

BARRY LAM

Curriculum Vitae

Vassar College
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ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Assistant Professor-Philosophy Department, Vassar College

Fall 2006-present

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Philosophy, Princeton University, January 2007

Dissertation: *The Dynamic Foundations of Epistemic Rationality*

M.A. Philosophy, Princeton University, January 2004

B.A. (*summa cum laude*) Philosophy, English (w/ minor in History and Philosophy of Science) University of California, Irvine 2001

Education Abroad, 1999 Pembroke College, University of Cambridge

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Epistemology, Philosophy of Language/Linguistics, Philosophy of Science

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Metaphysics, Logic, History of Early Modern Philosophy

HONORS AND AWARDS

Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship 2001

Jacob K. Javits Fellowship (2001, *declined*)

Humanities C.B. Scholarship, UC Irvine 1999

Phi Beta Kappa, UC Irvine 2000 (junior year)

PRESENTATIONS

“Rationality from a Dynamic Point of View,” Vassar College
February 3rd, 2006

“The Importance of Dynamic Rationality,” Swarthmore College
January 27th, 2006

“Rationality from a Dynamic Point of View,” University of Kansas
January 19th, 2006

“Rationality from a Dynamic Point of View,” Princeton University
January 13th, 2006

CURRENT RESEARCH INTERESTS

EPISTEMOLOGY

Classical theories of epistemic rationality, such as Cartesian Foundationalism, Coherentism, and Evidentialism, take an agent’s individual beliefs to be the only things that are rational or irrational. For them, rationality is wholly *static*. Contemporary formal theories, like Bayesianism, take sets of individual beliefs and also *changes of belief over time* to be rational or irrational. For these theories, rationality is both static and *dynamic*. However, for both groups, static rationality is fundamental. I argue to the contrary that, in fact, all rationality is dynamic rationality. Epistemology is better off setting the notion of static rationality aside. Instead, we should think of epistemic reasons, rationality, and justification as applying *only* to *changes* of belief. This wholly dynamic view of rationality has wide-ranging epistemological consequences. A small set of simple, elegant, and independently motivated principles of dynamic rationality can illuminate and solve otherwise interminable epistemological disputes, including disputes about the principled relationship between logic and epistemic rationality, the normative scope of coherence arguments for probabilism and conditionalization, the issue of fallibilism and defeaters, the viability of conservatism, the dogmatism paradoxes, and closure principles for justification.

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

Noam Chomsky and semanticists like Paul Pietroski have argued that we should understand the semantics of a language in the same way we understand its phonology. I am interested in the application of the “distinctive feature” model of phonetics to the theory of meaning, whereby the meaning of a lexical item is given by a set of distinctive semantic features, and the meaning of a complex expression by a set of rules for the combination of the distinctive semantic features of their parts. I am interested in identifying such features, if they can form a closed class, what the combinatorics would be, and how we should interpret them in terms of the cognitive science of language processing and understanding.