

Curriculum Vitae

William Ratoff

Personal

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Dartmouth College
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Research Interests

Areas of Specialization: ethics, philosophy of mind and of cognitive science

Areas of Competence: philosophy of action, political philosophy, history of early modern philosophy, philosophy of science

Academic Employment

2019-Present Postdoctoral Research Associate at Dartmouth College

Education

Graduate

2013-2019 PhD in Philosophy at Yale University
Dissertation: *The Practical as Theoretical: A Theory of Practical Reason*
Committee: Stephen Darwall (Chair), Michael Della Rocca (Chair), Gideon Yaffe, Shelly Kagan, Daniel Greco

2010-2011 MSc with Distinction in Cognitive Neuroscience, University College London
Thesis: *Words and Faces under CFS: The Emotional Modulation of Visual Consciousness*
Experiment Supervisors: Gabriella Vigliocco, David Vinson

Undergraduate

2006-2010 BA in Philosophy with First Class Honors at Robinson College, University of Cambridge
Craig Taylor Prize for Highest Performance in Final Exams
Dissertation: *Is Moral Naturalism Defensible?*
Supervisor: Simon Blackburn

Publications

‘How Humeans Can Make Normative Beliefs Motivating’. *Philosophical Studies*, 2020, 178(4).

‘Can the Predictive Processing Model of the Mind Ameliorate the AI Value-Alignment Problem?’. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 2021, 23(2).

‘Motivation and Moral Agency’ (Forthcoming in *The Cambridge Companion to Moral Psychology*) (with Adina Roskies)

Invited Papers and Chapters

‘The Nature of Agency I’ (Commissioned by *Philosophy Compass*; currently under review) (with Adina Roskies)

‘The Nature of Agency II’ (Commissioned by *Philosophy Compass*; currently under review) (with Adina Roskies)

‘Experimental Ethics’ (Invited for *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*; in preparation) (with Adina Roskies)

Revise and Resubmit

‘Self-Driving Cars and the Right to Drive’ (Revise and Resubmit at *Philosophy and Technology*)

‘Radical Cognitivism about Practical Reason’ (Revise and Resubmit at *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*)

‘Motivational Internalism and Acquired Sociopathy’ (Revise and Resubmit at *Philosophical Psychology*)

Under Review

‘Thinking Machines Should Not Be Voluntary Slaves’ (under review)

‘Practical Reason as Theoretical Reason’ (under review)

‘Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanation of the Explanatory Gap’ (under review)

‘Practical Reason for Predictive Coders: What’s the Story?’ (under review)

‘Functionalism, Constitutive Rationality, and Akrasia’ (under review)

‘Against the Humean Theory of Motivation’ (under review)

Working Papers

‘Are Nascent Generally Intelligent AI Moral Persons too?’ (working paper)

‘The Arbitrariness of A Posteriori Physicalism’ (working paper)

‘The Right to Mental Autonomy and the Wrong of Nudging’ (working paper)

Teaching Experience

As Principal Instructor

Principal Instructor for *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*, Dartmouth College, Fall Quarter, 2021

Principal Instructor for *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*, Dartmouth College, Spring Quarter, 2021

Principal Instructor for *Theories of Consciousness in Philosophy and Cognitive Science*, Dartmouth College, Winter Quarter, 2021

Principal Instructor for *Theories of Consciousness in Philosophy and Cognitive Science*, Dartmouth College, Spring Quarter, 2020

Principal Instructor for *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*, Dartmouth College, Fall Quarter, 2019

Principal Instructor for *The Philosophy and Cognitive Science of Consciousness*, Yale University, Summer Semester, 2019

As Teaching Assistant

Teaching Assistant for *First-Order Logic*, Elizabeth Miller, Yale University, Fall Semester 2018

Teaching Assistant for *Introduction to Modern Philosophy*, Michael Della Rocca, Yale University, Spring Semester 2017

Teaching Assistant for *Infinity*, Zoltan Szabo, Yale University, Fall Semester 2016

Teaching Assistant for *Introduction to Ethics*, Shelly Kagan, Yale University, Spring Semester 2016

Teaching Assistant for *Moral Skepticism*, Shelly Kagan, Yale University, Fall Semester 2015

In all cases of being a teaching assistant, I taught two one-hour sections per week for fourteen weeks. I graded and gave feedback on all assignments (student papers and, where appropriate (*Infinity* and *First-Order Logic*), problem sets) and held weekly office hours for students.

Selected Talks

‘The Right to Mental Autonomy and the Wrong of Nudging’, Invited Talk, Trinity College Dublin, September 2nd 2021 (also at Dartmouth College, September 28th 2021)

‘Radical Cognitivism about Practical Reason’, Philosophy of Action Seminar, October 22nd 2019, Yale University

‘Hallucinations for Disjunctivists’, Philosophy Graduate Conference, November 7th 2015, Brown University

‘Essence and Existence: A Generalized Ontological Argument’, Philosophy of Religion Colloquium, March 26th 2015, Yale University

‘What can Neuroscience tell us about Consciousness?’, Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge, Speaker Series, April 15th 2013 (also at The Amoral Sciences Club, April 27th 2013, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Cambridge)

Invited Comments

Comments on Dennis Papadopoulos, ‘Joint Intentionality in Chimpanzees and Bonobos’, Eastern American Philosophical Association, January 2019

Comments on Daniel Murphy, ‘Qualitativism and the Identity of Indiscernibles’, Yale Philosophy Graduate Student Conference, April 2015

Academic Service

Fall 2014-Spring 2017, Organized ELLMM CITY, Yale Philosophy Department’s visiting speaker series in Theoretical Philosophy (Epistemology, Language, Logic, Mind, and Metaphysics).

