |
| 2000-2001 | TA for PHIL101, <i>Introduction to Logic</i>                    | Rod Girle, Jeremy Seligman                    |

## **Graduate Courses Taken**

(\* indicates audited class)

### **Metaphysics, Philosophy of Language and Philosophy of Mind**

Metaphysics	Denis Robinson (University of Auckland)
Philosophy of Language	Fred Kroon (University of Auckland)
Topics in Metaphysics	Stephen Yablo (MIT)
*Philosophy of Mind	Jonathan McKeown-Green, Justine Kingsbury (University of Auckland)
*Topics in Philosophy of Language	Robert Stalnaker (MIT)
*Topics in Philosophy of Mind (Greatest Hits)	Alex Byrne (MIT)
*Topics in Philosophy of Mind (Perception)	Alex Byrne, Susanna Siegel (MIT/Harvard)
*Topics in Philosophy of Mind (Memory)	Alex Byrne (MIT)

### **Ethics, Moral Psychology and Philosophy of Action**

Topics in Moral Philosophy (Consequentialism)	Caspar Hare (MIT)
Topics in Moral Philosophy (Metaethics)	Caspar Hare (MIT)
*Topics in Mind and Morality	Alex Byrne, Caspar Hare (MIT)
*Special Studies: Metaethics	Richard Holton (MIT)
*Philosophy of Action	Douglas Lavin (Harvard)
*Virtue Ethics	Martha Nussbaum (Harvard)

### **Philosophy of Science and Epistemology**

Topics in Epistemology (A Priori Knowledge)	Sally Haslanger (MIT)
Topics in Philosophy of Science	Ned Hall (MIT)
*Topics in Epistemology	Roger White (MIT)

### **History of Philosophy**

History of Philosophy (Aristotle)	Sally Haslanger (MIT)
History of Philosophy (Kant's Ethics)	Rae Langton (MIT)
*Topics in History of Philosophy (Free Will)	Richard Holton (MIT)

### **Logic, Computation and Philosophy of Mathematics**

Alternative Models of Computation	Cristian Calude (University of Auckland)
Mathematical Logic	David McIntyre (University of Auckland)
Modal Logic	Robert Stalnaker (MIT)
Special Studies: Metalogic	Jeremy Seligman (University of Auckland)
Topics in Philosophical Logic	Vann McGee (MIT)
*Philosophy of Logic (Foundations of Mathematics)	Fred Kroon, Thomas Forster (University of Auckland)

## **Other Philosophy**

Proseminar in Philosophy (I – Frege to Wittgenstein) Ned Hall (MIT)

Proseminar in Philosophy (II – Austin to Kripke) Alex Byrne, Robert Stalnaker (MIT)

## **Academic Service**

2007-2008 Co-organizer, Harvard/MIT Graduate Student Conference

2007 Research Assistant for Alex Byrne – Compiled and summarized articles on the psychology of introspection

2006-2007 Co-organizer, 'Eminees' (Harvard and MIT Metaphysics and Epistemology Reading Group)

2005 Co-organizer, Philosophy Prospective Students' Visit, MIT

2004-2005 Co-organizer, Philosophy Department Colloquium Series, MIT

## **References**

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## **Further References**

Jeremy Seligman, +64 9 373 7599 ext.87992, j.seligman@auckland.ac.nz,

Department of Philosophy, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre, Auckland 1142, New Zealand

Jonathan McKeown-Green, +64 9 373 7599 ext.84631, j.mckeown-green@auckland.ac.nz,

Department of Philosophy, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre, Auckland 1142, New Zealand

## Dissertation Abstract

### Dispositional Interference and the Mind: Desire, Perception and Rules

In this dissertation, I bring the philosophy of mind into closer contact with the metaphysics of dispositions, to the benefit of both. Many orthodox theories of the mind class mental states as dispositional; these theories require us to think of dispositions as interacting with each other in complex ways. However, a certain metaphysical position poses problems for this sort of theory: the claim that there cannot be dispositional interference from intrinsic properties. It is old news that an object can have a disposition yet not manifest it in the disposition's stimulus conditions, because of interfering factors. Such factors are commonly called *finks* and *masks*. Finks and masks falsify the *counterfactual* associated with the disposition, yet their presence does not make the dispositional ascription false. However, it is *also* generally thought that finks and masks must be *extrinsic* to the object; if the interference is *intrinsic*, then the object does not have the disposition. If it is in virtue of an intrinsic property that a glass would fail to break when struck, then the glass is not fragile; if an extrinsic property, such as bubble-wrap, were to prevent the glass from breaking, this would not affect the glass's fragility. I argue that there are cases of dispositional interference by intrinsic properties of the disposition bearer, and show how this conclusion plays out with regard to several different dispositional theories of mental faculties. In particular, I argue that the possibility of intrinsic dispositional interference allows us to answer Kripke's skeptical problem concerning rule-following, and can also help us in giving plausible dispositional theories of perceptual content and desires.

