

Aaron Wolf

Curriculum Vitae

Employment

Lecturer, Philosophy Department, Colgate University. 2017–

Lecturer, University Studies Program, Colgate University. 2015–

Education

2015 PhD Syracuse University

2006 BA Muhlenberg College

Dissertation: *Where the Reasons Come From*

Supervisor: Ben Bradley

Committee: David Sobel, Janice Dowell, Hille Paakkunainen, Daniel Star (*external*)

Areas of Specialization

Ethics and Metaethics

Areas of Competence

Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind, Early Modern

Other Teaching Interests

Political Philosophy, Technology Ethics, Logic

Publications

“Reviving Concurrentism about Death,” forthcoming in *Journal of Value Inquiry*

“Giving Up Hume’s Guillotine,” (2015) *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 93, no. 1: 109–125

Works in Progress

“Do Reasons Drain Away?” (under review)

“More Problems with Hume’s Guillotine”

“Reasons as Possible Motivators”

Talks & Poster Presentations

Reasons as Possible Motivators

2016 Pacific APA Meeting, poster (as Motivational Ought Implies Can)

Do Reasons Drain Away?

2016 Central APA Meeting

2014 Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (as Against Rational Exclusion), poster

Reviving Concurrentism about Death

2014 Central APA Meeting

2011 Newcastle conference on “Death: Its Meaning, Morality, and Metaphysics”

Giving Up Hume's Guillotine

- 2011 Society for Exact Philosophy Meeting
 2010 Creighton Club Meeting (New York State Philosophical Association)

Are Photographs Transparent? (with Bence Nanay)

- 2007 Canadian Society for Aesthetics session of the Canadian Philosophical Association Meeting

Comments

Brandon Williams, "Toward a Functional Account of Normative Reasons." 2018 Central APA.
 Gwen Bradford, "Uniqueness." 2014 Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress.

Teaching Experience**Colgate University**

PHIL 101: Introduction to Philosophical Problems Spring 2018
 Core 152: Challenges of Modernity 2015-2018, 6 semesters

Syracuse University

PHI 175: Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy Fall 2015, Fall 2013
 PHI 311: The Rationalists Spring 2012
 PHI 192: Introduction to Moral Theory Fall 2012
 PHI 107: Theories of Knowledge and Reality 2008-2015, 11 semesters

Ithaca College

PHIL 212: Introduction to Ethics Spring 2012
 PHIL 101: Introduction to Philosophy 2011-2013, 3 semesters

As a Teaching Assistant

ECS 392: Ethical Aspects of Engineering and Computer Science Fall 2011
 PHI 251: Introduction to Logic Spring 2007
 PHI 191: Ethics and Value Theory 2006-2008, 3 semesters

Other Professional Activity

Research contributor to Barry Lam's *Hi-Phi Nation* podcast (season 2), 2017
 Referee for Syracuse Philosophy TA Summer Research Fellowships, 2014, 2012, 2009

Graduate coursework

Logic & Language	Topics in Ancient Ethics	Image & Imagination
Critique of Pure Reason	Time, Change, & Identity	Young Ontologists
Philosophy of Language	Death	British Empiricists
Contemporary Epistemology	Realization & Causation	The <i>a priori</i>
Natural Kinds	Predication & Quantification	Foundations of Analytic Ethics

References

Ben Bradley
Allen and Anita Sutton Professor of Philosophy
Syracuse University
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Professor of Philosophy, University of Antwerp
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David Sobel
Irwin and Marjorie Gutttag Professor of Ethics and Political Phil.
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Hille Paakkunainen
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Daniel Star
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Maura Tumulty
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Dissertation Abstract

A clear understanding of the normative world should involve an explanation of what our most fundamental reasons are. Yet common-sense thinking generates a puzzle. If there's a reason to do something, we can explain that reason with the fact that it would be good in some way. At the same time, it's also explainable by the non-evaluative properties underlying its goodness. For example, suppose the traffic gives us a reason to leave early for the airport. The fundamental reason might be the non-evaluative fact that the traffic would cause us to miss our flight, or it might be the value of making the flight. Although both reasons are perfectly good at the everyday level, it would be wrong to say they contribute equally to the story of why traffic favors leaving early. Both are ways of calling attention to the same thing, so they shouldn't be independent. One of these is a reason only because the other is—if we considered them independent reasons we'd be counting the same explanation twice and inviting deep skepticism about normativity. So which is the more fundamental one? Where does the reason really come from? I argue that value properties—like the goodness of making our flight—give the most basic, and therefore best, reasons. And I do this in a way that departs from the more common Platonic, Aristotelian, and Kantian views.

Many contemporary philosophers take the opposite tack and point instead to value-making properties as the things that give the primary reasons, following the lead of A.C Ewing, Elizabeth Anderson, T.M. Scanlon, and Derek Parfit. It can seem as though values don't give any reasons at all, since good-making properties are sufficient on their own to generate all the reasons we have. I argue that this popular inference is mistaken by drawing a parallel to causal exclusion arguments. If reasons must be given by what would have been metaphysically sufficient to generate them, a regress in which the power to give reasons drains away into unappreciable micro-properties is inevitable. And if the most basic reasons are unappreciable, we are at the very least alienated from them, and they may not exist at all.

We can see why reasons have their source in values by modifying two well-known doctrines: *ought implies can* and *the guise of the good*. I argue we should accept a modification of the former saying that normative reasons must also be possibly motivating, otherwise the normative loses its connection to real actions. And I argue that the only plausible version of the latter is that motivational explanation is fundamentally about our value judgments, whether we find things to be *good or bad*. I show that if these are true, then value properties must give our most basic reasons: fully complying with a normative reason means aligning one's motivation with it, and the most salient element of motivation is an evaluative attitude—so, our best normative reasons would need to be reasons given by value properties.

Opponents of a value theory of reasons appear to confuse two distinct questions: what the most fundamental reasons are, and how normatively relevant phenomena are metaphysically grounded. Running these together is a mistake. Pain might consist of C-fiber firings, but that's no cause to think they give better reasons to alleviate suffering than the pain itself does. A virtue of my approach is that it keeps these questions separate. Values give our fundamental normative reasons, but value-making properties explain the ground of those reasons. Minding the difference between these gives us a new path between the received options: a value theory of reasons with roughly Platonic metaphysics and epistemology (Moore's theory), roughly Aristotelian theories (Brentano, Ewing, Anderson, Scanlon, and Parfit's theories), and Kantian approaches (internalist theories).