

Aleksy Tarasenko-Struc

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AOS: Ethics, Moral Psychology, Social Philosophy

AOC: History of Ethics, Philosophy of Action, Philosophy of Mind, Political Philosophy

EDUCATION

Ph.D. 2017 Philosophy Harvard University

B.A. 2008 Philosophy University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (*magna cum laude*)

DISSERTATION

The Authority of Morality and the Recognition of Persons

Committee: Christine Korsgaard (primary advisor), Selim Berker, Matthew Boyle

Other people have the authority to make claims on us, seemingly just because they are fellow people. I provide an explanation of how others could have this kind of authority, arguing that others' claims on us have intrinsic *motivational relevance* for us and that acting on them is a matter of *normative necessity*. The claims of others have intrinsic motivational relevance because recognizing others as persons is an action-guiding state of mind, like seeing someone as our friend or as our child. And being prepared to act on these claims is normatively necessary because loving anyone in particular commits us to holding an ethical stance towards everyone in general and it is our human plight to live in light of others' love.

PRESENTATIONS

'Interpersonal Engagement and the Recognition of Other Persons'
Speculative Ethics Forum, November 2017

'The Kantian Conception of Obligation and the Directedness Constraint'
Northwestern University Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics, May 2016
Pitt-CMU Graduate Conference in Philosophy, April 2016
University of Waterloo Graduate Student Association Conference, March 2016

'The Authority of Morality and the Conditions of Friendship'
Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, April 2016

'Moral Skepticism and the Recognition of Persons'
Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, November 2016

'What Is Constitutivism?'
Harvard Philosophy Department Talkshop, November 2011

COMMENTARIES

On Monica Malgalhaes, 'Should Rare Diseases Get Special Treatment?'
Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, November 2015

On Andrew McAninch, 'Acting for a Reason and Following a Principle'
Illinois Philosophical Association, November 2012

On Michael Deem's 'Dehorning the Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value'
Harvard/ MIT Graduate Conference, April 2012

TEACHING

Primary Instructor

Freedom of the Will and Moral Responsibility
Sophomore Seminar: Harvard University, Spring 2015

Ethical Objectivity
Junior Seminar: Harvard University, Spring 2013

Nietzsche's Critique of Morality
Junior Seminar: Harvard University, Spring 2013

Why Be Moral?
Sophomore Seminar: Harvard University, Fall 2012

Teaching Assistant

From Sinners to Sociopaths: The Many Faces of Evil (Amélie Rorty)
Introductory Course: Harvard Extension School, Spring 2016

Moral Reasoning about Social Protest (Susanna Siegel)
General Education Course: Harvard University, Fall 2013

Introduction to the Philosophy of Law (Douglas Lavin)
Introductory Course: Harvard University, Fall 2011

Introduction to the Problems of Philosophy (Matthew Boyle)
Introductory Course: Harvard University, Spring 2012

Philosophy of Mind (Brad Majors, Kimberly Van Orman)
Academic Summer Camp: JHU Center for Talented Youth, Summer 2008, 2010

SERVICE

Emerson Hall Poetry Night
Co-Founder and Organizer: Spring 2014–Spring 2017

MIT INSPIRE: Research Competition in the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities
Experts Committee Member: Spring 2017

Harvard University Philosophy Department
Graduate Representative: Fall 2012–Spring 2013

Harvard/MIT Graduate Conference
Co-Organizer: Fall 2010–Spring 2011

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Fall Writers Residency
Ox-Bow School of Art, Fall 2017

GSAS Dissertation Completion Fellowship
Harvard University, Fall 2016–Spring 2017

Graduate Fellowship, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics
Harvard University, 2015–2016

Certificate of Distinction in Teaching
Harvard University, Fall 2012

Graduate Teaching Fellowship in Philosophy
Harvard University, 2011–Present

Graduate Fellowship in Philosophy
Harvard University, 2009–2011

Departmental Distinction: Philosophy
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 2008

Donald W. Doerscher Award in Philosophy
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 2008

Lois S. Green Scholarship in Philosophy
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 2006

REFERENCES

Christine Korsgaard
Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Philosophy
Harvard University
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Selim Berker
Professor of Philosophy
Harvard University
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Matthew Boyle
Professor of Philosophy
University of Chicago
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Kyla Ebels-Duggan
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Northwestern University
kebelstduggan@northwestern.edu

Richard Moran (*Teaching Reference*)
Brian D. Young Professor of Philosophy
Harvard University
moran@fas.harvard.edu

GRADUATE COURSEWORK (* - denotes audited course)