**Chapter 1: The Rejection of Superficial Dispositionalism.** Superficial Dispositionalism is the view that the line between interference which merely falsifies the counterfactual associated with the disposition and that which also falsifies the dispositional ascription is drawn by the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction; intrinsic interferers cannot be finks or masks. I provide two kinds of examples of intrinsic interference. If the first is rejected as an example of intrinsic masking, Superficial Dispositionalism collapses into the view that dispositional ascriptions are equivalent to counterfactuals. If the second type of example is rejected, then we must deny that paradigmatic dispositions, such as fragility, are intrinsic. If paradigmatic dispositions are not intrinsic then the central argument *for* the impossibility of intrinsic finks and masks is undermined. Allowing for intrinsic finks and masks gives us the possibility of understanding the *having of* a disposition D as both dependent on some intrinsic properties of its bearer and independent of others, even where those properties would interfere with, or overdetermine, the particular responses that D properly manifests itself in.

**Chapter 2: Desire.** In philosophy of mind, metaethics and moral psychology, it is common to assert that desires are, roughly speaking, dispositions to bring about their contents. However, if Superficial Dispositionalism were true, we could not give such a dispositional theory of desires, because Superficial Dispositionalism does not allow that an agent could have competing dispositions. Desires may interfere with one another, and so compete to be causes of my action. For example, I may desire to spend my holiday in France, and also desire to stay at home with my family. These desires conflict with each other, as both cannot be fully manifest in my action. Superficial Dispositionalism cannot accommodate this feature

of our desires for these dispositional theories, and, furthermore, any way of complicating the disposition associated with the desire either does not avoid the problem, or does not accord with our practices of assigning responsibility based on which desire we act on. Now that we have seen the problems with Superficial Dispositionalism, we have a metaphysical view of dispositions that allows for the disposition bearer having competing intrinsic dispositions, and so we can give a plausible dispositional account of desire.

**Chapter 3: Perception.** Armstrong, in *Perception and the Physical World* (1961), gives a dispositional analysis of the content of perception: the content of your perceptual experience is what you are disposed to believe upon having that perception. This account faces problems if there cannot be intrinsic dispositional interference. Where I know that there is an illusion, say if faced with the Müller-Lyer illusion, it seems I'm not disposed to believe that things are the way they appear. After all, I don't believe upon seeing the lines that they are of different lengths. Thus the content of an experience and its effect on our beliefs can come apart. However, since we *can* in fact have dispositional interference from intrinsic properties, cases of known illusion can be thought of as cases of having dispositions to believe that things are as they appear, which have been intrinsically interfered with. Given the cognitive effort needed to avoid simply taking the world as it appears, there does seem to be some temptation – some disposition – pulling in the direction of believing things are as they seem, even when an illusion is known to be present. (chapter at first draft)

**Chapter 4: Rule-following.** As Philip Pettit points out (“The Reality of Rule-Following” 1990), solving the rule-following problem is “of the greatest importance to the philosophy of mind”, as without an answer to this problem we have an extremely strong objection to any naturalistic theory of mind. Kripke (on behalf of Wittgenstein) argued that no natural, intrinsic property of an individual's mental state can do the job both of determining the meanings of her words, while also playing meaning's normative role. Kripke argued that dispositional solutions are impossible, but his understanding of the metaphysics of dispositions was much more simplistic than that which has emerged in the last 20 years. Although the more sophisticated understanding of dispositions seems at first to provide a promising avenue of response to Kripke, dispositional solutions that appeal to this, such as given by C.B. Martin and John Heil (“Rules and Powers”, 1998), have been rejected (“Dispositions, Rules and Finks”, Toby Handfield and Alexander Bird 2008) because they rely on the possibility of *intrinsic* dispositional interference. In this chapter I sketch a dispositional solution to the rule-following problem, drawing on work from my first chapter. Dispositions can play the role, in particular cases, of pinning down the particular rule that constitutes the meaning of a word as uttered by a language user. I argue that this fact is to be found in my higher order dispositions to correct my responses. This should not, however, be taken to show that *all* meaning in language is completely determined by these dispositions. The meaning of most words in natural languages is not to be wholly found in intrinsic dispositions of individuals. Therefore, though I show that dispositions to follow *some* rules, such as the infamous *plus* rule, can be constituted by an individual's dispositions, I favour something more akin to Kripke's own response to the problem as it concerns the meanings of most of natural language.