Reviewer for *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*

Earlier Academic Employment (Pre-PhD)

September 2012 – June 2013 Research Assistant, Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge

I analyzed magneto-encephalography (MEG) data from object recognition neuroimaging experiments, and collected and analyzed behavioral data from object recognition psychophysical experiments

Awards

2010 – Craig Taylor Prize. Awarded by the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Cambridge, for achieving the highest performance in final exams

2010 – College Prize. Awarded by Robinson College, University of Cambridge, for achieving a First-Class degree in final exams

2008-2010 – College Scholarship. Awarded by Robinson College, University of Cambridge, for achieving a First-Class grade in 2008-2009 exams and maintaining a high level of performance until graduation in 2010

2008 – College Prize. Awarded by Robinson College, University of Cambridge, for achieving a First-Class grade in 2007-2008 exams

Languages

English (Native), French (Intermediate: A* at GCSE), Latin (Advanced: A at A-Level and Classical Tripos Part 1a, University of Cambridge), Ancient Greek (Advanced: A at A-level and Classical Tripos Part 1a, University of Cambridge)

Technical Skills

Statistical Analysis (SPSS: ANOVA, Regression, etc.); MATLAB; Neuroimaging Analysis (SPM: both Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Magneto-encephalography (MEG))

References

Stephen Darwall, Andrew Downey Orrick Professor of Philosophy, Yale University

stephen.darwall@yale.edu

Michael Della Rocca, Andrew Downey Orrick Professor of Philosophy, Yale University

michael.della@yale.edu

Adina Roskies, The Helman Family Distinguished Professor at Dartmouth College, Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Cognitive Science Program at Dartmouth College

adina.roskies@dartmouth.edu

Shelly Kagan, Clark Professor of Philosophy, Yale University

shelly.kagan@yale.edu

Gideon Yaffe, Professor of Law, Professor of Philosophy, and Professor of Psychology, Yale University

gideon.yaffe@yale.edu

Daniel Greco, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Yale University

daniel.greco@yale.edu

Karl Friston, Wellcome Principal Research Fellow and Scientific Director, Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging, and Professor at the Institute of Neurology, University College London

k.friston@ucl.ac.uk

Zoltan Szabo, Professor of Philosophy and Linguistics, Yale University

zoltan.szabo@yale.edu (teaching referee)

Dissertation Abstract

My doctoral dissertation (“The Practical as Theoretical: A Theory of Practical Reason”) develops, argues for, and defends a total reduction of the practical to the theoretical. Practical attitudes – intentions and desires – are reduced to beliefs. Practical reasoning is reduced to a kind of theoretical reasoning. And practical normativity is reduced to a variety of epistemic normativity.

In the first chapter, I outline a philosophical psychology in which what it is to be a motivational mental state (of any certain kind) is to be a belief (of some certain kind) and in which practical reasoning is just a species of theoretical reasoning about what you are going to do. I dub this view ‘Radical Cognitivism about Practical Reason’. The inspiration for this philosophical psychology is recent work in contemporary cognitive science on the prediction-error minimization model of the mind – in particular, the seminal work of the neuroscientist Karl Friston, that has been brought to the attention of philosophers by Andy Clark and Jakob Hohwy.

I then investigate the radically cognitivist theory of intention and means-end practical reasoning to which this psychology is committed. Unlike other cognitivists about intention, the radical cognitivist reduces all practical reasoning to theoretical reasoning and all practical norms to epistemic norms. She therefore faces unique challenges in accounting for the basic desiderata on any adequate theory of intention and means-end practical reasoning: whereas other cognitivists can appeal to *sui generis* practical states (desires) and norms, the radical cognitivist is restricted to the sparse resources – cognitive states and the epistemic norms that govern them – to which she has restricted herself. I develop and critically examine the options the radical cognitivist has for satisfying these desiderata.

In the second chapter, I draw out, elucidate, and defend the wholesale reduction of practical normativity to epistemic normativity, practical reasons to epistemic reasons, and practical rationality of epistemic rationality, that this novel philosophical psychology precipitates. I show how this ‘radically epistemic’ conception of practical reason can recover, and accommodate, most of our pre-theoretic common-sense intuitions about we ought, or have reason, to do. I also demonstrate how this theory of practical normativity as epistemic normativity has virtuous meta-normative upshots: principally, it opens the way for a compelling defence of realism about categorical practical reasons, and paves the way for a novel defence of normative naturalism.

In the third chapter, I investigate another upshot of this theory of practical reason – namely, that it allows for a novel demonstration of the proposition that morality is rationally required. Just as common-sense suggests, we are rationally required to act in accord with the requirements and dictates of morality. It simply falls out of this theory of practical reason, alongside the rationality of prudence.

In the fourth chapter, I develop an argument for accepting the radically cognitivist doctrine that every

mental state is really a cognitive state (of one kind or another). In brief, I argue that it is a consequence of the standard neurobiological hermeneutics – the procedure for correlating psychological states or events with neurobiological states or events – practiced in contemporary cognitive science.

Lastly, in the fifth chapter – an independent paper that nevertheless riffs upon the same themes – I show how the normative realist might go about explaining how normative judgments could be motivational states, all consistent with them being beliefs, simply by reducing one element of the practical (your intentions) to the theoretical (beliefs about what you are going to do). The virtuous upshots of this theory include an elegant explanation of weakness of the will and a novel solution to the generalized version of Michael Smith's moral problem.

In this way, my dissertation encompasses, and connects, a wide range of core topics in moral philosophy and the philosophy of mind.