Courses in Ethics, Moral Psychology, and Political Philosophy

Practical Reason and Ethics (Thomas Scanlon, Derek Parfit)
*Recent Ethical Theory (Christine Korsgaard)
*Equality and Democracy (Thomas Scanlon)
*Metaethics (Selim Berker)
*Constitutivism (Douglas Lavin)
*The Moral Sentiments (David Sussman)
*Animals and Ethics (Christine Korsgaard)

Courses in Epistemology and the Philosophy of Mind

Self-Consciousness and Self-Knowledge (Matthew Boyle)
Skepticism and Epistemic Levels (Roger White)
*Epistemic Normativity (Selim Berker)
*Philosophy of Action (Douglas Lavin)
*Other Minds (Matthew Boyle, Richard Moran)

Courses in the History of Philosophy

Kant's Ethics (Christine Korsgaard)
The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein (Warren Goldfarb)
British Empiricism (Alison Simmons)
Aristotle's Ethics and Politics (Gisela Striker)
Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Farid Masrour)
*History of Modern Moral Philosophy (Christine Korsgaard)

Other Courses

Deductive Logic (Peter Koellner)
Instructional Styles in Philosophy (Alison Simmons, Edward Hall)
German Philosophy in Translation (Bernhard Nickel)
French Philosophy in Translation (Richard Moran)

LANGUAGES

French (proficient), German (reading knowledge)

Dissertation Abstract: The Authority of Morality and the Recognition of Persons

Aleksy Tarasenko-Struc

Other people have the authority to make claims on us, seemingly just because they are fellow people. I provide an explanation of how others could have this kind of authority, arguing that others' claims on us have intrinsic *motivational relevance* for us and that acting on them is a matter of *normative necessity*. The claims of others have intrinsic motivational relevance because recognizing others as persons is an action-guiding state of mind, like seeing someone as our friend or our child. And being prepared to act on these claims is normatively necessary because loving anyone in particular commits us to holding an ethical stance towards everyone in general and it is our human plight to live in light of others' love.

I begin by pointing out that morality is essentially linked to the possibility of *wronging* particular other people—not merely of acting wrongly with respect to some requirement, value, or reason. For core moral obligations have a directed, person-to-person structure: they are obligations *to* others. This fact about morality shows that its authority consists in a vast network of normative relations to every person in the world, where these relations are relationships on a par with friendships and romantic partnerships. It also places a criterion of adequacy on attempts to vindicate morality. According to the *directedness constraint*, a moral theory is adequate only if it can show that our moral obligations to others are owed to the right person, in the right way. Versions of egoism, utilitarianism, and intuitionism fail to meet it because they cannot escape the conclusion that we have no obligations to others at all. And versions of Kantian constructivism run afoul of the constraint because they entail that our moral obligations to others must be, or must be grounded in, obligations *to ourselves* to treat others morally.

How, then, should we account for the authority that other people have just as fellow people? I propose that an account of this kind will come from a theory of recognition and a theory of love.

To explain how the claims of others could have intrinsic motivational relevance for us, I defend a view of what it is to recognize someone as a person, on which it is a motivating state of mind. On my own view, to recognize someone as a person is to directly and empathetically experience her perspective, feeling her power to move our will and our emotions whenever she makes claims on us. And we can only experience someone's perspective in this way only if we are disposed to have certain emotional and motivational responses to her, particularly sympathy and the reactive attitudes. Hence, recognizing others as persons isn't a matter of identifying them as falling under a folk-metaphysical category but rather a matter of identifying *with* them in a way that enables interpersonal engagement. Because affective and practical dispositions are constitutive of recognizing other persons, on my view, it follows that a range of motives is built into this mental state: motives for treating others as persons.

Finally, to explain why our being prepared to act on others' claims is a matter of normative necessity, I articulate a view of love on which this attitude carries ethical commitments by its nature. Drawing an analogy with our experience of nature's beauty, I argue that loving another person consists in an appreciative awareness of our beloved that acquaints us with her value as the individual she is. Love also requires a stance of respect for our beloved and a kind of empathetic openness to her perspective, and this is what explains how her value, as revealed in love, is a distinctively *ethical* value. Taking up her perspective leads us to recognize in her a center of self that is equivalent to our own, so that we come to see the value of her plight as consisting largely in its value *for her* in particular. And respecting our beloved commits us to regarding her as enjoying the authority to make claims on us. Since loving someone gives her the power to reveal that same value in others as well, too, we must acknowledge that value in the people she loves as well, and, ultimately, in a broader ethical community.

In light of love's ethical commitments, then, the authority that other people have to make claims on us is secured by the inescapability of love itself. For we have a basic need for the love of others, which is woven into our nature as human beings and plays a crucial role in making us agents.