

Thomas Jack Lynch Lecture

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Relocating Normative Thought and Discourse

In this paper, I attempt to provide and argue for a unified semantic treatment of 'good', 'bad', 'must', 'ought', 'reason' and cognate terms. I then show how this treatment can avoid implausible attributions of brute ambiguities found in some of its rivals. Along the way, to show how these terms all "hang together" in virtue of all being analyzed in terms of the idea of contextually specified sorts of standards. I then discuss how this theory "relocates" normative theory in such a way that the idea of *wisdom* now becomes a central topic. Finally, I reflect on how this unified semantics helps provide a fresh perspective on a variety of difficult philosophical debates – over the role of rules and principles in moral and normative thought (the debate over "particularism," the context-sensitivity of reasons, and the so-called "buck-passing" theory of value, according to which talk of values is elliptical for talk of reasons. In short, the semantic framework I defend (a) favors generalism over particularism, (b) vindicates but deflates the significance of the context-sensitivity of reasons, and (c) undermines the buck-passing theory of value and instead favors a kind of "no priority" view in its place.

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5:00pm

B316 Tribble Hall

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