

SUSAN M. BENCOMO

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Department of Philosophy
Northwestern University
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AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION: Ancient Greek Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Moral Psychology

AREA OF COMPETENCE: Applied Ethics

EDUCATION

Northwestern University, Ph.D., Philosophy

December, 2023

THESIS: *Desire and the Birth of the Self: What Plato's Theory of Erōs Can Tell Us About Value*
Committee: Richard Kraut (Co-chair), Kyla Ebels-Duggan (Co-chair), Patricia Marechal

ABSTRACT: Desire is perplexing due to its vexing marriage of our activity and passivity. Further, desires exert an attractive pressure on us— what I call imperatival force— which we take to figure in desire's role in the explanation of our action. Some have thought Plato was the first to hold that desires are appearances of goodness, thereby explaining both our passivity and their imperatival force. This Perceptual Model remains attractive to many today. My dissertation argues that the Perceptual Model fails as a model of desire, and that Plato's view differs importantly from it. In the *Symposium* and *Republic*, Plato explains imperatival force in terms of the attractiveness of the *self* which we recognize in a desired object. When we value, we identify with another object. I argue Plato offers a cognitive theory of desire for the good (*Erōs*), explicated as correct belief (*orthē doxa*), but also that cognitive states are ultimately explicated as evaluative acts. Plato offers a theory of valuing that informs his understanding of cognition. While his view that conation and cognition are the same principle is not viable by modern lights, his theory of the structure of valuing attitudes provides insight into how valuing differs from perception and belief.

Boston College, M.A., Philosophy

2004

St. John's College (Santa Fe, NM), B.A. Liberal Arts

1998

THESIS: "On the Relationship between Friendship and the Political Art in Plato's *Gorgias*"

PRESENTATIONS

"Plato's Erotic Theory of *Doxa*", Northwestern University Moral and Political Philosophy Workshop,
February 10, 2021

“Assertoric Force and Appearance as Cognitive Relations”, Northwestern University Moral and Political Philosophy Workshop, February 13, 2020

“Desire Under Two Different Descriptions”, Northwestern University Moral and Political Philosophy Workshop, March 15, 2019

“Alcibiades’ Anti-Intellectualism”, Northwestern University Moral and Political Philosophy Workshop, October 20, 2017

COMMENTS

Tushar Irani, “The Significance of Politics: Adeimantus’ Contribution to the Argument of the Republic”
May 5, 2023 Seeking the Good: A Conference in Celebration of the Work of Richard Kraut

Rory Hanlon, “Why Aristotle’s Soul Needs Parts”
2021 Central Division Meeting, American Philosophical Association Central Division

Nicholas Kerklaan, “Flattering the Beautiful: Plato on Love Poetry”
2020 West Coast Plato Workshop, September 18-20, 2020

Alycia LaGuardia-LoBianco, “Suffering, Moral Luck, and the Duty to Self-Care”
March 8-10, 2018 Northwestern University Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor of Record

Phil. 210: History of Philosophy: Ancients, 2023, Northwestern University
Phil. 210: History of Philosophy: Ancients, 2021, Northwestern University
Phil 262: Ethical Problems and Public Issues, 2020, Northwestern University

Teaching Assistant, Northwestern University

Classical Philosophy, Ethics, History of Philosophy, History, and Literature
Early Western Civilization (D. Garrison, 2007)
Classics of Ethical Theory (K. Ebels-Duggan, 2008)
Greek and Roman Mythology (M. Hopman, 2009)
History of Philosophy - Ancients (J. Wynne 2008; P. Marechal, 2020)
Roman Civ., Culture, & Empire (J. Wynne, 2009; T. Terpstra 2022)
Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (R. Zuckert, 2018)
Ethical Problems and Public Issues (M. Sheldon, 2019)
Introduction to Philosophy (S. Goldberg)
Ancient Greek History (A. Darden, 2022)
Climate Change and Sustainability: Ethical Dimensions (C. Horne, 2023)

Guest Lecturer

“The Myths of Plato’s *Symposium*”, for Classical Mythology, Fall 2021

GRADUATE COURSEWORK (* = audit at Northwestern or Boston College)

Ancient Greek Philosophy

- Friendship and Love in Plato and Aristotle* (R. Kraut, 2018)
- Metaphysics of Goodness in Plato and Aristotle* (C. Shields, 2017)
- Aristotle's *Ethics** (R. Kraut, 2015)
- Aristotle's *Metaphysics* B* (D. Ebrey, 2010)
- Aristotle's *Physics** (D. Ebrey, 2010)
- Socrates on the Real Good (T. Penner, 2009)
- Plato's Moral Psychology (R. Kraut, 2008)
- Aristotle's *de Anima* (J. Wynne, 2008)
- Aristotle on Science* (W. Wians, 2001)
- The Presocratics* (J. Cleary, 2001)
- Aristotle on Dialectical Method (A. Madigan, 2000)
- Aristotle's *Politics* (J. Cleary, 1999)
- Plato's *Republic* (de Chiara-Quenzer, 1998)

Ethics and Moral Philosophy

- Love, Reason, and Reasoning* (K. Ebels-Duggan, 2017)
- Limits of Articulacy* (K. Ebels-Duggan, 2016)
- Desires* (K. Ebels-Duggan, 2015)
- Virtue Ethics* (K. Ebels-Duggan, 2012)
- Kant on the Highest Good (S. Fleischacker, 2008)
- Consequentialism and its Critics (J. Garthoff, 2007)
- Responsibility (K. Ebels-Duggan, 2006)

Greek Language

- Plato's *Euthyphro* (R. Wallace, 2019)
- Greek Lyric Poetry (R. Platte, 2018)
- Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* (K. Bosher 2007)
- Euripides *Bacchae* (D. Philippides, 2001)

Other

- Proseminar: Heidegger (C. Lafont, 2008)
- Husserl's Phenomenology (D. Moran, 2007)
- Proseminar: Spinoza's *Ethics* (K. Seeskin, 2007)
- Continental Aesthetics (R. Kearney & D. Rasmussen, 2001)
- Philosophy of Language (E. Sweeney, 2001)
- Philosophy of Physics (R. Anderson, 2001)

LANGUAGES

- Ancient Greek (reading knowledge), French (reading knowledge)

SERVICE AND MEMBERSHIP

Referee, <i>Apeiron</i>	2020
Co-Organizer, Northwestern University Ancient Philosophy Workshop	2019-2021
Co-Organizer, Northwestern University Practical Philosophy Workshop	2018-2019
Co-Organizer, Women into Philosophy in the Chicago Area Workshop & Conference	2017-2019
Co-Organizer, Northwestern University Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics (NUSTEP) Annual Conference	2017-2019
Session Chair, Central Division Meeting, American Philosophical Association	2018